

ERIC PFANNER

Team mascots silly, insensitive

The on-field action at this year's World Series is over. The Minnesota Twins defeated the Atlanta Braves in one of the most exciting series of all time. The games had home runs, extra innings and clutch performances.

As an extra bonus, however, the games spilled from the sports pages to the editorial sections of newspapers.

This involved, of course, the "tomahawk chop" that Atlanta Braves fans conducted with great ceremony. Crowds at Atlanta's Fulton County Stadium may have liked participating in the chop, a sweeping arm motion accompanied by what I always thought was the Florida State fight song.

Activist groups, particularly those concerned with achieving greater sensitivity toward Native Americans, were offended.

With good reason. The issue is really not so much one of sensitivity as of common sense.

We name athletic teams after aggressive, strong, fast, guileful, brutish characters. Obviously, if such mascots are placed on their uniforms, the players on the team will be aggressive, strong, fast, guileful and brutish. Then they will defeat the other team.

That practice runs into trouble when we use other human beings — or groups of human beings — as athletic mascots. Calling Native Americans aggressive, strong, fast, guileful and brutish may have been acceptable decades ago when the Redskins, Seminoles and Braves got their names and when John Wayne was in the movies. Now the practice is outdated and offensive. Worse yet, it is silly.

If we are to do away with the names of groups of people as sports mascots, of course, the argument could be carried still further.

One could argue that it is insensitive to name teams after falcons, horned frogs and penguins. But realistically, only an obsessed animal rights activist or Merrill Lynch employee could claim that it is offensive to name a team after a buffalo.

The biggest problem with names involves those about groups of people that aren't considered offensive or don't have an interest group to stand up for them. Examples include the Raiders, the Buccaneers, the Vikings



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and the Cornhuskers.

The problem here is one of definition. What exactly is a Raider? It could be a common criminal, a pirate or a gang member. "Vikings" could be considered offensive for the same reason that "Seminoles" is. But the last true Vikings died hundreds of years ago.

Cornhuskers is trickier because it creates a stereotype of Nebraskans as clumsy, cute, blond, slow and oafish. Nebraskans as a whole, however, are not an oppressed minority.

The solution to the problem of names is simple. Don't simply change the name to a more innocuous one, such as Stanford University did a few years back when it went from "Indians" to "Cardinal." Eliminate all mascots, offensive or otherwise.

The idea of mascots was stupid in the first place. While they were supposed to intimidate, they actually provide more humor than fright. Who can keep a straight face while looking at a New England Patriots helmet? No wonder the team went 1-15 last

year. Athletic teams in Europe are the beneficiaries of such thinking. Instead of having some cute animal or offensive depiction of a minority group on their helmets — if they used helmets — European soccer teams are known by the names of their city or the club where they train: Inter-Milan, Bayern-München or Juventus-Turin.

If the uniforms display any graphics, they are the logos of the companies that sponsor them.

The spread of the World League of American Football threatens this situation with teams such as the London Monarchs, Barcelona Dragons and Frankfurt Galaxy.

Happily, however, the thinking behind European teams appears to be exhibiting an influence on this side of the Atlantic.

In recent years, more and more college football bowl games have lengthened their names to include a corporate sponsor. Hence, we have the Sunkist Fiesta Bowl and others, including my personal favorite, the Thrifty Car Rental Holiday Bowl. One new game, the Blockbuster Bowl, has eliminated the danger of insensitivity entirely by dropping any pretense of a cute name.

Named teams won't disappear from the American sporting scene overnight, of course. They are as much a part of our tradition as racism.

In the naming of expansion teams, at least, franchise owners seem to be showing some sensibility. The new baseball team in Denver was named the Colorado Rockies. It is very difficult to generate stereotypes of an entire mountain range, except perhaps to say that it is craggy or towering.

Surely expansion owners would not name new teams the "Washington Whites" or "Atlanta African-Americans."

If such names offend people, and surely they do, it is time for similar sensitivity toward a less-vocal ethnic group. If the Braves make a return appearance in the World Series, the "tomahawk chop" should be left at home.

Pfanner is a senior news-editorial journalism major, the Daily Nebraskan's opinion and wire editor and a columnist.




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Columnist's abortion views empty rhetoric, make no sense

I wish David Reiter would give up trying to convince us that his views on abortion make any sense. Earlier this semester, he attempted to compare Operation Rescue protesters to animal-rights extremists. He pointed out that the animal-rights people believe the old Judeo-Christian view that man (humanity) is master over the animals, but he chose to completely ignore the fact that anti-abortion extremists are acting out the equally wicked lie that man (the male human) is master over woman.

Now we have his Oct. 25 column, "Abortion politics frustrating," based on two sentences of completely empty rhetoric: "The Republican Party exhibits a commitment to traditional family values. The sanctity of human life is an essential component of this package of values."

Randall Terry, founder of Operation Rescue, recently said, "This country's roots are in the Puritans and people who believed in Biblical values." What the Puritans are best remembered for is the Salem witch hysteria that killed 19 women and one old man for having farms that were too successful. "Biblical values" were invoked as an excuse to hang these people. (It's interesting that the Catholic Church did not equate abortion with murder until the mid-1800s, when European and American women first began agitating for equality.)

Today, Reiter's "values" take the form of vetoed family-leave bills, national health care as a pariah concept, prenatal care left to struggling



Brian Shellito/DN

private groups such as Catholic Social Services and parents going bankrupt raising disabled children. I know of this last situation intimately, as I watch my own family edge toward ruin raising a beautiful spina bifida child without any public help.

As Mr. Reiter continues his anti-

abortion campaign in the Daily Nebraskan, he crystallizes the true conflict here: It's neither Democrat vs. Republican, but rather people who think for themselves vs. people who do not.

Joan Ratliff
Lincoln