

4-10-2006 Mascot and Nickname Policy

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2 JOSH CENTOR: I began working at the NCAA
3 in June. And just six weeks later, the NCAA Executive
4 Committee handed down its policy restricting the use of
5 Native American mascots and imagery by NCAA member
6 institutions. This has been a topic of tremendous
7 passion and debate since the summer.

8 I'm happy to have NCAA president Myles
9 Brand here to discuss the issue on "Mondays With Myles"
10 this morning.

11 Dr. Brand, good to see you.

12 DR. MYLES BRAND: Good to talk with you,
13 Josh.

14 JOSH CENTOR: Can you explain a little bit
15 about the mascot and nickname policy for those of our
16 listeners who haven't followed.

17 DR. MYLES BRAND: Yeah. The policy was
18 over four years, almost five years in the making. Our
19 membership committees looked at it, reviewed it again and
20 again. We were contacted by a number of organizations --
21 80 national Native American organizations, for example.
22 We received information from the Commission on Civil
23 Rights. Our membership went back and forth with it. And
24 finally they said, you know, we really have to take some
25 strong measures here. We're very uncomfortable about the

1 disrespectful treatment of Native Americans in some of
2 our sporting venues. And then we acted.

3 JOSH CENTOR: Why now? When I was a kid, I
4 grew up in Queens, and St. John's changed their name from
5 Redmen to Red Storm 15 years ago. Why is this all
6 coming, you know, to light now?

7 DR. MYLES BRAND: Well, you know, we had in
8 the '70s and '80s, and coming out of the late '60s, a
9 consciousness of these issues, and a lot of changes were
10 made. Stanford was another example that made a change
11 along those lines, and then it kind of died out. And it
12 wasn't as if the problem entirely went away, because some
13 institutions hadn't made a change. And it was building
14 for a while.

15 You know, the NCAA only controls our
16 championship games. We don't control regular season.
17 What a school calls itself, what mascots it has, relies
18 on the autonomy of the institution. But when they're
19 going to play in our games, in our championship games, we
20 want to make sure that those venues are respectful for
21 everyone.

22 There's something else here that's going on
23 that is a total cultural phenomena. We have learned over
24 the years to treat ethnic groups with respect. There are
25 certain names and stereotype images that we won't use to

1 talk about African Americans or Hispanics or other
2 groups. We've stopped doing that.

3 But for some reason, in America, we have
4 not yet stopped doing that with Native Americans. We,
5 somehow, in our culture, have not been treating them with
6 the same kind of respect we now treat all other groups.

7 So while in the past it might have been
8 permissible to say something about some other ethnic
9 group, and that would have been accepted in our culture,
10 it's not now accepted. But we haven't moved that
11 direction with Native Americans.

12 JOSH CENTOR: Well, what about the Fighting
13 Irish at Notre Dame?

14 DR. MYLES BRAND: Yeah. We're not talking
15 about leprechauns. We're talking about real people who
16 are offended -- young people, children, who are Native
17 Americans who hear these things. We're talking about
18 offense that according to the American Psychological
19 Association, in an extensive report, indicated that these
20 kinds of stereotypic and caricatures actually make them
21 less successful. They become depressed about it and it
22 affects their livelihood. It affects who they become as
23 a person -- who they see as -- what they see as
24 opportunities, who they can become in the futures,
25 they're so stereotyped.

1 So we have good psychological evidence that
2 people are being affected. We don't have anything
3 comparable to that about leprechauns.

4 JOSH CENTOR: Now, I understand the
5 difference between the leprechauns and the Native
6 Americans. But Irish are real people, and fighting --
7 Fighting Irish. There's a negative connotation there;
8 isn't there?

9 DR. MYLES BRAND: Well, I'm not sure about
10 that. And Notre Dame and the people who are supporters
11 of Notre Dame haven't really given us that feedback. So
12 we haven't had feedback. We haven't had the kind of
13 psychological, in-depth research that we have had for
14 Native Americans that indicate that.

15 So there are some names that are
16 permissible, at least at this time. I can't predict how
17 our culture will change in the future. But at least at
18 this time some names that are predictable and considered,
19 in fact, supported.

20 The Native Americans, by and large -- not
21 uniformly -- but, by and large, find discomfort in the
22 current approach.

23 JOSH CENTOR: Well, there are some schools
24 that have been taken off the initial list. Why is that
25 and what are the differences between some of the schools

1 that have been left on the list and some that have been
2 removed?

3 DR. MYLES BRAND: Yeah. That's a very
4 important and very difficult question. There's great
5 complexity in this issue.

6 There are 560 Native American sovereign --
7 legally sovereign, federally recognized tribes. And they
8 all think for themselves. So the Florida Seminole Tribe
9 has been working with Florida State University for
10 decades in terms of using images and names.

11 Now, I may find a white boy painting his
12 face, riding in on an Appaloosa horse -- which they
13 didn't have in the swamps -- throwing a flaming spear as
14 to be disrespectful. But it's not my decision to make.
15 Because that Florida Seminole Tribe has made an explicit
16 decision and participated in the images that they use and
17 said this is acceptable. And surely we have to defer to
18 those Native American tribes who feel that way.

19 And so it isn't just the Florida Seminoles.
20 The Utah Utes would be another example.

21 But in several other cases where the
22 schools haven't changed their names, the local Indian
23 tribes are very unhappy with the approach being taken.

24 JOSH CENTOR: One school that did change
25 its name was Carthage College, a Division III

1 institution. They went from the Redmen to the two words,
2 Red Men. Along with many others, I want to know what the
3 difference is.

4 DR. MYLES BRAND: Yeah. First of all,
5 Redmen, as a single word, is a derogatory term. It
6 refers to the scalped Native American bleeding. And
7 that's very derogatory.

8 Now, it turns out that this school took its
9 name in contradistinction to a high school which is
10 called the Red or Blue Boys, and they would become the
11 Redmen. But over the years, they began to take on Native
12 American imagery, although it was just meant to
13 distinguish themselves from a local high school. So what
14 they did is they dropped all the Native American imagery,
15 and went back to their origins and say, we are the color
16 red, and men, as opposed to the color blue and boys,
17 which is the local high school. So they've gone back to
18 that, and there's no Native American imagery or
19 caricatures going on there.

20 JOSH CENTOR: Is there's some history there
21 that a lot of people aren't aware of?

22 DR. MYLES BRAND: These are complex issues.
23 You can't have a simple answer to these questions. And
24 that's part of the problem in understanding what's going
25 on.

1 JOSH CENTOR: A lot of people don't see
2 Native American mascots and imagery as offensive, and yet
3 they seem offended that the executive committee would
4 actually take a position and a stance, as it did.

5 What do you have to say to some people like
6 that?

7 DR. MYLES BRAND: Well, the majority of the
8 population doesn't see that as offensive, just as in the
9 past they didn't see the use of some ethnic slurs as
10 offensive. They are offensive to the people who are
11 being criticized in this way, not to necessarily the
12 majority of the population, but those who have been
13 caricatures and stereotyped, and that's the problem. We
14 want to be respectful for everyone, whether you're a
15 member of an ethnic minority or not.

16 JOSH CENTOR: And where do we stand right
17 now? Where are we in the process?

18 DR. MYLES BRAND: We have a few appeals
19 pending. We are moving forward. Our goal was to
20 establish a national dialogue in these issues. We've
21 done that be.

22 JOSH CENTOR: Certainly.

23 DR. MYLES BRAND: Probably more than was
24 expected.

25 JOSH CENTOR: Certainly.

1 DR. MYLES BRAND: And we're working our way
2 through it. I think we should, in the next several
3 months, be pretty far along.

4 JOSH CENTOR: Well, it's certainly a
5 sensitive and emotional issue. I appreciate you taking
6 the time to discuss it with us.

7 DR. MYLES BRAND: Thank you, Josh.

8 JOSH CENTOR: "Mondays With Myles" can be
9 found on the NCAA blog, www.doubleazone.com, each and
10 every Monday morning. If you'd like to subscribe, you
11 can find our podcast on iTunes. See you next week.

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