

An Open Letter to the NCAA

I want to applaud your recent decision to ban the use of racially or ethnically hostile or abusive Native American school nicknames or logos. It's about time that you did the politically correct thing and stood up for the down-trodden. Out here in New Mexico we certainly have our share of Native American tribes and notwithstanding the fact that they actually do call themselves Indians, no doubt some are pleased to know that do-gooders like yourselves are looking out for their best interests, whether they care for it or not.

Of course the last thing we need in college athletics is hurt feelings. However, none of this is really any help to all those Stanford alums who matriculated cheering on their beloved Indians. Now they show up on campus for Homecoming Weekend and have to cheer for something called the Cardinal. What is this anyway – a bird, a color, a high-ranking Catholic? Are they closet ecumenicals over there or something? And whatever they are, why do they use a tree for a mascot? That must surely strike terror in the hearts of their opponents. But if it's the bird (not birds, plural, since they simply refer to themselves as “the” Cardinal), then the tree makes perfect sense. The bird needs some place to sit and mess up everything down below. But I digress.

But let's not stop there. Many schools' mascots celebrate illegal or lawless behavior and this shouldn't be condoned, either. Take “Jayhawk,” for example. That term refers to roving bandits who terrorized homesteaders in and around Kansas and Missouri in the mid-1800s, stealing livestock, burning homes and killing innocents. Is this the kind of image the NCAA should be promoting? And while you're at it, even if the Sooners weren't quite so bad, they nonetheless had no respect for the law as they went out and staked their land claims sooner than they were supposed to. Surely we shouldn't be encouraging this sort of thing, either. And Pirates – don't get me started.

And what about all those animal mascots caged up around the country? You've got Leroy the tiger down at LSU, who really should be out in a jungle somewhere, and Bevo the longhorn down in Austin who really just wants to be out roaming the range. The same for Ralphie the buffalo up in Colorado. Are we going to countenance all this captivity of wild creatures yearning to be free?

The dogs – Uga over in Georgia and Smokey in Tennessee and Reveille at Texas A&M – my goodness, are they even spayed? I mean, you really ought to require proof of this before allowing these hounds to race all over creation. Well, maybe not Uga. He's not much built for racing, but you get the idea.

And there's this falcon up at the Air Force Academy flying and pooping all over the place. You ought to see the stadium after he's finished with it. On second thought, you don't want to go there. At least the Cardinal is figurative. I think. But you get the idea.

Then you've got the Ragin' Cajuns at Southwest Louisiana State and that just sticks in a lot of folks' craw. First off, Louisianans don't much care to be called Cajuns anyway, but even if they did, they are certainly a much more hospitable bunch than anything that could be depicted as

“raging.” Now, my Aunt Lenora over in Bogalusa could fly off the handle with the best of them but can’t we just get away from being so judgmental?

Yet even all of this wouldn’t go nearly far enough in eliminating the most despicable hostile and abusive school nicknames. Let’s cut right to the core of racial and ethnic insensitivity and root out the worst of the worst, a mascot that offends millions of Americans, myself included, based solely on their ancestry. Yes, it’s time for the NCAA to strike a telling blow against bigotry. It’s time to ban the “Fighting Irish.” They really ought to be more docile anyway, like the football team these past few years.