Fighting Sioux Logo: Racial slur or cherished tradition?

By: Lakeya M. Bull, Three Affiliated Tribes

Fighting Sioux, Atlanta Braves, Washington Redskins, and the Kansas Chiefs. These are the names of college and national sports teams. Do these names represent a racial slur or a cherished tradition?

Growing up as a Native American into today’s society becomes hard when one is constantly questioned about the Sioux nickname at the University of North Dakota (UND). The majority of Native American students on campus agree with changing of the name, but then again there is the other opinion expressed by the Native American population who believe that they are being honored. It is based on what you have been brought up to think. There is the number of people who attend the various sporting events at our local college who don’t think twice about how big of an issue this has really became.

Dorreen Yellow Bird, a columnist for The Grand Forks Herald once stated, “When the state Board of Higher Education ruled to keep the Fighting Sioux mascot and logo, they also opened the door for disrespect at sporting events – disrespect such as racial slurs and obscene jeers.” One event occurred when a large group of Native Americans from various reservations carried a thirteen-feathered eagle staff and gathered in protest of the new hockey arena that celebrated the Sioux nickname. All different races marched across campus carrying signs while standing outside the newly built Ralph Engelstad Arena during a weekend NCC event going on at the time. During this time, fans, alumni, and students frequently taunted and insulted the Native American protestors outside sporting events.

This issue has grown over the months into something that is causing somewhat of an uproar among UND students who want the name changed. Mark Little Owl, Three Affiliated Tribes and UND student, is one of those students and said, “I think the Native Americans of the Greater Grand Forks area are affected the most because in our culture there are certain things that we need to earn.”

Little Owl went on to say he thought “the University is making fun of us by wearing a headdress to games and painting their faces in stereotypical ways. They are showing no honor towards the Native American people.”

Marla Anderson, a UND Alumni Associate, said, “I support it, I don’t see anything wrong with it. The logo it is being used with good taste and there’s nothing hostile about it . . .” Anderson also went on to say that “there were some negative things happening with the logo, but that was in the past and it’s no longer like that.”

I am going to be turning eighteen years old soon and can proudly proclaim that I have yet to attend a Fighting Sioux sporting event. UND mirrors the stereotypical image of the Sioux people as being war-driven, out-to-kill-warriors so why not have them as a mascot or logo? Barbara Munson and Cornell Pewewardy, long-time advocates of discontinuing Native American mascots and logos, agree with me. We are proud of the warriors who fought for our people and our land from the greed of other people and we don’t want them demeaned by being “honored” in a sports activity on a playing field.