

# Los Angeles Times

<https://www.latimes.com/sports/la-xpm-2013-dec-15-la-sp-redskins-nickname-20131215-story.html>

SPORTS

## Redskins, Chief Wahoo: Some sports team nicknames, mascots under fire

BY KEVIN BAXTER  
DEC. 15, 2013 12 AM PT

The best sports nicknames connote power, speed, bravery and even whimsy. But many fans say they see something else in some of the country's most popular team names and mascots — racism.

The Oneida Indian Nation is pressuring the NFL and Washington Redskins owner Daniel Snyder to change that team's name and logo, which many Native Americans say is offensive. And thousands of baseball fans have signed an online petition asking the Cleveland Indians to retire Chief Wahoo, the team's smiling, red-faced caricature.

"Absolutely I'm offended by it personally," says Sam Kay, the Ohio State graduate student and Indians fan who started the petition. "Belonging to a team that I support, it in a way speaks for me. That's not the sort of thing that I'm really comfortable letting stand unopposed."

Kay, who says he is not Native American, believes the campaign is having an effect. The logo no longer appears in many Major League Baseball graphics, having been replaced by the word "Indians" in red script. And when the team clinched a wild-card playoff berth last fall, Chief Wahoo was left off the official postseason apparel.

But Snyder appears to be holding tight to his team's nickname. During a Monday night game in November, he answered the Oneida protest with a brief ceremony that honored four Navajo Code Talkers, Native Americans who worked in military communications during World War II. Three of the four men took the field wearing team jackets sporting a prominent Redskins logo.

"The communities ... they're the shareholders of this whole thing. And it's really how they feel," says John Rowady, president of the Chicago-based sports marketing firm rEvolution.

Snyder wouldn't be the first Washington owner to change his team's name. Sixteen years ago, in response to a soaring homicide rate in Washington, the late Abe Pollin changed his basketball team's nickname from the Bullets to the Wizards, becoming the first major professional sports franchise to change names without moving since Houston's Colt .45s became the Astros in 1965.

For Harvey Chimoff, a marketing strategist from New York, Pollin's decision to discard three decades of history as the Bullets to adopt a more culturally sensitive nickname was a wise one that should prove relevant to both Snyder and the Indians.

"Just because something has been done for a long time or been around for a long time — people change," he says. "Society changes and we look at things differently. And the length of time a nickname has been in place doesn't give it any permanent status.

"If the society feels that it is no longer appropriate, then that usually leads to a change."

kevin.baxter@latimes.com

Twitter: @kbaxter11

Kevin Baxter writes about soccer and other things for the Los Angeles Times, where he has worked for 24 years. He has covered five World Cups, three Olympic Games, six World Series and a Super Bowl and has contributed to three Pulitzer Prize-winning series at The Times and Miami Herald. An essay he wrote in fifth grade was voted best in the class. He has a cool dog.