

Questions and Answers

Q What happened?

A The University announced that Chief Illiniwek will no longer perform at athletic events on the Urbana campus after the final men's home basketball game on Feb. 21, 2007. And the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) stated in a letter the University will be immediately removed from the list of universities in violation of the NCAA policy regarding Native American imagery and sanctions against the University's Division of Intercollegiate Athletics (DIA) will be lifted.

Q What does this mean?

A It means the Chief Illiniwek tradition will be discontinued at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign:

- No connection of Chief Illiniwek to Illini athletics or the Marching Band.
- No selection of a student to portray Chief Illiniwek.
- No performance by Chief Illiniwek at Urbana athletic events, or other University events.
- No use of the name Chief Illiniwek in connection with the University.

Q Does this mean that on Feb. 21, 2007 the Chief will have danced for the last time?

A Yes. The Chief Illiniwek tradition will not continue after Feb. 21.

Q What will happen with the University's trademark rights to the name Chief Illiniwek, the portrayal of the Chief and the Chief Illiniwek logo?

A The University is reviewing trademark laws. No final decision has been made.

Q Will the names Illini and Fighting Illini be retained?

A Yes, absolutely.

- It is generally understood that the name Illini is short for the name of the state from which the University takes its name: Illinois. The Fighting Illini name is a common reference to an athletic team's competitiveness and drive for excellence, as is the case with numerous "Fighting"-nicknamed athletics at other universities (e.g., Fighting Irish).
- The BOT on several occasions has formally spelled out aspects of the consensus process regarding the Chief Illiniwek tradition and stipulated that the names Illini and Fighting Illini would be retained.
- The NCAA rescinded its objections to Illini and Fighting once its Executive Committee had a better understanding of their origins and meanings
- Many among those who favor an end to the Chief tradition nevertheless favor retention of the names Illini and Fighting Illini.

Q Will the Chief Illiniwek tradition be replaced? If so, with what?

A The campus administration will take up whether and how to go about establishing a new tradition, but a process and timetable for doing so have not been set. Any new symbol will not use American Indian imagery.

Q Who made the decision to end/retire the Chief Illiniwek tradition?

A This is an outcome that was foreshadowed for more than a year as the trustees engaged University constituencies in a consensus process since 2004 to resolve issues regarding the Chief Illiniwek tradition.

- The BOT approved eight guidelines for that process in the summer of 2005.

- The NCAA's August 2005 policy regarding use of American Indian imagery by member institutions and the University's unsuccessful appeal of that policy to the NCAA Executive Committee in 2006 were factors in the outcome.

Q Why wasn't there a formal action/vote by the Board of Trustees?

A A BOT vote was not required. The BOT chair conferred individually with his colleagues. A letter from the NCAA confirmed that U of I would be removed from its lists and sanctions lifted.

Q But since a BOT action in 1990, the common perception was that Trustees have claimed ownership/control of the Chief Illiniwek tradition, with the inference it would require a BOT action/vote to end or change the tradition. Did the BOT ignore responsibility?

A No, the BOT absolutely fulfilled its obligations.

- A formal BOT action/vote was not necessary.
- The BOT has voted on numerous occasions on this issue in recent years.
- In October 1990 the BOT approved a motion to retain the Chief as symbol of athletic teams at the Urbana campus and thus took BOT ownership of the issue, but neither in that nor other subsequent BOT actions was it ever stated that a vote would be required to change or end the tradition.
- The University is a member of the NCAA and has been in violation of an NCAA policy since last April, when the University's final appeal of that policy was denied by the NCAA Executive Committee.
- As a practice, the BOT does not take a formal action/vote to ensure University compliance with NCAA or other applicable regulations.

Q Was this legal?

A Yes. University legal counsel provided guidance to the BOT on how it could proceed.

Q Did the BOT act secretly in closed-door session?

A No, that would be forbidden by the Illinois Open Meetings Act (OMA), and the BOT complies with the OMA. The BOT chair conferred individually with his colleagues on the BOT to seek their consensus and concurrence.

Q Why didn't the BOT sue the NCAA to challenge the policy?

A BOT members agreed that litigation against the NCAA wasn't in the best interest of the University.

- A lawsuit against the NCAA would be time-consuming and expensive.
- There would be no guarantee of success.
- It would involve challenging the member organization that regulates intercollegiate athletics at the Urbana and Chicago campuses.
- The current sanctions on the Urbana DIA would remain in effect throughout the litigation process.

Q Why didn't the University join the University of North Dakota in its lawsuit against the NCAA?

A The circumstances—legally and in terms of the NCAA policy—were not the same for the respective universities. BOT members determined a costly, time consuming lawsuit against the NCAA was not in the best interest of our University.

Q Did the University cave in to the NCAA?

A No, as a member institution of the NCAA the University made an exhaustive appeal of what the BOT saw as flaws in the policy, an appeal that lasted eight months and went for several rounds. As a result, the NCAA Executive Committee rescinded its objections to the names "Illini" and

“Fighting Illini,” and Urbana athletics will continue to use those names without sanctions. The NCAA Executive Committee ultimately upheld its policy and sanctions against the University on three issues: the Chief Illiniwek name, the portrayal/performance and the logo. Illini athletic teams already have been subjected to the NCAA sanction—a ban on hosting post-season NCAA championship competition (men’s tennis in Spring 2006 and women’s soccer in Fall 2006).

Q What were the BOT’s considerations in the consensus process?

A The BOT adopted the following eight guidelines in 2005:

1. Seek consensus.
2. Preserve tradition and heritage in concert with the Board’s (Sept. 9, 2004) heritage resolution.
3. Retain the names “Illini” and “Fighting Illini.”
4. Recognize the diversity of Illinois’ American Indian culture, past and present.
5. Engage American Indian involvement in our efforts.
6. Reflect the University’s core values of excellence, integrity and respect.
7. Recognize the significant opportunities that University events, venue and forums provide to educate and inform our community and the public about American Indian culture, history and heritage.
8. Recognize the University’s goals of having high integrity athletic programs, winning teams and athletes who are successful students and who have the opportunity to compete at the highest levels.

Each one of those guidelines has been factored into drawing the consensus process to a conclusion.

Q If the men’s basketball team doesn’t make the NCAA basketball tournament but participates in the NIT tournament—owned by the NCAA—will the Illini be able to host opening round(s) at Assembly Hall?

A Yes. Based on a letter from the NCAA, the sanction will be lifted immediately based on the University’s announcement, and all Illini athletic teams participating in winter and spring sports will be able to host championship tournament competition.

Q Is that why the University decided to make this announcement now?

A The consensus process had substantially run its course, and, with the basketball season home schedule nearly complete, it was decided to make the announcement now.

Q Why isn’t the Chief’s last performance at the final home Illini basketball game of the season, a women’s basketball game on Feb. 25?

A The men’s game is when the Chief, not the assistant Chief, performs. For that reason, the final men’s game was selected as the final performance.

Q If the consensus process is “substantially complete,” what is left to do?

A Guideline #8 dealt substantively with matters concerning the NCAA policy, but other guidelines were important factors in the consensus process.

- They relate to preserving tradition, honoring heritage and effectively utilizing the resources of the University to “educate and inform our community and the public about American Indian culture, history and heritage.”
- Further developments in this regard will be reported as they occur.

Q A Sioux Indian tribe in South Dakota has asked for the return of regalia purchased by the University and used as part of the Chief Illinwek tradition. Do you intend to return the regalia, as requested?

A The request has been taken under advisement; no decision has yet been made.

Q Will you display the regalia that did come from the Sioux?

A We are considering what to do with the remaining regalia, but no decisions have been made. An accurate recounting and permanent, respectful safekeeping of the Chief Illiniwek tradition should be taken into account as part of the history of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. In doing so senior administrators may confer with all constituencies.

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