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News Release

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NCAA okays names Illini and Fighting Illini

Chief Illiniwek tradition remains an issue

URBANA—The NCAA on Friday agreed with the University of Illinois Board of Trustees that the use of the nicknames "Illini" and "Fighting Illini" are not reasons for including the University on the list of schools subject to its policy banning Native American names and symbols.

In a split decision, the NCAA approved the use of the names Illini and Fighting Illini by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), but the staff review committee rejected the University's arguments regarding the Chief Illiniwek tradition.

The NCAA's decision on the names "Illini" and "Fighting Illini," based upon the information provided by the University and on the NCAA's own research and discussions with Native American groups, concurred with the University's position that the term "Illini" is closely related to the name of the state and is not directly associated with Native Americans.

Board of Trustees Chair Lawrence C. Eppley expressed gratitude that the NCAA concurred with the University's view on the names.

"I am pleased the NCAA recognized what we've maintained all along," Eppley said. "'Illini' is taken from the name of our patron state and 'Fighting Illini' refers to our University's winning spirit and drive to excel."

Eppley also stated that the Board will consider its options for further response to the NCAA on the other matters raised in the NCAA's response to the appeal.

Eppley set no timetable for when the Board will make a decision on how to proceed on the NCAA policy.

The University of Illinois petitioned the NCAA Oct. 14 for an exemption from a policy announced in early August that prevents certain member institutions from hosting NCAA championship competition if they use American Indian imagery deemed by the organization as “hostile and/or abusive.” Both the Illini name, a campus identity and usage for 130 years, and the 80-year old Chief Illiniwek tradition were cited by the NCAA as reasons to ban UIUC from participation in championship competition.

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