**YES** LeBron James, the nation's most celebrated high school basketball player, and his team, the St. Vincent-St. Mary Fighting Irish of Akron, Ohio, recently played in Los Angeles. Roughly 13 percent of California's population is Irish-American, but there were no protests because the Irish-American community saw nothing particularly offensive about the Akron high school's team name.

That's why it's hard to understand the crusade to outlaw the use of Indian-related team names and mascots by public schools. Last year, a California legislator proposed banning the use of Redskins, Indians, Braves, Chiefs, Apaches, Comanches, or any other American Indian tribal name. A similar measure has been proposed in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Had the California law been enacted, the state's 60 or more public schools and colleges that boast Indian team names would have been forced to abandon those monikers. But the bill was based on the dubious notion that Indian team names make life unbearable for American Indians. It assumes that most American Indians find such team names and mascots racially offensive.

But that's not true, according to a poll last year, conducted for Sports Illustrated. "Although most Native American activists and tribal leaders consider Indian team names and mascots offensive, neither Native Americans in general, nor a cross-section of U.S. sports fans agree," says Andrea Woo of Sports Illustrated. In fact, four of five American Indians said that professional teams (like the Washington Redskins) should not stop using Indian names. Asked whether the use of Indian nicknames contributes to discrimination against them, the vast majority said it does not.

Actually, Indian team names foment goodwill toward American Indians. They are positive symbols in the minds of students. Teams like the Kansas City Chiefs and the Atlanta Braves are the pride of their cities.

When it comes to team names and team mascots, intent is what matters. Are they meant to disparage a group of people? Or do they represent inspirational symbols around which fans of all backgrounds can rally? Most American Indians understand the distinction. Too bad those who presume to speak for them do not.

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**NO** The overwhelming majority of Native Americans despise "Indian" sports references and want all schools to put an end to this tradition of recreational racism.

Even if you think your school shows the greatest respect for your team, there are always the opposing fans being disrespectful to your name and symbols. When effigies of Indians are burned in bonfires, or when signs and chants call for Indians to be scalped and tomahawked, Native people--especially students--take those insults personally.

Such behaviors promote assaults against living Indian people and have no proper place in the American educational system or public arena. The sports names that draw from a specific Native nation, such as Apache or Cherokee, steal and debase their very identity. The only teams with a right to use tribal names are those whose players are citizens of that tribal nation. That's self-identification.

There are no teams called Zulus or French or Japanese, but there are hundreds of non-Native teams with tribal names. What about the "Fighting Irish"? That came from the original all-Irish players, not from any outsiders. And how about "Cowboys"? That's a profession, not a people.

The use of Native references in sports amounts to name-calling. It reduces the entire race to caricatures at a time when health and poverty problems in Indian country need to be addressed with utmost seriousness.

All the leading Native American organizations have called for an end to Native-related names and images in sports. So have the National Education Association, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, and hundreds of social-justice and religious groups nationwide.

In 1970, the first "Indian" mascot was retired--the University of Oklahoma's "Little Red." At that time, there were more than 3,000 American schools using Indian names and symbols for their sports teams. Today, there are fewer than 1,200. American society is changing for the better, and it's high time for the rest of the schools to get on the right side of history.

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