



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on June 18, 2012

## Voters In N.D. Reject Fighting Sioux Mascot

In yet another victory for the forces of politically correct insanity, voters in North Dakota voted to dump the mascot of the University of North Dakota (UND). The Fighting Sioux are no more.

According to the *Bismarck Tribune*, more than 67 percent of voters approved of Measure 4, a ballot initiative that ended the long struggle between the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and its supporters, on the one hand, and those who love and revere the formidable-looking Indian logo the school has used for many moons.

Backers of the logo vow to keep fighting.

### NCAA Began the Fight

The trouble for UND began when the NCAA decided that Indian symbols, logos, and mascots are offensive. So it ordered schools to stop using any symbols that are “hostile” or “abusive.”

The NCAA permitted schools to retain their names as long as the Indian tribes approved, but rammed the policy through for “unapproved” names by telling teams they could not use Indian imagery in post-season tournaments. At the time, NBC reported, “Major college football will not be affected because there is no official NCAA tournament.”

In other words, the NCAA did not want a national uprising on their hands.

Anyway, UND sued the NCAA and forced the ruling organization for college sports to give the university a three-year grace period to drum up support for the name. That didn’t happen, even with the help of the Spirit Lake Sioux.

That’s because the Standing Rock Sioux, another branch of the many-limbed Sioux nation, did not support the mascot and imagery, and so the NCAA, in 2009, ruled again: no more Fighting Sioux. North Dakota’s state board of education and the school agreed to dump the logo on August 15 of that year.

Then the state legislature stepped in, passing a bill last spring that required the school to use the logo. Undeterred, opponents of the logo, worried that the NCAA and academic leftists would ostracize the school and wreck its athletic schedule, prevailed upon the legislature to pass another bill in November. SB 2370 authorized the school to change the logo.

That didn’t settle the matter either. Supporters of the Fighting Sioux, including the Spirit Lake Sioux, gathered signatures to put Measure 4 on the ballot. That measure gave voters the chance to approve or reject SB 2370.

Voters approved the measure overwhelmingly. The totals were 113,684 votes for the measure and 55,114 against, 67.35 percent versus 32.65 percent, the *Grand Forks Herald* reported.

In Grand Forks, the home of the school, support for Measure 4 was lopsided as well. Voters in Grand





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Forks County cast 11,284 ballots for the measure and 4,518 against it, a margin of 71.41 percent to 28.59. The newspaper reported that the “‘yes’ vote carried by decisive margins in all the state’s major counties.” It added,

Only sparsely populated Billings County in far western North Dakota voted “no,” by 2 votes — 150-148.

Sioux County, home of the Standing Rock Sioux Nation, also voted for an end to UND’s use of the tribe’s name, 184 votes to 159. The vote total was surprisingly low, given the importance nickname supporters had placed on giving Standing Rock people a voice in the long-running dispute.

For their part, supporters say they won’t give up, the *Tribune* reported. “Sean Johnson with the Spirit Lake Committee for Understanding and Respect said efforts to maintain the name aren’t over,” the newspaper said.

He said the group has gathered more than enough signatures to get a proposed constitutional measure to preserve the Fighting Sioux name on the November ballot.

“At this point we’re still looking to push forward with the initiated measure,” Johnson said.

### **NCAA Not the Only Opponents**

The NCAA, of course, wasn’t the only outfit pushing the school to dump the Fighting Sioux logo. Another group, the Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, had sent a team to evaluate problems the mascot created for the schools and its students.

Among the NCAA’s findings were that the “[t]his persistent controversy has a negative impact on the learning environment at the University of North Dakota.”

It adversely affects student participation in the classroom and the laboratory. It adversely affects student relationships in residence halls and in sports and other recreational activities. It encourages disrespectful treatment of some students by other students and by some faculty and staff. Team members also hear that it adversely affects student recruitment and retention. It is an issue which distracts students, faculty, staff, and administration from the very important business of higher education.

And that was just for starters. The mascot is also “manifestly inconsistent with the university’s goal of being the foremost university in the nation in the programs it offers for and about American Indians.”

The evaluation also said the logo was “awkward for an American university, which endeavors to teach and model respect for others and sensitivity to their perspectives, to widely and prominently employ a logo and nickname that a substantial number of American Indians and their organizations have said and continue to say is offensive and demeaning.”

“Times change,” the report said, and because “the nation has moved over the last century to de-legitimize and reduce discrimination against minorities, it has become less tolerant of the use of stereotypes and language regarded as offensive by minorities and many others.” Thus, “if UND continues on course, it will be increasingly out of step with the times.”

### **It’s All About Money**

In the end though, it may well have come down to money. University foundation members say the price of keeping the mascot will be way too high, the *Tribune* reported. “UND Foundation members argued that UND would pay too high a price long-term if forced to remain the Fighting Sioux.”



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Officials said the inability to host playoff series could cost the city of Grand Forks millions of dollars in hospitality and retail sales dollars. Athletic coaches said NCAA sanctions could hurt recruiting efforts and erode the overall quality of their programs.

The money the school and state earn from athletics will settle the matter, as Robert Potts, the retired chancellor of Arkansas State explained to the Associated Press. His school dropped its name, the Indians. "Potts said some boosters who held out for Arkansas State to keep the Indians nickname reversed course after the University of Wisconsin pulled out of a football contract that could have been worth about \$300,000, citing a Wisconsin school policy barring them from playing teams with nicknames considered offensive," AP reported.

"It was just a hassle we didn't need," Potts said.

Davies and Potts said neither school's booster donations suffered.

Income tax documents obtained by The Associated Press show that the Indian Club Inc. at Arkansas State took in donations of about \$1.5 million in 2004, the year before the NCAA edict. Revenue was \$1.9 million in 2005, \$1.5 million in 2006, \$1.6 million in both 2007 and 2008 and \$2.4 million in 2009.

"Even the most rabid Indian fans came around," Potts said.

*Photo of University of North Dakota's Fighting Sioux logo: AP Images*



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