

## Chief Wahoo and Outcome-Based Morality

Written by {ga=jonathanknight}

Saturday, February 16 2013 1:00 PM - Last Updated Saturday, February 16 2013 6:48 AM

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Let's assume, just for the sake of argument, that we're all not inherently racist.

Let's assume that there's ultimately nothing wrong with slapping a cap with an undeniably offensive caricature on our heads before heading out to Home Depot to pick up lawn bags on a Saturday morning.

Let's assume that the Washington Redskins' general manager didn't look like a knuckle-dragging nincompoop last week for refusing to even discuss changing his team's preposterously inflammatory nickname. And just ignore the fact that most people who live in the world capital of political correctness are perfectly fine with that.

Let's assume the Atlanta Braves overreacted last week when they decided against using its - and this, I shit you not, is actually what it's called - "screaming savage" team logo on its batting-practice caps after enough people complained.

And ultimately - again for the sake of argument - let's say that there's nothing wrong with good old Chief Wahoo.

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I certainly don't want to get into the sports-mascot debate that has been ignited and extinguished hundreds of times since we decided, as a group, that burning crosses on people's lawns wasn't just a quaint little snapshot of boys being boys. The quest to get America to stop celebrating caffeine-free apartheid just because it's the right thing to do has gone nowhere. Particularly at the professional level, where branding and merchandising are far more important than human dignity or respect for history.

So instead of leading a noble revolution based on respectable motivations, let's make a case for shitcanning Chief Wahoo based solely on self-interest.

There will be no lectures or guilt trips. If you don't bring up Louis Sockalexis or the "Indians" nickname, neither will I. Let's stick to the grinning, triangle-eyed apparition that makes us look like idiots to the rest of the world.

It's now been 65 years since the Indians won a world title. Literally everything about the team has changed over that period, from top down: ownership, management, uniforms, philosophy, the ballpark, uniforms, financial wherewithal, the designated hitter, Slider the mascot, so on and so forth.

There's only one thing that hasn't changed.

Yes, Chief Wahoo evolved from its creepy dried-apple-head origin in 1946 into the round-nosed, red-faced depiction of happiness and dental hygiene we know today. Incredibly, the Chief Wahoo the Indians will wear on their caps this season is identical to the one drawn up in 1951.

Of all the things - good and bad - that have come and gone over the past half-century, Chief Wahoo has endured as the sole touchstone of an historically progressive franchise that fielded the American League's first African-American player and hired the game's first black manager. And this contradiction blows my fucking mind. It would be like a direct descendent of Martin Luther King naming his daughter Aunt Jemima.

Bottom line: Chief Wahoo has never won a World Series. We've tried every other method to

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snap the streak - a list that now includes signing Jason Giambi, for Christ's sake - so isn't it time to try switching out the logo? What do we have to lose?

Okay, okay - several million dollars in ill-gotten merchandising moolah. But as The Dolans 2.0 have demonstrated over the past few months, they're now actually willing to give up some of their hard-earned FOX Sports cash to make the team better. We're on a roll here - time to hit up Uncle Larry for the keys to the car so we can put on a new hood ornament.

And why do we assume that there will be such a dramatic dropoff in merchandise sales once Chief Wahoo is finally laid to rest? Have we no faith in the graphic designers of today to top the work of some whistling cartoonist who had no idea what he was doing back in '51?

The new block "C" cap introduced three years ago is a classy alternative - let's run it up the flagpole. Come to think of it, the script "I" cap they trotted out a decade ago was a fine replacement, as well. Alternate uniforms and caps are the name of the game these days, so let's design a few more - hell, one for every day of the week - to soften the blow of losing our beloved, xenophobic emblem.

Whatever. It. Takes.

Ultimately, this is a result-driven quest. Let us not quibble over why we want what we want.

I don't think we're currently haunted by the dark veil of a Native American curse cast upon the franchise for its deliberate ignorance of its racist tendencies in the name of a higher profit margin. But if that's what inspires you, then sure - what the hell.

Or if you're more of a bold-promise kind of person, here you go: drop Chief Wahoo and I guarantee you the Indians will win the World Series.

And then there's always the old stand-by that elementary-school kids have been using to sell

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candy bars and magazine subscriptions for years: it's the right thing to do and, try as you might, you can't cook up a good excuse not to do it.

But at the end of the day, I don't care about our motivations, I'd just like to see us all striving for the same thing. I believe that in the face of crisis, polar opposites and bitter rivals can band together for an important cause. Like *Independence Day*, only this won't suck.

If you don't believe Native Americans deserve better, I'm not out to change your mind. Rather I ask that you come with me because you believe *Cleveland baseball fans* deserve better.

Different paths, same destination. Let's go.