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# Should the Cleveland Indians change their name? A history of protest over Chief Wahoo



By Nicole Bogart National Online Journalist, Breaking News  
Global News

**WATCH:** Grand Chief Shiela North Wilson of the Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak praised the decision by Toronto Blue Jays radio announcer, Jerry Howarth, and other broadcasters to boycott saying the Cleveland baseball club's nickname on the air during the American League Championship Series beginning Friday.

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A decades-old debate over the identity of Cleveland's baseball team has been re-ignited, as the Toronto Blue Jays gear up to face the Cleveland Indians in the American League Championship Series.



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Wednesday, a Blue Jays broadcaster, Jerry Howarth, re-iterated his long-standing personal ban on using the Cleveland team's full name, noting that he would only refer to the team as "Cleveland" during the ALCS.

### READ MORE: Sports broadcaster Jerry Howarth won't mouth 'Indians' as Blue Jays take on Cleveland in ALCS

Howarth explained that he stopped using team names like "Indians" and "Braves" – and terms such as "tomahawk chop" and "powwow on the mound" – when he received a letter from an aboriginal fan after Toronto defeated Atlanta in the 1992 World Series.

**David du Feu** [@DavidduFeu](#) [Follow](#)

@jessewente #NotYourMascot Totally with you to have the Cleveland @Indians change their name. Offensive! Cleveland Cougars has a nice ring!

5:52 AM - 12 Oct 2016

But protest surrounding Cleveland's identity is not new.

The team's mascot, Chief Wahoo, is largely referred to as "the most offensive image in sports."

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The logo is described as a caricature of a Native American face – with a red face, black hair, triangular eyes and a feather poking out from the back of his head.

Over the years the team has scaled back the use of Chief Wahoo. Before the start of the 2016 season, Indians owner Paul Dolan announced that the team would use a block letter "C" as its main logo, instead of the chief's face. Only a small glimpse of Wahoo can be seen on players' sleeves.

 **Richard Sharp**  
@mrsharpphoto Follow

I wake up this AM to sportsfans FINALLY realizing that Cleveland INDIANS is the most ridiculous team name/logo/mascot in pro sports. yes!

4:17 AM - 11 Oct 2016

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Banners and promotional material at Progressive Field, the team's home stadium, often exclude Wahoo's image. In fact, Chief Wahoo is notably missing from the entire team history section on the Indians' official MLB website.

The Indians' attempt to distance themselves from the controversial logo may be due, in part, to a long-standing Opening Day tradition at Progressive Field – protest.

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For over 25 years, Native American groups have filled the streets outside the stadium to protest Chief Wahoo's association with the team. Groups, such as the Cleveland American Indian Movement, believe the logo is disrespectful and offensive to Native American people.

The Cleveland American Indian Movement has filed legal complaints over the name several times. In 1972, the group unsuccessfully sued Cleveland Baseball for libel and slander over the Indians name and filed a human rights complaint in 1999.

Most recently, the group created a petition to remove the name "Progressive" from Cleveland's stadium.

"We firmly believe that attaching the Progressive name to institutionalized racism directly contradicts this proclaimed core value, and sends the insidious message that racism is somehow 'progressive,'" read the petition, started in May.

The petition only garnered half of the 1,000 signatures it needed.

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But as the Blue Jays make their way to that very stadium for the first ALCS game Friday, members of Canada's indigenous community are starting to weigh in on the controversy.

"I understand the good intentions by a lot of people, and I think even in our own indigenous community, some people don't see it as an offence. But [Indians] is a term that is not respectful to a lot of people – it shouldn't be a term that is easily thrown around," said Grand Chief Shiela North Wilson, of the Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak.

North Wilson pointed out that the use of the word Indian is still a legal term recognized by Canadian Law under the Indian Act, which allows indigenous Canadians to obtain their status.

"A lot of us hold Indian status cards that say I am an Indian under the Indian Act," she said.

"It's a term that people don't view as respectful because it doesn't produce the same effect as someone who has indigenous roots to this country. It puts us at a place where we are more cartoon characters, people from the past that don't honour where we come from."

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