



National
Congress of
American
Indians



March 9, 2015

NFL Players Association
1133 20th St. NW
Washington, DC 20036

Dear NFLPA Executive Director Candidate,

From Jesse Owens to Jackie Robinson to Muhammad Ali, athletes hold a special leadership position in history's crusades for social justice. That has never been truer than it is today: as sports have become such an integral part of American culture, athletes have unique power to shape that culture for the better and to be a voice for the cause of equality.

The National Football League Players Association has been one of the organizations that has consistently marshaled that power for this righteous cause, standing in solidarity with others, just as civil rights groups have stood with the union. Because you are a candidate to become the next executive director of this hallowed organization, we are writing to you with a critical request: we are asking that you pledge that, if elected, you will put a resolution forward to NFLPA members allowing them to vote to have the organization formally join our Change the Mascot Campaign.

Our campaign's goal is simple: we want the NFL to use its power to finally stop the Washington franchise from promoting a dictionary-defined racial slur as its name. This is a word screamed at Native Americans as they were dragged at gunpoint off their lands -- and it was a name originally given to the team by one of America's most infamous segregationists, George Preston Marshall. As public health organizations have attested, this name has significant negative effects on Native Americans: every Sunday, the promotion of this name tells millions of Americans it is acceptable to denigrate native peoples on the basis of their alleged skin color.

Just as the NFL would never dare allow any other racial slur to brand one of its teams, it should not allow this name to continue to be promoted for the team that represents the nation's capital. That is a common sense view understood by current professional football players including Richard Sherman and Champ Bailey; by former stars such as Terry Bradshaw, Calvin Hill and Mark Schlereth; and by the Fritz Pollard Alliance, the organization that works with the league to promote civil rights. They have all spoken out against the continued use of the team's current name, as have major Native American organizations, public health organizations, religious leaders, sports media icons, governors, Members of Congress from both parties and the President of the United States.

For current NFL players, this name is an affront on two levels.

Morally, it is unacceptable for the league to continue forcing athletes to wear uniforms that publicly promote the iconography of a racial slur.

Economically, the continued use of the name potentially reduces revenues for players. According to an Emory University study of college teams, "The shift away from a Native American mascot yields positive financial returns." With the NFLPA generating some of its revenues through merchandise sales, continuing to use the Washington team's name forsakes the same positive financial returns that players could reap if the name were changed.

Last year, the current NFLPA executive director DeMaurice Smith issued a statement to The Washington Post correctly noting that the Washington team's name conveys "racial insensitivity" and declared that "I do not believe anyone should inflict pain, embarrass or insult, especially given the racial insensitivity" of the team's name.

We applaud Mr. Smith for making such a bold statement, and we are asking that all current candidates for NFLPA executive director make similar public statements. But we are also asking that the candidates take it a step further by pledging to have the full membership of the NFLPA vote on a formal resolution to join the Change the Mascot campaign and to demand that the league change the team's name.

As noted at the beginning of this letter, athletes are in a unique position to take up the cause of social justice - especially on an issue like this that is so intertwined with professional sports. In the spirit of solidarity that the NFLPA so often promotes, we hope you will stand with us in this critical campaign.

Sincerely,



Ray Halbritter
Oneida Indian Nation Representative



Jacqueline Pata
Executive Director, National Congress of American Indians



Brian Patterson
President, United South and Eastern Tribes
Bear Clan Council Member, Oneida Indian Nation