
an editorial . . .

What's at Stake?

After months of silence on the Little Red issue, Sooner magazine is speaking out. There are many reasons. Chief among them is the desire to somehow clarify what has become a muddy, distorted, emotional issue for everyone.

Understandably, nearly everyone is confused about what's happening over Little Red. The problem has gone in and out of the student court; charges have been filed and dropped in district court; even the state supreme court has been pulled into the situation.

At issue are two things: (1) the abolishment of a position known as University mascot, and (2) the attempt by a student to serve as Little Red despite a University regulation abolishing the position.

Last spring when the Human Relations Committee recommended abolishing the mascot position, it left the door open for one or more Indians to continue to appear on the field. By trying out for cheerleader or the newly created position of rally leader, an Indian student can, if chosen, then appear at sports events in whatever costume he chooses. The effect, therefore, is the same. The position, however, is no longer officially known as Little Red.

Once Little Red had been abolished, the University had to enforce its regulations. Since the student who attempted to serve as Little Red this fall had not gone through cheerleader tryouts, had not secured a pass to enter the playing field, he was therefore breaking a University regulation.

Probably the terrible division among people interested in Little Red and the University has occurred through emotional escalation. These people thought they were being denied what they considered an important part of OU's sports tradition. They were not; the methods and the title were changed. That's all.

It is true that only a tiny group of people truly feel that Little Red was a degrading image. Their feeling was based on the idea that any kind of mascot is necessarily something of a caricature—Pistol Pete at OSU, the Jayhawk at Kansas, the Tiger at Missouri. While none of those involves a race of people, the premise carries over.

It is also true that the vast majority of Indians in and out of Oklahoma do not see Little Red as degrading. They see the position as a way of perpetuating Indian heritage.

Virtually all the Indians can agree on one point. They would like this essentially trivial matter to be settled and get down to the more serious business of improving conditions for Indians—social conditions, educational opportunities, health services.

So in the end we have an ethical and a legal consideration. If even a handful of Indians are degraded by the existence of a mascot, then that mascot should be abolished and a more satisfactory method of providing Indian representation at sports events should be found. That has been done. In addition, now that it is done, the regulations established at the University must be upheld because no sensible person wants to see rules flaunted.

We encourage the Indian population of this state to urge their young people to try out for cheerleader and/or rally leader. Randy Palmer already has been named a rally leader this year. He will appear in garments much like those worn by Little Red. So now we have achieved the ultimate—to have Little Red and not have him at the same time. We hope now that the University can get on to more important matters relating to the Indian: developing programs in Indian studies, programs that rightly belong at a university in a state where Indian heritage is so important.