

Cougars join endangered nickname list

Written by Mark Dukes

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As political correctness has become more and more vogue, mascots and nicknames for high schools have come under increasing scrutiny.

Many colleges and high schools have used “Indians” for their mascot . But pressure from Native American groups has forced schools to change names. Even so, Marion and nine other Iowa high schools still are known as the Indians. What’s politically correct for some must be tradition to others.

Now comes a strange story out of Utah that tops all others for silliness. Draper Corner Canyon High School announced its mascot and school colors last week. The future student body of the new school voted on the mascot, and the winner with 23 percent was Cougars. Perhaps not by coincidence, nearby Brigham Young University is the Cougars.

Not so fast, though.

The Canyons School District, which will open the new school in 2013, rejected Cougars because it might be offensive to middle-aged women. Most of us know Cougar as an animal. But one dictionary reference describes a Cougar as slang for a middle-aged woman seeking a romantic relationship with a younger man.

Think about it, almost any nickname has the potential to insult or offend someone’s interest or background ... animal activist (Tigers, Eagles, Panthers), a heritage (Indians, Irish, Norsemen), religious (Saints, Demons).

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If you don't get too serious about it, though, you can have some fun with nicknames.

The Nevada Cubs vs. the Treynor Cardinals would be a terrific rivalry. Who would be favored in this one, the Xavier Saints or Washington Demons?

Sheldon's mascot is the Orabs, a word not listed in any dictionary. Best guess is it is the fusion of two colors, orange and black, to create Orab. *(Editor's note: Dukes is correct.)*

Most Iowa high schools have common or predictable mascots. Two of the more unusual are the Audubon Wheelers and the Estherville-Lincoln Central Midgets. I've always liked the Des Moines Lincoln Railsplitters, too.

Outside of Iowa, there are some real doozies. My favorite two are the Poca (W.Va.) Dots and the Frankfort (Ind.) Hot Dogs. Honorable mention would go to the Astoria (Ore.) Fighting Fishermen and the Blooming Prairie (Minn.) Awesome Blossoms.

Perhaps the best way to avoid offending anyone is to have no mascot or nickname, like Iowa Mennonite School in Kalona or Morning Star Academy in Bettendorf. They are the only two Iowa high schools without a mascot.

If anyone has any ideas for that school district in Utah, help them out. But be careful. It might offend someone.

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