

Indian images in sports may violate laws

MILWAUKEE (AP) — Warhawks, Braves, Chiefs, Redmen and Redskins may be discriminatory names and logos for Wisconsin school teams because they reinforce stereotypes, the state attorney general said.

Educators and Indian activists praised the opinion last week from Attorney General James Doyle, saying it could lead other states to restrict use of Indian motifs by public schools.

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction has the authority to determine which Indian images used by schools violate anti-discrimination laws, Doyle said.

The department mailed copies of Doyle's opinion to school districts, leaving them to decide whether to change Indian motifs, said Steven B. Dold, assistant state superintendent for management and budget.

"It will have a fairly direct and positive effect," Dold said. "We think communities are increasingly sensitive to the kind of harm these logos can cause."

At least 50 Wisconsin high schools use

nicknames, logos and mascots derived from Indians. Doyle said in his opinion that such names and likenesses may reinforce stereotypes or create "an intimidating or offensive environment, thus perpetuating past discrimination."

If a school district refuses to dump Indian themes and a complaint is filed, the public instruction department can determine whether they are discriminatory, Dold said.

Indian advocates said the opinion may, for the first time, offer communities a legal basis in the fight against names and images they consider discriminatory.

"The attorney general's opinion carries a lot of weight. What we need are elected officials who take leadership positions and who speak out publicly on this issue," said Karen Funk, a legislative analyst for the National Indian Education Association in Washington, D.C.

Athletic teams with Indian motifs have caused problems in other states' schools and in professional sports as well.

Indian activists have complained about the professional Washington Redskins football team and Atlanta Braves baseball team.

Indians said school motifs pertaining to them are demeaning and present a view of their culture and heritage frozen in time. They said such names and images perpetuate stereotypes that hurt relations with their communities.

"It gives Indian students and non-Indian students very erroneous pictures of Indian people," said Lisa Waukau, a Menomonee Indian and history teacher at Menomonee Indian High School.

In Minnesota, the state board of education directed schools not to use nicknames and likenesses that were prejudicial, but school districts questioned whether the board had that authority, said Will Antell, manager of Indian education for Minnesota.

"I hope our (education) board will pick up on that and get an opinion from our attorney general," he said.

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