

## NSU looks for new mascot

By James Gutzmer, Press Sports Editor  
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The Northeastern State Bigfoots, Platapi, or maybe the Alligator Snapping Turtles.

Those could be early suggestions of what's to come as NSU searches for a mascot to replace the "Redmen" moniker, and the little-known "Rowdy" mascot.

The school, which began its life in 1851 as the Cherokee National Female Seminary, will undergo its second mascot change in 82 years.

NSU President Dr. Larry Williams announced Tuesday a decision has been made to form a 26-member task force, charged with guiding the selection and implementation of a new mascot to represent NSU's athletic teams. This all comes on the heels of an extensive study of how logos and the name "Redmen" are used throughout the university.

The Redmen mascot was officially adopted in October 1924, chosen by a vote of the faculty to replace the name Warriors. Several characters have been introduced through the years as a mascot, but none ever took hold. The most recent "Rowdy" is best described as a green, furry puppet with yellow spaghetti hair.

The change is spurred by the National Collegiate Athletic Association, which has requested all colleges and universities with American Indian mascots review their use. NSU's use of the "Redmen" nickname does not assign a mascot to symbolize the moniker, but the university has nevertheless been under scrutiny by the athletic governing board for several years. Although NSU has not been specifically asked to make a change, Williams feels now is the time.

Several institutions across the United States have made headlines in an effort to comply with NCAA guidelines, and some have been forced into decisions to avoid team penalties.

According to NSU, its moniker has not been classified as hostile or abusive by the NCAA. However, restrictions connected to the use of American Indian nicknames could affect future NSU athletic competitions unless the university takes the initiative to comply before the "Redmen" name becomes an issue.

One institution that has already been affected is NCAA Division II and Lone Star Conference rival Southeastern Oklahoma State. The "Savages," as they were called since 1921, changed their mascot to the "Savage Storm" at the beginning of this year.

The fight to eliminate racially insensitive mascots has been going on for nearly 40 years when the National Congress of American Indians launched its campaign to eliminate derogatory Native American mascots. In 1968, the NCAI started addressing stereotypes found in print and other media. The group's first big victory was on April 17, 1970, when the University of Oklahoma retired its "Little Red" mascot that had been a traditional part of the school's athletics since the 1940s.

In 1992, Simpson College in Iowa dropped its "Redmen" and "Lady Reds" nickname in favor of "Storm." The following year, the college adopted the Thundercat as its mascot. In the same year, Ripon College in Wisconsin also changed its mascot from the "Redmen" to the "Red Hawks." In 1998, Southern Nazarene University changed its mascot from the "Redskins" to the Crimson Storm after being pressured by the NCAA. In that same year, Oklahoma City University, a college affiliated with the United Methodist Church, decided to

replace its Chiefs" nickname, which dated back to 1944.

In a campuswide e-mail to NSU students, faculty and staff, Williams said, "After listening to leaders within the American Indian community and hearing from many of our alumni, I have concluded it is in the best interest of NSU to find a new mascot that will generate respect across the wide spectrum of individuals that make up the alumni, faculty, staff, students, friends and supporters of this great university."

Williams indicated a new mascot would be unveiled before the start of the 2007-'08 academic year, which begins in August 2007.

NSU Public Relations Director Nancy Garber said the process is just beginning. She said no specific suggestions have been made, and the field is wide open right now.

According to Garber, the task force's charge will be to take suggestions from the staff, alumni, students, and other supporters of the university.

During the next 15 months, a task force appointed by Williams will solicit input through focus groups, develop a plan for selecting the new mascot, and implement steps for a smooth transition to a new identity.

"I believe that designating a mascot is a matter that should be the responsibility of stakeholders in the university, not driven by pressure from a national governing body," Williams said. "By starting now, we have the opportunity to decide on a mascot that everyone connected to the university can rally behind and cheer to victory."

"With NSU's 17-month Centennial Celebration starting in August 2008, university officials hope to identify a mascot symbolic of the institution's history and inspiring for future generations."

Garber did say the university colors would most likely to stay the same – green and white – with the change of mascots. She said the new mascot would include a character that would pull the university and community together.

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