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Obama Points to ‘Legitimate Concerns’ Over Redskins’ Name

By **KEN BELSON**

The long-simmering debate over the [Washington Redskins’](#) name took a new turn when [President Obama](#) said that he would consider changing it if he were the team’s owner.

Obama’s comments are likely to stoke the dispute, which has forced the team, the N.F.L. and politicians on both sides of the aisle into the awkward position of defending a nickname that some Native American groups find objectionable.

“I don’t know whether our attachment to a particular name should override the real legitimate concerns that people have about these things,” Obama said [in an interview](#) Friday with The Associated Press.

Obama, who roots for baseball, football and basketball teams from Chicago, said he did not think that fans of the Redskins were deliberately trying to offend Native Americans. But advocacy groups and at least 10 members of Congress who insist that the Redskins name is derogatory are likely to embrace his comments.

Dan Snyder, the Redskins’ owner, has long promised to keep the name. On Saturday, Lanny J. Davis, a lawyer for the team, pointed to polls that showed that fans overwhelmingly supported the team’s name, and that Native Americans did not consider it offensive.

“We at the Redskins respect everyone,” Davis said. “But like devoted fans of the Atlanta Braves, the Cleveland Indians and the Chicago Blackhawks, we love our team and its name and, like those fans, we do not intend to disparage or disrespect a racial or ethnic group.”

The issue has dogged N.F.L. Commissioner Roger Goodell, who has supported the Redskins but has also tried to remain sensitive to their critics. In May, 10 members of Congress wrote to Snyder, Goodell and the chief executive of FedEx, which sponsors the team’s stadium, and sponsored the Non-Disparagement of Native American Persons or Peoples in Trademark Registration Act of 2013.

In June, Goodell wrote back to the members of Congress and said the Redskins name was “a unifying force that stands for strength, courage, pride and respect.”

Yet two weeks ago, he appeared to soften his stance when he said that the league had an obligation to consider all sides.

“If we are offending one person, we need to be listening,” Goodell, who grew up a Redskins fan in Washington, told WJFK-FM, “and making sure that we’re doing the right things to try to address that.”

Several reporters who cover football, including Peter King of Sports Illustrated, [have stopped using the team's nickname](#) in their articles.

Other professional teams, including the Braves, the Indians and the Kansas City Chiefs, have Native American nicknames, yet they have not been embroiled in nearly as much controversy as the Redskins.

Many college teams have changed nicknames and mascots in the last few decades. Teams at St. John's, for instance, are now known as the Red Storm rather than the Redmen. Stanford teams are known as the Cardinal, not the Indians.

The Oneida Indian Nation, which is part of the Change the Mascot movement, will hold a symposium Monday at the hotel in Washington where N.F.L. owners will be meeting for two days.