The Last Warrior

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A four-panel exhibit on the Marquette Warrior nickname and mascots.
The Last Warrior

Our Warrior

Before 1954, Marquette University teams were known unofficially as the Hilltoppers and the Golden Avalanche. Marquette's location on the crest of a bluff overlooking the city inspired the nickname Hilltoppers. A New York reporter coined the nickname the Golden Avalanche for Marquette's football team following its successful 1936-37 season when they played Texas Christian University in the Cotton Bowl. As the football team's success diminished, students became dissatisfied with the nicknames and began looking for a new identity.

The Student Senate recommended Warriors as a new nickname on May 13, 1954. The students chose this name for three main reasons. The University's official seal, featuring Father Marquette in a canoe with an American Indian guide, provided the connection to local tribes. Marquette's positive relationship with American Indians also influenced the students' decision to depict an Indian as their warrior. Students hoped that the new name would complement the other Milwaukee sports teams. Milwaukee's major league baseball team the Braves, the NBA team the Hawks, and the local hockey team the Chiefs, all served as an inspiration for the Marquette Warriors.

Above left: The Milwaukee Braves mascot served as one inspiration for the Marquette nickname change; the Golden Avalanche no longer seemed a proper nickname for the school as the football program began to dwindle. Above right: Fr. Marquette tours the Wisconsin region with help from Native Americans; Milwaukee's minor league hockey team, the Chiefs, served as another in-town inspiration for the change to Warrior. Left: The Marquette Student Senate for the 1954-1955 academic year.
Marquette students sought a face to embody the new name. Patrick Buckett, a Marquette student and local television personality, appeared as Chief White Buck in Marquette’s 1954 Homecoming Parade. Clad in a traditional headdress and Plains Indian attire, White Buck led students in dances and appeared as a representative to the local media. While the new nickname flourished in depictions such as Whoosh the Warrior, the search continued for an appropriate mascot to appear at sporting events. In January of 1961, the University held a “Name the Warrior” contest that offered a $5 prize for the student who submitted the best name for the new mascot.

The Student Senate selected Willie Wampum as Marquette’s new warrior. With a tomahawk and a papier-mâché headdress, Willie Wampum represented a stereotypical Indian. His purpose was to foster greater school spirit at basketball games and he proved to be successful. In December 1970, world-renowned Native American ballerina, Maria Tallchief, quietly informed President John Raynor, S.J., that Willie Wampum was offensive to some area tribes. In response to new cultural sensitivities, the Student Senate voted to retire Willie Wampum. The search for a more respectful representation of the Warrior began.

Willie Wampum served well to encourage school spirit and excite the crowd at sporting events. However, the exaggerated and inaccurate image offended the Native Americans at Marquette and across the country.

Maria Tallchief, a prominent ballerina in the 1940s and 1950s, brought the matter of Willie Wampum’s offensiveness to the attention of Fr. Raynor. Image courtesy of swiga.com

Perfecting the Image
The Last Warrior

A group of Native American students with a novel idea approached Dr. James Scott, Vice President of Student Affairs, in 1976. They proposed the First Warrior as a culturally sensitive American Indian icon to represent Marquette at sporting events. Their purpose was to educate about Native culture as well as represent the University. The Student Senate supported the idea and the First Warrior debuted on February 10, 1980, at the Marquette/Duke basketball game. There were strict rules governing the behavior and selection of the First Warrior; the individual had to be of Native descent and was expected to behave with dignity in interactions with the audience and other mascots. According to Mark Denning, an Ojibwa and the second student to portray the First Warrior, the excitement centered around “getting a shot to represent ourselves.” However, the effort to combine cultural education with sporting events was unsuccessful. A game against University of Wisconsin-Madison, the notoriously fun-loving Bucky Badger failed to engage the First Warrior in typical mascot play. Instead, students and alumni treated the solemn cultural dances with considerable disdain, even uttering racial taunts and slurs. Unfortunately, the First Warrior could not fill the shoes left by Willie Wampum.

The First Warrior was meant to serve as a symbol for the university rather than a mascot. However, the message got lost in translation at basketball games, and the First Warrior was retired soon after its inception.
In an effort to revitalize school spirit at basketball games, Marquette introduced Bleuteaux, hoping that his presence as a crowd-pleasing, inoffensive mascot would improve the reception of the First Warrior. This experiment was ultimately unsuccessful and Student Affairs abandoned the First Warrior following the 1986-87 basketball season. With Bleuteaux's continuing unpopularity, the University dropped him after 1990. The Athletic Department refused to yield to student requests to return to an Indian mascot. On October 12, 1993, Marquette University announced its decision to discontinue the Warrior and the logo. Once again searching for a new name and mascot, the selection process was open to Marquette students and alumni. The finalists were the Lightning and the Golden Eagles. In July of 1994, the University unveiled the new Marquette Golden Eagles. Alumni and students, dissatisfied with the decision, continued to call for a return to the Warrior. After an extremely unpopular change to the Marquette Gold, the Warrior mascot was finally laid to rest by the administration. Even today, the controversy continues as some students and alumni rally around the Marquette Warrior.