In recent weeks there has been a renewal in the discussion over the use of American Indian names and images in sports.

From calls - on both the local and national level - for the Washington Redskins to change their name, to a recent symposium at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian on *Racist Stereotypes and Cultural Appropriation in American Sports*
, the topic is gaining renewed attention.

While the discussion about the continued use of Chief Wahoo and the name Indians by the Cleveland baseball team has gained more strong local attention than national, the topic is always going to be a divisive one in Northeast Ohio.

Which is why a recent column by Paul Lukas at ESPN caught our eye. In a follow-up to his piece on the symposium, Lukas interviewed Frank Cloutier , public relations director for the Saginaw Chippewa Indian tribe in central Michigan, about the tribe's position on the use of American Indian imagery and names. Cloutier's explanation of the tribe's position is an interesting one:

"It's very, very clear for us, because we've worked with so many institutions in our area. Our position is that if it's not derogatory and it's being used appropriately, with an opportunity to share or cross-share our culture, then it's fine. There's nothing derogatory about Warriors or Braves. There's nothing derogatory about Indian. But terms like Redskin or Half-Breed, those

are derogatory terms to us."

Cloutier cited the work his tribe has done with Central Michigan University to illustrate one way to appropriately use certain terms.

"... in 2003 we entered into an articulation agreement with Central Michigan University, because they were the Chippewas. As part of that agreement, the tribe and the university each has an obligation. Every year I go in and address every freshman athletic student about our culture and what it means to be a Chippewa, and about the proud, competitive nature of our people. We explain that it's not about war paint and fake feathers. It's about honoring the triumph of these resilient, competitive people.

"They also have areas on campus that are dedicated to the presence of the Chippewa Nation. So it's a good cross-cultural exchange. And when they go out there and compete, they're Chippewas, they're fighting like a Chippewa, fighting to win. We've made that university our school of choice for Native Americans, because our tribal community is close by, so we can help support those Native students."

The Dolans have made it clear that they are not going to change the team's name, but the work that the Saginaw Chippewas have done with Central Michigan and other schools provides a blueprint to the Dolans to show they are not tone deaf to the fact that the world has changed in the past 50 to 60 years.

The first step is to do away with the backstory that the team is named the Indians as a tribute to Louis Sockalexis, the first American Indian to play professional baseball. While not as embarrassing as the Washington Redskins putting out news releases saying Redskins is OK as a name because high schools across the country use it
, as Peter points out in the
Scene
article we linked to, while Sockalexis' story has been accepted as fact by many, it is probably not true.

Keeping the Indians name does make geographical sense, however, as there were American Indians in Northeast Ohio for centuries

, including the Wyandot, Ottawa and Mingo. The Dolans need to find a way to partner with any remaining members of the various Indians tribes that once populated the area. If that's not possible, then find some Indian tribe with Ohio connections to work with in a meaningful way to help them improve their lives.

In addition, the team should create opportunities to, as Cloutier says, share and cross-share the Indian culture and educate people on the real history of American Indians and show people how they can help. They can even extend the program down through their minor league teams to help spread the message.

Once they do that, team officials can then replace the caricature of Chief Wahoo with a more modern logo. Because as Cloutier points out, it's not necessarily the images that are the problem, but the attitudes behind them.

"... if you look at generational trauma and the way Native peoples were treated 300 years ago, it wasn't until 1924 that we were formally recognized as human beings, and we didn't get the chance to vote until after women did. That's what makes these (American Indian) kids feel marginalized - the way their culture and their people were treated. I don't believe that a menacing-looking brave on the backboard of a basketball hoop is going to marginalize that child as much as that generational trauma.

That said, however, I believe that these schools using these images have an obligation to talk about the truth of Native American history. One of the largest genocides in world history happened right here on American soil, and it happened to Native Americans. So it's important to talk about the true history about the settling of the United States, and to talk about those things that happened to Native Americans that are often not talked about.

If Native children are struggling, hopefully this kind of education and outreach and help identify why, instead of having us blame it on a mascot."

That's the thing; it's easy to say the team should drop the Chief Wahoo logo or change the team name from Indians, but if that is all the team does then it doesn't change anything. If the team doesn't put any weight behind the move and use it as an opportunity to truly make a difference, then it is nothing more than a public relations move.

A move like this would not be popular with everyone; just as there are people who complain that

the Dolans sold the naming rights to the stadium to Progressive Insurance (but were OK when the naming rights were sold to name the park Jacobs Field), there will be complaints that the Dolans are giving in on the issue.

But that shouldn't weigh in on the discussion. The Dolans have a platform to make a real difference, rather than just a cosmetic one, and an opportunity to set themselves apart among professional teams and create a situation that could help a group of people that really need it.

While it may not be everyone's idea of a perfect solution to the problem, it would clearly be a step in the right direction.

(Photo by Sports Illustrated)