

Mascot Policy at Iowa

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) – The University of Iowa probably would say no if it received a lucrative offer to play Florida State in a made-for-TV football game.

The reason: Florida State is nicknamed the Seminoles.

Iowa has a policy, approved by its athletic department governing board in 1994, that prevents the scheduling of non-conference games with schools that have American Indian mascots.

"We would probably not accept a preseason game against an institution which had a Native American mascot," athletic director Bob Bowlsby said after being asked specifically about Florida State. "We have some control over that."

The policy had prompted little discussion in recent years until Iowa dropped a baseball game scheduled earlier this week against Bradley, nicknamed the Braves.

Iowa has played Bradley in baseball seven times since the policy was implemented, including last season. Bowlsby said that was an oversight and he canceled this year's game in February when the policy was brought up.

Only last week, Bradley University president David Broski said the school would keep the Braves nickname, despite a push by student leaders and American Indian groups to change it. Broski said he found no compelling reason to do so.

The Iowa policy has exceptions. Illinois, nicknamed the Fighting Illini, is exempt because of Big Ten Conference obligations. However, the Illinois mascot, Chief Illiniwek, is barred from Iowa athletic venues.

The policy also exempts postseason or tournament games "where we don't have control over the scheduling," Bowlsby said.

"In the case of a bowl game or an NCAA (tournament) game, someone else is selecting us and preparing the matchup, so I think it would be covered by the exemption," he said.

Iowa played Central Michigan, nicknamed the Chippewas, in football in 1994 and 1998, but both games were scheduled before the policy went into effect, Bowlsby said.

An Iowa-Florida State basketball game in the 2002-03 season was arranged as part of the Big Ten-ACC Challenge.

Chad Uran, a member of the university's American Indian Student Association, said he was

pleased to see that the policy was enforced.

"It kind of lapsed and wasn't used for a while," said Uran, a graduate student from the White Earth Reservation in northern Minnesota.

"To see it back is kind of cool. It demonstrates to somebody, somewhere that the university has to commit to the word they give to the rest of the world."

The issue has cropped up at other schools recently, including Illinois, where the Chief Illiniwek mascot has divided the campus for years.

Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich has urged the Legislature to pass a resolution on whether the mascot should stay or go. One lawmaker threatened to slash the university's budget if the Chief wasn't dumped.

The NCAA last summer stopped short of requiring schools to drop American Indian nicknames or logos, instead urging them to review their depictions to determine if they are offensive.

Arkansas State's president last year rejected a proposal to drop Indians as a nickname, but Southeast Missouri State is looking at replacements for its nicknames – Indians for men and Otahkians for the women's teams. The finalists: Red Hawks or Red Wolves.

Bowlsby said he did not think the policy restricts Iowa coaches in scheduling because "there are lots of teams out there to play." After Southeast Missouri State changes, there will be 11 Division I schools with American Indian nicknames or mascots, according to the NCAA.

The Iowa policy was approved during a period of considerable debate over the appropriateness of American Indian mascots. Marquette changed its nickname from Warriors to Golden Eagles and some newspapers stopped using American Indian nicknames in their stories.

"The policy has been in place for 10 years and there are people who feel very strongly on both sides of the issue," Bowlsby said. "I think I could capably argue either side of the issue."