

Snyder must change racist team name



Jarrett Bell
Columnist
USA TODAY

George Preston Marshall's monument was removed from RFK Stadium last week, which incredibly had been positioned outside the city-owned space for decades.

It never should have been there in the first place.

But fitting, the damned thing was hauled away on Juneteenth, which commemorates the day the last enslaved African Americans in the United States were freed in Texas in 1865, nearly two-and-a-half years after President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation.

Marshall was the former owner of Washington's NFL franchise and a proud, wear-it-on-his-sleeves racist. That team name that Dan Snyder needs to get rid of because of the slur that it is to Native Americans was hand-picked by Marshall. Washington was the last NFL team to integrate, in 1962, then after Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy and Interior Secretary Stewart Udall threatened to revoke the team's lease for the new stadium that was built on federal land using taxpayer money.

Marshall had famously declared, "I'll integrate when the Harlem Globetrotters integrate."

It is beyond me to accept why they ever gave that character a monument at RFK, where Washington played home games until moving to FedExField in 1997. It was surely a different time as Marshall – the one who persuaded other NFL owners to institute a color line that banned Black players from 1934 until 1946 – was one of the charter members who received a bust when the Pro Football Hall of Fame opened in 1963.

Yet it's better late than never to remove the tribute to Marshall amid a push to take down statues and monuments or rename buildings, streets names and other venues that honored Confederate war figures, slave owners and segregationists as America reexam-



Dan Snyder is a businessman who has typically rationalized the NFL's Washington team name as a valuable brand. RICH BARNES/USA TODAY SPORTS

ines the symbols of racism that permeate throughout our society.

Which reminds me: "Never." That's what Snyder vehemently declared in 2013 when asked if he would consider changing the slur of a team name.

"We'll never change the name," Snyder told USA TODAY Sports. "It's that simple. NEVER – you can use caps."

He should have never said never. Now is the perfect time for Snyder to acknowledge the degrading message that his team's name sends to many Native Americans and just change the thing.

Snyder, one of the NFL's biggest revenue generators yet also one of its most maligned owners, can keep the team colors. They can still be the "Burgundy

and Gold." Yet changing the name, as the NBA's Washington Wizards did in 1997 in switching from the Bullets, would allow Snyder – who has searched to no end and no success in trying to win the big one since buying the team in 1999 from the estate of Jack Kent Cooke – to stand pretty tall with a clean slate.

Talk about rebuilding an image overnight.

If Snyder reverses his hard-line, Marshall-esque stance on the team name it might even result in him getting a statue. I mean, Washington has won two playoff games in 20 years under Snyder, who during the same span has gone through 10 head coaches (including two interims). That pattern won't get him a bronzed sculpture. But a significant

statement would do wonders.

"Dan Snyder has now been given an opportunity to create a different legacy for himself," Ray Halbritter, head of the Change the Mascot campaign, said in a statement. The grassroots campaign is aligned with the Oneida Indian Nation. "For as long as he insists on slurring Native Americans with his team's racist mascot, it will lead to more damaging impact on Native American communities and he will become more synonymous with infamous segregationist George Preston Marshall."

Sure, Snyder is a businessman who has typically rationalized the team name as a valuable brand. Well, imagine the merchandise that can be sold with a new name. And imagine not having the nation's capital as a potential site for a new stadium and new team headquarters.

Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser said recently that the team name would be an "obstacle" for relocating within the District of Columbia. Bowser also told Washington radio station Team 980, "I think it's past time for the team to deal with what offends so many people."

It's also past time that the NFL pressed the issue with Snyder.

When you see NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell proclaiming in a video that "Black lives matter" and that the league is committed to battling racism, as he did in response to a video from players in the aftermath of George Floyd's death, it's natural to wonder whether he'll do anything about the racist slur that one of the league's highest-grossing franchises still uses.

Goodell and the NFL apparently didn't take Colin Kaepernick as serious as they should have and years later are expressing regret for not "listening" enough to the concerns of Black players.

Well, here's a chance for Goodell and other NFL owners to prove what they've learned, while other brands like Quaker Oats and Land O'Lakes are making moves to erase racially insensitive symbols.

What a perfect time for Snyder to change the name – better late than never.

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