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News Release

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(Note to journalists: Please call Office for University Relations at 217-333-6400 to schedule an interview with Chairman Eppley.)

Chief Illiniwek Will No Longer Perform
NCAA to lift sanctions on Illini athletics

URBANA—The University of Illinois today announced that Chief Illiniwek will no longer perform at athletic events on the Urbana-Champaign campus after this season's last men's home basketball game in Assembly Hall on February 21.

As a consequence, the University will immediately become eligible to host post-season National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) championship events.

In a February 15, 2007, letter to the University, the NCAA stated that “[o]nce this action is taken, the university will be immediately removed from the list of institutions subject to the NCAA Executive Committee’s policy regarding Native American mascots, nicknames and imagery at NCAA championship events. Continued removal from the list is conditioned upon the university’s future non-use of ‘Chief Illiniwek’ and the related Native American imagery in connection with university athletics.

“Assuming the announced changes are affected and assuming such use does not reoccur, the university will be in full compliance with the policy,” the letter stated. “Accordingly, the policy will not preclude the university from hosting or participating in NCAA championship events, should the university be otherwise eligible.”

The NCAA letter was signed by Bernard Franklin, senior vice president for governance, membership, education and research services.

U. of I. Board of Trustees Chair Lawrence C. Eppley said today’s announcement marks a critical step toward finishing the work of the consensus process. “This step is in the best interest of the University and is consistent with the Board’s previously stated goal of concluding this year its consensus process regarding Chief Illiniwek. Among our objectives was recognizing the goal of having high integrity athletic programs and student athletes who have the opportunity to compete at the highest levels,” Eppley said.

“We made and met many friends through the consensus process. And while people differed on their opinions of the Chief, the overwhelming majority of those voices put their love for the University ahead of their opinion on the Chief,” Eppley said.

“The Chief Illiniwek tradition inspired and thrilled members of the University of Illinois community for 80 years,” Eppley said. “It was created, carried on, and enjoyed by people with great respect for tradition, and we appreciate their dedication and commitment. It will be important now to ensure the accurate recounting and safekeeping of the tradition as an integral part of the history of the University. We also have the responsibility to work together to capture and put to good use the goodwill created by the tradition and to maintain other great traditions like the *Three-In-One* for decades to come.”

The Chief Illiniwek tradition began in 1926 in conjunction with the Marching Illini, the nation’s premier marching band. Criticism of the tradition intensified in recent years, although the symbol and iconic halftime performance remained popular among alumni and the public. The Board of Trustees’ consensus process for resolving issues regarding Chief Illiniwek was underway when the NCAA Executive Committee established its policy in August 2005. During two rounds of appeals by the University to the NCAA over its policy, the NCAA rescinded its objection to the names “Illini” and “Fighting Illini” but retained Illinois on its non-compliant list because of the Chief Illiniwek name, logo and the performance. The University exhausted the NCAA appeals process last April and since then has been banned from hosting NCAA championship events on the Urbana campus.

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For more information, including a link to the NCAA letter, refer to the following website:

www.uillinois.edu/chief