Gold: Pan it or dig it?

Surprise decision on MU's new nickname caps debate

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Sensitive to those opposed to the Warriors nickname and unenthused by Golden Eagles, the Marquette University Board of Trustees on Wednesday moved in a new direction for the school's athletic teams.

Ladies and gentlemen . . . meet your Marquette Gold.

The surprise announcement was made by John F. Bergstrom, the chairman of the 38-member board of trustees, and university President Father Robert A. Wild, at a press conference at the Alumni Memorial Union.

Wild said the vote in favor of Gold was unanimous. The Gold will become official in July. "I'm very pleased that we've chosen this direction for Marquette athletics," Wild said. "With Marquette Gold, the board has captured, I truly believe, decades of tradition in one profound term that symbolizes the high standards always met by our student athletes and our coaches."

The decision, arrived at after a two-hour discussion, capped a yearlong debate both on campus and among Marquette alumni around the country. The board met last September and December on the often contentious topic before Wednesday's meeting at an undisclosed campus site. While many had expected that the school would not elect to bring the Warriors name back, the decision to scrap the Golden Eagles came as a surprise.

Wild said that surveys found that fans were unenthusiastic about the Golden Eagles nickname and found it boring, weak and too common.

Bergstrom and Wild said they knew some Marquette supporters would be unhappy with the decision not to reinstate the Warriors nickname. But both said the school had to adhere to the highest possible standards in recognizing and appreciating people of all walks of life.

Wild said he had pondered the notion of reinstating Warriors. "But as we worked through it, we became convinced that we live in a different era than when the Warriors name was selected in 1954," he said. "The perspective of time has shown us that our actions, intended or not, can
offend others. We must not knowingly act in a way that others will believe, based on their experience, to be an attack on their dignity as human beings. We cannot teach one principle about respect for human dignity in our classrooms, than fail to act by the same principle when making decisions.

Marquette coach Tom Crean said: "To me, it was very apparent there was going to be a change, and I think it will be a very significant part of Marquette because it stands for so many good things. Like anything else with change it takes time, but I'm behind any decision that is made by this school because I know the commitment that the powers that be have to making Marquette as successful as it can possibly be."

The Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council, a consortium of American-Indian tribes and bands in the region, had been opposed to the possibility of the school embracing Warriors again, saying that it was an affront to American-Indians. Ray DeBerry, the president of the council and chairman of the Red Cliff band of Lake Superior Chippewas, was unavailable for comment.

"I'm ecstatic and I'm appreciative that Marquette lived up to their ideals," said Darren J. Thompson, a member of the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewas and a junior in political science and criminology at Marquette. "Everybody at home is happy, too."

Reaction among the MU faithful on Web sites devoted to Marquette athletics was swift and largely negative. Some commented that the decision was a copout, and the board acted in a politically correct way. Others said the board was right to move in a new direction with a new identity.

"Our family has 9 MU grads and/or students and we are all in shock," wrote one person in a chatroom.

"I am proud to be a graduate of Marquette and I will wear my gold colors with pride forever," another wrote.

Wild said he didn't believe alumni would withhold donations to the university.

Wild said the new nickname arose from discussions back in 1993-'94 when the school dropped Warriors as the team nickname and embraced Golden Eagles, and in more recent discussions.

For the board, the new name is being promoted as a blend of the new and old athletic traditions at Marquette. Those traditions include the old Golden Avalanche nickname, the Golden Eagles and the Gold Rush, the name of the student section at the Bradley Center during men's basketball games.

Wild also unveiled a new monogram for the school, which he said would help visually identify Marquette athletics. The new symbol will be stitched on all athletic uniforms, merchandise and will appear on the floor of the Al McGuire Court at the Bradley Center and Al McGuire Center.

With the Gold, the school is gambling that the new nickname will be embraced by students and alumni. The timing is also important; Wild said the board knew it had to act because the school will be joining the Big East Conference beginning in July.

Wild made brief mention of the fact that two prominent schools - Syracuse and Stanford - are clearly identified with a color. The Stanford Cardinal embrace red, while Syracuse athletes are widely known as the Orange.
Wild also indicated the students would have a hand in selecting a mascot to represent the Gold.

*Journal Sentinel staff reporter Todd Rosiak contributed to this report.*

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