Case 13-5: The American Indians’ Battle with the Major Leagues

Moral Agent: Margaret Roundtree, Owner of the Oklahoma City Team

Question:
1. How will Margaret evaluate the concerns of the American Indian Movement and how will she respond to their need for a call to action.

Issue: Although baseball has seen some rough times, Peter Backus, commissioner of the Major League Baseball, wants to move past some of the darker sides of the past few years of baseball. These including strikes, decline in attendance, financial securities of teams, and development of a stable league. They have recently expanded the league by adding two expansion teams in Jacksonville and Oklahoma City. Oklahoma City, is awaiting approval of the nickname of the Warriors, with a mascot that is fierce looking, scowling image of an Indian warrior with a red cast. The American Indian Movement (AIM) has developed a campaign against teams that use teams that use Indian names and mascots in their franchise. More severe threats include pickets, press conferences and ads in newspapers. They have targeted the Oklahoma City team first because they are new and are a good target to see some change of names and mascots. Margaret and upper level management are having a meeting discussing the issue of how to respond to the AIM and the demeaning stereotypes and institutional racism. There decision could affect the team economically, the fans, AIM, and other teams with similar names.

SAD Analysis:
Situation
- AIM claims name/mascot creates demeaning stereotypes and institutional racism
- It is us to the owners to decide whether to change the name of the team
- Time and money has been invested in marketing and licensing agreements
- AIM plans to picket and run campaign against organizations with name/mascots

Analysis
- Issue of whether or not such symbols are degrading
- Issue of the fans and they support for the name
  - Polls were conducted before settling on the name support the use of the Warrior name
- Issue whether the names/mascots can be looked at in a positive point of view
- Issue of whether teams names are part of America’s culture
• Issues of whether Oklahoma changes the name, it will build confidence in the AIM to attack other teams and franchise and their names/mascots
• If any cooperation can be made between AIM and the Major League

Moral Theories:
A) Deontological
• Duty not to offend a group or individuals using institutional racism

B) Teleological
• Concern of the AIM to not use institutional racism
• Potentially harm (economically) the franchise
• If we react with Oklahoma, could there be more incentive to move to larger teams (Braves/Indians)
• May upset the majority of the fans in Oklahoma if the name is changed

C) Value
• Oklahoma could work with AIM and create a compromise that could keep the name but maybe change the mascot image.

Decision:
If I were in the shoes of Margaret, the team owner, I would be put in a difficult decision and question what should be done. I understand the concerns of the AIM and am willing to listen to their thoughts and viewpoints. Because Oklahoma is a new team and has not started the season, I would first try to reach a compromise with the AIM to see what options the team could keep and have to forfeit. I would not change the image much if possible. It sounds like they are upset about the actual image/mascot that the team has chosen. If no compromise could be made within a reasonable time, I would refuse to change the mascot and keep the team name. The team name and mascot was chosen by polls conducted throughout the city. Names cannot appeal to everyone and there are going to be some people upset. I would be too afraid to change the name completely or change the mascot too much because of the finances that have already been invested. I do not think that AIM could successfully organize a picket against the Majors and keep loyal and true fans from attending. Most fans agree that a name is a name and do not look at it as a way to downfall an organization or group. I would agree, “Team names are a part of American culture, they’re as much a part of some cities’ history as politics. There is a lot of fan support out there, and they are the ones we have to appeal to – both through our marketing and the stories in the media.” I will work to make my fans happy; they are the paying customers and I will market my team in their direction.