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# Editorial: Hail to the belted kingfisher? She'd be a fine mascot for the University of Illinois

By THE EDITORIAL BOARD  
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A proposed new mascot for University of Illinois, a belted kingfisher. (Spencer Hulsey)

We wonder if, 100 years from now, [the controversy over the mascot of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign](#) will still rage. But if no one in the 22nd century recalls the dispute, the credit may go to [a current student with a clever and winsome idea](#).

We all know Chief Illiniwek, the fictional Native American warrior who served as the school's symbol for decades. A student would don a costume and do a war dance at athletic contests. But the U. of I. got rid of the mascot in 2007 under pressure from the NCAA, which sought to eliminate offensive uses of Indian names and symbols.

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**That didn't end the controversy, though.** Some alumni and students bitterly resented this effort to stop insulting Native Americans, and this group has labored to keep the chief alive.

In 2018, the Honor the Chief Society organized a “Paint the Hall Chief” effort, encouraging fans to wear the old logo to home basketball games. At the conclusion of the “Three-in-One Song” at halftime of home contests, reported the Tribune’s Shannon Ryan, “fans bellow ‘Chieeeeeef.’ Many fold their arms in stereotypical Native American mimicry.” Native American organizations have responded with demonstrations and chants of “Down with the Chief.”

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#### Chief Illiniwek

Student Omar Cruz, 20, stands inside the State Farm Center as he portrays Chief Illiniwek during halftime against Minnesota on Sunday, Feb. 28, 2016. (Erin Hooley / Chicago Tribune)

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Efforts to find a suitable replacement, however, have come up short. Last year, students voting in a referendum decided that “Alma Otter” would not do as the

new symbol.

Spencer Hulsey, however, has a fresh idea. The senior physics major drew a belted kingfisher, whose feathers match the school's blue and orange color scheme, and persuaded the Illinois Student Government to submit it to a campuswide vote. The kingfisher carried the day with a 625-vote margin out of some 7,800 that were cast.

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Hulsey grew up seeing the bird on her family's farm in downstate Marion County. "It's native to Illinois," she told *The Daily Illini*. "It's true to the orange and blue — it is literally an orange and blue bird. It's completely untapped potential."

In the wild, this bird is known for divebombing rivers and lakes to snatch small aquatic creatures out of the water. Marvels Susan Zhou, speaker of the student senate "It's a pretty intimidating predatory bird. It hunts by beating its prey against a rock and swallowing it whole." That scenario might be enough to give nightmares to Bucky Badger or Goldy Gopher. And Hulsey's sketch would look fierce on a football helmet.

A bonus is that the birds that are blue and orange are exclusively female. (The male of kingfisher is a relatively drab blue and gray.) ) All the other Big Ten mascots are



either overtly male or of indeterminate gender. And Illinois would be the only university in the country with this mascot.



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A real belted kingfisher sits in a branch above Salt Creek in Oak Brook in 2011. (Chuck Berman / Chicago Tribune)

The referendum was nonbinding, so the next move will have to come from the university. Hulsey and other students deserve credit for offering a promising way to get beyond the acrimony of the past. We hope the belted kingfisher takes flight in Urbana-Champaign.

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