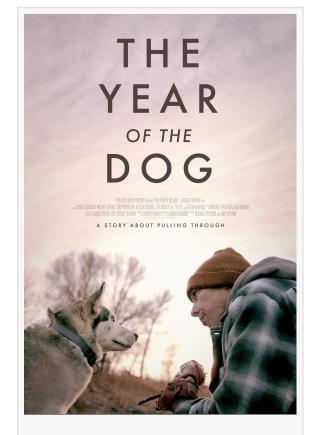


Is the Kansas City Chiefs Team Name Harmful? Indie Filmmaker and Lakota Actor Address Controversial Subject in New Film

LOS ANGELES , CA, USA , January 30, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As the Kansas City Chiefs prepare to play in Superbowl LVII on Sunday, February 12, Rob Grabow, writer, producer, co-director, and lead actor in the indie film, <u>The Year of the Dog</u>, which touches upon indigenous themes, asks audiences to consider the question, "Is the Kansas City Chiefs team name harmful?"

The Year of the Dog, which releases nationwide on February 24, 2023, is a story about two strays: Matt, an alcoholic struggling to maintain sobriety, and Yup'ik, a rescue dog with an unusual athletic gift. The film takes audiences on a heartwarming journey of forgiveness, finding purpose, making connections, and ultimately healing. Grabow never intended to use his first feature film to address controversial American professional sports team names, such as the Atlanta Braves and the Kansas City Chiefs, along with some of their offensive fan traditions, like the "tomahawk chop." However, on



day one, after filming an early scene opposite Michael Spears, a Lakota-Sioux actor whose credits include Dances with Wolves, Reservation Dogs, and 1923, Grabow noticed that Spears appeared upset and approached him.

Spears shared with Grabow that it was painful for him to do the scene because Grabow's character was wearing a Braves hat. Spears explained that "The use of Native American team names, themed mascots, degrading gestures, and cartoonish rituals are deeply harmful to the self-esteem and dignity of indigenous people." Since Dances with Wolves, when not filming, Spears travels the country advocating on indigenous issues and devoting his life to help support indigenous youth. Spears made it clear to Grabow that "Seeing the Braves name was humiliating."

Grabow was stunned and crestfallen. Having grown up in Alaska, including in rural native

villages, the Atlanta Braves, one of only two pro sports teams regularly available on television, was the first professional baseball team Grabow watched. He idolized them so much that for his first personal purchase, at nine years old, he spent his life savings on a Braves baseball hat. So, in his original script, Grabow included the Braves hat and team name in a few scenes as part of Matt's endearing backstory, unaware of the emotional hurt it would not only cause his cast member, but also an Indigenous community.

Grabow was quick to remedy the situation, immediately inviting Spears to help rewrite the scene and create new dialogue directly addressing the issue of the Braves hat. In doing so, the scene deepened in meaning and poignancy. "We're not Braves or Chiefs or Redskins. We're real people," Spears says in the new scene. "I'm not a goofy cartoon. We don't do the tomahawk chop.... And that makes a difference in how we feel about ourselves. That affects my self-esteem."

"Learning to have difficult conversations is essential, especially in a divided political climate," Grabow adds. "I'm proud of the way Michael and I faced this serious topic. I believe the scene now provides a useful road map for engaging in controversial subject matter with mutual respect and understanding."

The NFL's Washington Redskins officially rebranded as the Commanders; MLB's Cleveland Indians, as the franchise was known for over a century, are now the Guardians; hundreds of colleges and high schools across the country have revised or eliminated the use of derogatory and hurtful symbols. Recognizing the distress it caused in their community, a Utah high school team, once known as the Bountiful Braves, are now the Bountiful RedHawks. A Florida high school team, once known as the Chamberlain Chiefs, are now the Chamberlain Storm.

While the issue of offensive sports team names like the Atlanta Braves and Kansas City Chiefs is a minor subplot of the film, it leaves audiences asking, as it does a lifelong Braves fan like Grabow, "Why is it that this small handful of our professional sports teams still cling to names that harm the self-esteem of millions of Indigenous Americans?"

Production stills, cast and crew information, trailers, and information about release locations are available online at <u>www.theyearofthedogmovie.com</u>, Instagram, and Facebook.

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