

A Painful Truth about the Atlanta 'Braves' Team Name

A Lifelong 'Braves' Fan and a Lakota Actor Address the Controversial Subject in a New Film

BOZEMAN, MT, April 10, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- On Friday, April 7, 2023, the day after the Atlanta Braves home opener, the award-winning new film, [The Year of the Dog](#), releases digitally. The movie, which touches upon Indigenous themes, stars two well-known Indigenous actors alongside a lifelong Atlanta Braves fan, Rob Grabow. Grabow also wrote, produced, and co-directed the film which, in one poignant scene, asks audiences to honestly consider whether the Atlanta Braves team name is harmful to Indigenous communities.

The Year of the Dog, a story about two strays – Matt, an alcoholic struggling to maintain sobriety and Yup'ik, a rescue dog with an unusual athletic gift – takes viewers on a heartwarming journey of forgiveness, finding purpose, making connections, and ultimately healing. Grabow never intended to use his first feature film to address Atlanta's controversial team name and contentious fan traditions, like the "tomahawk chop." However, on day one, it became a priority.

After filming an early scene opposite Michael Spears, a Lakota actor whose credits include 1923, Reservation Dogs, and Dances with Wolves, Grabow noticed that Spears appeared upset and approached him. Spears shared with Grabow that it was painful for him to do the scene opposite Grabow's character who was wearing a Braves hat. Spears, who has traveled the country advocating on indigenous issues, explained his belief that "the use of Native American team names like the Braves are deeply harmful to the dignity of native people." Spears added that, "Seeing the Braves name was humiliating."

Grabow was stunned and crestfallen. As he grew up in Alaska, including in rural native villages, the Atlanta Braves, one of only two pro sports teams regularly available on television, were the first professional baseball team Grabow watched. He idolized them so much as a kid that for his first personal purchase, at nine years old, he spent his life savings on a Braves baseball hat. So, in the 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 might cause.

To address the situation, Grabow quickly made a choice to move a discussion about the Braves into the script. Grabow stayed up through the night to rework all mentions of the Braves and invited Spears to cowrite a scene for their two characters, directly addressing the issue of the Braves hat and team name. The scene made the final cut and Spears' character breaks it all

down: "We're not Braves or Redskins. We're real people. 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. That affects kids' self-esteem."

"What Michael said about self-esteem really hit home," Grabow says, "I'm a lifelong Atlanta Braves fan, but I could feel where Michael was coming from. His appeal is a basic one, to human dignity. I believe the scene now provides a subtle, useful road map for engaging in controversial subject matter, like this one, 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; and hundreds of colleges and high schools across the country have revised or eliminated the use of potentially hurtful names and 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. WWW

"The fact that high school teams are out in front of the Atlanta Braves is telling," Grabow says, "The issue is a minor subplot of the film, but it highlights a painful truth and prompts an honest question, 'Why is it that the Braves still cling to a name that may harm the self-esteem of millions of Indigenous Americans?'"

The Year of the Dog is available to rent or buy beginning April 7 on: Amazon, [Apple TV](#), iTunes, Google Play, Xfinity, DirecTV, Dish, and VUDU. More information available at: www.theyearofthedogmovie.com, Instagram, and Facebook.

Rob

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