

Manual drops its nickname as school transitions to new leadership

Kyle Neddenriep Indianapolis Star

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The old nickname "Redskins" will officially be retired at Manual High School after more than 90 years.

The Indiana High School Athletic Association approved a merger of the sports teams at Christel House Watanabe and Emmerich Manual, which currently occupy the same Southside building. The merger "allows the schools to increase sports offerings and provide many more opportunities for student athletes as the Manual program winds down" by the end of the 2022-23 school year.

The new name: The Christel House at Manual Eagles. The new colors: The eagle mascot and logo will incorporate the blue and gold of Christel House and the red and white of Manual. The old name, which first appeared in articles referencing Manual's sports teams in the early 1930s, will officially go by the wayside.



Emmerich Manual High School in Indianapolis. *Jennifer Dum/Chalkheat Indiana*

Christel House, a charter school that opened in 2002, assumed management of Manual in July of 2020 after the school was returned to Indianapolis Public Schools after a state takeover in 2012. Christel House executive director Sarah Weimer said it was clear through the innovation agreement with IPS that keeping some of the Manual tradition alive was important to alumni.

“We did some community outreach when we first took over and really it was to engage the alumni and the indigenous community about the mascot,” Weimer said. “After listening to the communication between the two groups and the perspective of the indigenous people, it was a prime opportunity to reinvent what Manual is. The name hadn’t really taken hold until the 1930s so there had already been one reinvention.”

Manual, which opened in 1895, is one of the state’s oldest schools, though nicknames of athletic teams were not commonplace until the late 1920s and early ‘30s. In newspaper articles, teams at Manual were frequently called the “red and white” until 1930, when nickname now being dropped became prevalent.

In recent years, from the professional to college to high school levels, several teams have changed their nicknames after facing pressure from critics, including Native Americans. The Washington Football Team, dropped its nickname last year and announced it would change its name by the 2022 season. At the high school level, Fort Wayne North Side changed from the the same nickname to the Legends in 2016 and Goshen to Redhawks in 2015.

Knox, an 830-student school in Starke County, is the only Indiana high school that still goes by the nickname after the change at Manual. Anderson, Lake Central, Milan, Mississinewa, Portage, South Bend St. Joseph, Twin Lakes and Union City are called the “Indians,” a designation that has also decreased in number at the national and local levels.

The “Eagles” nickname, along with the logo, mascot and school colors, came after a vote from the Christel House board of directors, along with students from both schools. Christel House athletic director Nolan Dowling said the school would offer football, soccer, volleyball, cross country, boys and girls basketball, wrestling, cheerleading and track and field for the upcoming school year. The IHSAA amended a bylaw at its executive committee meeting on June 25 to allow the merger.

“The important thing from our perspective is that when we took over the Manual campus that we didn’t create a disruption in the education of the existing Manual students,” Weimer said. “It is really a unique situation with two high schools operating as one.”

The innovation agreement allows current Manual students, who will be juniors and seniors for the upcoming school year, to graduate with a Manual diploma. Christel House, in addition to a K-12 school, offers an evening school for adults that will be expanded to a daytime option next year. There are also plans for an early learning center on campus.

“We’ll have infants through great-grandparents on campus,” Weimer said.

As the school year begins, there will likely be some reminders of the old nickname on campus. It was a similar situation last year at Roncalli as the school transitioned from “Rebels” to “Royals.”

“We haven’t really touched anything yet as far as that goes,” Dowling said. “We just finalized this process so we’ve had other priorities. But we’ll get to work soon on trying to refurbish everything.”

Call Star reporter Kyle Neddenriep at 317-444-6649.