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### **Indian mascot remains benched for Final Four**

By Jared Hopkins, USA TODAY

Chief Illiniwek, a student in Native American garb who performs a five-minute halftime show at Illinois home games, has not been at the NCAA tournament and will be absent from the Final Four.

Illinois has come under pressure from Native Americans to eliminate Illiniwek, and in 2002 Illinois professor Brian Jewett launched [www.retirethechief.org](http://www.retirethechief.org).

In January, the NCAA minority issues committee asked schools that use the American Indian as a nickname to conduct a six-month self-evaluation of their relationship with the American Indian. They are due May 1.

"There are an infinite number of choices for the sports culture, but the Native Americans only have one culture," Illinois professor Carol Spindel, author of the book *Dancing at Halftime: Sports and the Controversy over American Indian Mascots*, said Wednesday.

This month the Illinois Native American Bar Association sued the school, saying the chief violates the 2003 Illinois Civil Rights Act, the *Chicago Sun-Times* reported.

The Illini, who face Louisville in the semifinals Saturday, do not bring the chief on the road except for an annual contest against Missouri in St. Louis or selected other neutral-site games.

School officials say Illiniwek is not a mascot in a traditional sense because he is not comical and does not run down sidelines.

"He's considered a symbol at the university," Illinois spokesman Kent Brown said Wednesday.

The chief did perform at the NCAA tournament more than a decade ago, according to Illinois spokesman Tom Hardy.

The other three finalists' mascots are expected to attend, according to the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

Kyle Cline, who has served as Chief Illiniwek since 2004, declined comment Wednesday via e-mail.