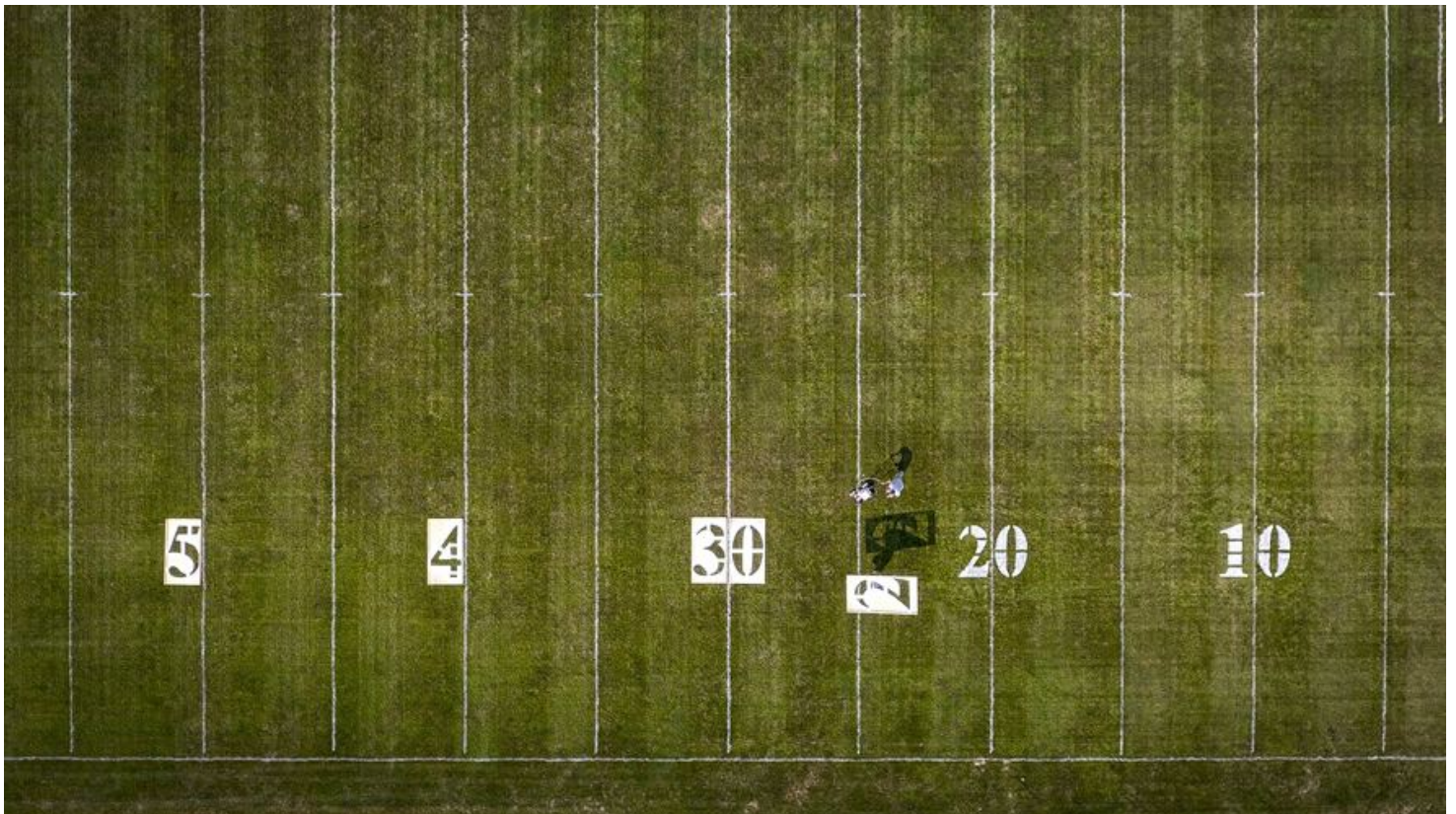


# Activists want to change offensive team name at a North Dakota high school

By Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff on 01.23.20

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An aerial photo of a high school football field, not located in North Dakota. Photo: Brandon Mowinkel/Unsplash.

Samantha Rayburn-Trubyk is a person with dwarfism. That's the appropriate way to describe people with medical conditions that prevent them from growing. Sometimes they also refer to themselves as "little people."

Rayburn-Trubyk wants to end the use of another hurtful and disrespectful term. That word is "midget." Rayburn-Trubyk is not alone in this fight. She's part of a community of advocates. These advocates fight for the rights and respect of people with disabilities. In recent years, they've successfully called on groups to stop using the word.

Rayburn-Trubyk's latest fight is in the southwest corner of North Dakota. That's where Dickinson High School is. The school still uses the nickname "Midgets." Rayburn-Trubyk drove all the way from Canada to encourage the school to change.

## Hurtful And Hateful

Rayburn-Trubyk told the Dickinson school board that the term is simply offensive. It is hurtful and hateful. There is simply no reason to keep it around.

"I want to make it clear, we're not here to come and force you to change. We're not trying to force anything upon you," Rayburn-Trubyk said at a meeting on December 9, 2019. "We just really want to give you our perspective and our point of view. You can make the decision on your own."

Rayburn-Trubyk wanted to explain the word's history to the community. It's a painful one. People with dwarfism used to be treated as "freaks." They were used as entertainment or exhibits in traveling circuses and shows.

She also asked members of the community to walk a day in her shoes. Even better, she wanted them to think about the word from a student's perspective. What if a person with dwarfism went to Davidson High School? What if they were bullied with the word, "midget?" Would they really expect their school to do anything about it? After all, the word is written across the gym floor.

### **Team Mascot**

It's not just the word that hurts, either. Davidson's mascot is an exaggerated drawing of a person with dwarfism. Rayburn-Trubyk has strong reactions to such images.

"That's me? That's supposed to be me, right? It's just so horribly offensive, just public mocking of someone with skeletal dysplasia, somebody with a disability," she said.

Nevertheless, during her visit, Rayburn-Trubyk found that people in the community seemed open to change. She hopes the name will be replaced. The school board has yet to take action. It wants more community discussion on the matter.