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Big Ten and Beyond: Chief Illiniwek

The Big Ten Conference runs through my veins. Both of my parents attended Penn State University, and I also grew up just twenty minutes from the University of Illinois campus. I know just about everything there is to know about the Big Ten Conference. The clock that I will be analyzing is a University of Illinois-Big Ten Conference clock, made in 1970 by Rodger Mason. It represents the Big Ten from 1970, which is interesting because of how much the conference has changed since. To help emphasize the representation of the University of the Illinois there are several qualities on the clock that are U of I specific. The claim of the clock is that it represents all the teams in the Big Ten Conference with a highlight on the University of Illinois, and the sport of football in particular.

To support the claim, the clock represents all ten members of the Big Ten Conference as they were in 1970. The Big Ten Conference has done some major changing since the manufacturing of this clock. The schools represented on the clock are Purdue University, the University of Wisconsin, the University of Minnesota, the University of Michigan, the University of Iowa, Northwestern University, Ohio State University, Michigan State University, Indiana University, and obviously, the University of Illinois. There is a banner in the top left portion of the clock that has a flag representing each of the ten colleges in the conference. Each school is also represented on the clock where the numbers would appear on a normal clock.

Instead of the numbers 1-12, there are heads of the mascot of their respective school. Along with each school being represented around the clock, there is a U of I logo at the “12” position on the clock, and a “Big Ten 1895” logo at the “6” position. Most of the ten mascot heads appear to have an aggressive expression or scowl, but for some reason the mascot representing the Indiana Hoosiers has a big smile on his face. Why is this? Why do all of the other mascots seem to be angry, or aggressive, but the Indiana Hoosier has a grin spreading across his face? Could it be because the Hoosiers were the conference champions in 1970? Or maybe it is because the Hoosier was never seen as an aggressive, dominating figure, but more as a normal, somewhat happy, person.

After having done some further research, I discovered that the Big Ten Conference was actually founded in 1895, with only seven schools (“School”). The clock says 1895 because that is when the conference first started, with seven schools, but didn’t actually get ten members until 1986. Once it finally grew to ten members the conference was incorporated as the “Big Ten Conference” in 1987. The Big Ten Conference is actually currently home to fourteen members when they added Penn State University in 1990, the University of Nebraska in 2011, the University of Maryland, and Rutgers University were added at the same time in 2014. The clock represents the original ten, and not the current fourteen. With there now being fourteen members, it is impossible to make a clock that is configured the same way, making the clock even more original and authentic.

To back the support of the claim, the image at the center of the clock stands out more than any other part of the entire artifact. All of the other school mascots revolve around a giant representation of a Native American or the “Chief.” The Native American is wearing orange and blue feathers on his head, and a loincloth that reads, “Fighting Illini.” He is there to promote the

warrants of the University of Illinois (dominance and prominence) on the clock, and to back the warrants, as I said earlier, the Native American (Chief Illinwek) is the dominant figure on the clock. The Chief is a member of the Illini Tribe that used to be located in the area that the U of I is located today. The Native American is hunched over with his legs bent in some sort of running position. He is holding a football in one hand and an axe in the other. The Chief, like many of the other mascots represented, has a very aggressive expression, seemingly to represent the aggression in the sport of football, or the passion the Illini play with in competition. Because of the aggressive aspects and the way the Native American is portrayed it could be seen as racist to some people. This clock was not made amongst the recent debate and ban of the Chief at sporting events. The Native American is portrayed just as they were thought of at the time it was created. I also think that the reason for the aggressive expression and violent body functions all has to do with the connection to football.

Along the outer portions of the clock are pictures of football players performing some sort of football act, such as catching and throwing the football. This clock not only represents the Big Ten Conference, but even more specifically, the football aspect of the conference. It is no secret that the Big Ten makes a lot of money off of football revenue. This is the main reason why they expanded from ten to fourteen. Not to mention that football can be a big portion of student life and culture, if you are into the athletics at your school. Whether or not your team is good, you have or will attend a football game. It is not by accident that the clock focuses on football more than any other sport that each of the other schools play.

This clock is a fascinating representation of the Big Ten and the University of Illinois at the time of creation. It definitely represents all of the Big Ten with a strong highlight of the University of Illinois. It is especially nostalgic me when you can immediately tell it is older

because of the lack of representation of the additional 4 teams. The clock's representation of the University of Illinois is evident with the big Native American in the middle, but also has smaller touches of the U of I in other places. This assignment has taught me to look deeper and harder at just about every object that I come across; I have begun to analyze everything I see. This clock is a great representation of the University of Illinois and the Big Ten Conference as a whole, or at least the original 10 members.

Works Cited

Mason, Rodgers. *1895 Big Ten Conference Clock*. Dallas: Decor Accessories, Inc. 1970.

"School Info Big Ten Conference Official Site." *School Info Big Ten Conference Official Site*.

Bigten.org. 1 July 2015. Web. 8 Sept. 2015.

P.S. I chose to make Rodgers Mason the author on account of him designing the clock. I named the clock "1895 Big Ten Conference Clock" because the 1895 logo is displayed and it represents the Big Ten Conference. I decided that the publisher was "Decor Accessories, Inc." because they are the company that made it, and it was made in 1970 in Dallas, Texas.