

Origins and Cultural Significance of Sports Team Names

By Jeroným Pazdziora,
professional sport
analyst and language
expert





Chicago Bulls

- strong meat packing tradition
- Matadors or Toreadors
- "Dad, thats a bunch of bull!"



Denver Nuggets

-
- originally the Denver Rockets
 - Gold Rush of the mid-1800s
 - to make a fortune finding nuggets of gold



Detroit Pistons

- originally in Fort Wayne, Ind.
- owner Frank Zoller owned a piston factory for engines
- moved to the Motor City in 1957, name stuck



Golden State Warriors

- Oakland
- many moves
- team that belongs to all of California



Houston Rockets

-
- originally San Diego Rockets
 - space industry was big there
 - relocated to Houston – name still fit



Indiana Pacers

-
- Indiana's history of harness racing pacers
 - pace car used during the Indianapolis 500





Los Angeles Clippers

- Buffalo Braves moved to San Diego
- name did not fit
- San Diego home to large sailing ships, coined “clippers”



Los Angeles Lakers

- makes no sense for LA
- used to be in Minneapolis
- Minnesota – Land of 10,000 Lakes



Milwaukee Bucks

- contest in 1968 for the name
- Bucks reflected the fish-and-game mentality



New Orleans Hornets/Pelicans

- originally Charlotte Hornets
- move to New Orleans
- hit with hurricanes
- “reflects our culture, our community and our resolve”
- resiliency and determination to come back



Philadelphia 76ers

- Syracuse Nationals
- signing of the Declaration of Independence which happened in the city of Philadelphia



New York Knicks

- Knickerbockers – short version Knicks
- a name given to Dutch settlers who came to the New World
- lot of the in New York



Others

- Phoenix Suns
- Seattle SuperSonics
- Oklahoma City Thunder





Carolina Hurricanes

- Hurricanes Bertha and Fran
- owner chose name prior to their debut



Columbus Blue Jackets

- blue coats worn by Union Soldiers during the Civil War
- Ohio had more soldiers in the Union Army (320 000) than any other state



Edmonton Oilers

- Alberta has the world's third-largest reserves



Florida Panthers

- Florida's state animal
- only < 100 panthers remain



St. Louis Blues

- after W.C. Handy's famous 1914 song
- no matter where you go in town there's singing
- spirit of St. Louis



Toronto Maple Leafs

- St. Pats
- 1927
- to honor Canada's soldiers who wore the Maple Leaf in WW1



Vancouver Canucks

- "Canuck" is slang for Canadian
- Johnny Canuck is a political cartoon character
- skating version of Johnny is Vancouver's secondary logo



Thank you for your attention!

- Sources:
- <https://www.nhl.com/news/nhl-team-nickname-origins-explained-283976168>
- <https://bleacherreport.com/articles/1523132-the-origin-stories-of-every-nba-teams-name>