From Bulldogs to Ragin’ Cajuns, how name reflects local heritage

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The University of Louisiana at Lafayette only landed on a moniker that represents the community and student body after a history of name changes.

The university opened up on Sept. 19, 1901 as Southwestern Louisiana Industrial Institute, according to ragincajuns.com, and changed from a secondary school to a college in 1920 after beginning to offer four-year courses. The college then changed its name (for the first time) to Southwestern Louisiana Institute.

At the time known as the Bulldogs, SLI equipped their campus for football with McNaspy Stadium in 1940, followed by the construction of Blackham Coliseum in 1946. SLI then became an accredited university after they began offering master’s degrees in 1957, leading to yet another name change in 1960, becoming into the University of Southwestern Louisiana.

The university’s name may have changed, but the athletic programs were still going by the Bulldogs. That is, until former Head Football Coach Russ Faulkinberry gave the university the name “Raging Cajuns” in the 1960s.

Leslie Saloom, associate director of trademark licensing at UL Lafayette, said the name “Ragin’ Cajuns” is a better representation of UL Lafayette than the former Bulldog moniker and the representation does not stop at the name.

“The best representation of our brand are the students, faculty and staff, and alumni who proudly wear the university’s colors whether they are on campus, across the country or traveling abroad,” Saloom said. “They are our best ambassadors.”

The new name brought about changes to the university’s athletic scene. In 1971, Cajun Field became the new home for Ragin’ Cajuns football when it replaced McNaspy Stadium and the Cajundome, a home for basketball, was introduced to Ragin’ Cajuns fans in 1985.

The Bulldogs were not put down forever, though, would make a comeback in the 1990s, after the Student and Government Association and University Program Council conducted a student survey, Saloom said. According to Saloom, the bulldog image won over a pelican in the vote.

“That’s when you’ll start seeing old Bulldog logos on jerseys that had the name...”
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"Ragin' Cajuns."

It was not until 1996 when the university finally registered the name "Ragin' Cajuns" and there were no more bulldogs and, according to Saloom, the name could then bring a representation that was unique to the Lafayette culture, according to Saloom.

According to UL Lafayette’s website, the university attempted to shed its combination of directional and regional name for over 16 years, and it finally happened in 1999 when USL officially became the name we know today: the University of Louisiana at Lafayette Ragin' Cajuns.

"It separates us from all the other institutions," Saleem said. "It's a good call back to the history of this area. It describes the culture here where we have passionate people. It's a good call back to the Acadians that came here."

According to Amy Daughters of Bleacher Report, there are 14 athletic programs in NCAA Division I athletics that use the name "Bulldogs."

Colin Landry, a junior civil engineering major at UL Lafayette, said he believes no one else has such a unique name.

"There's only one Ragin' Cajuns so it's cool that it's exclusive to us," Landry said. "It's something so unique to our region. It's such an identity for the people here, so I love it."