Opinion: LTUSD condones trashing tennis courts

By Kathryn Reed

Football is king. That's nothing new. It's just sad all the lies that go into making it a reality.

The latest lie is how Lake Tahoe Unified School District officials profess to care so much about the tennis courts at South Tahoe High School. Ever since those courts were rebuilt a few years ago it has been a nightmare to be able to play on them.

Superintendent Jim Tarwater claims he wants to keep the courts pristine. He doesn't want riffraff coming in and ruining the courts. That's why they are always locked, he has repeatedly said.

It cost about $350,000 to build what at the time were essentially six new courts. While the project wasn't originally part of the Measure G facilities bond, a line in the contractors' contract made it logical to repave the courts. The contract said if the workers could not park at STHS, they would be paid an additional 15 minutes at the start and end of their day to compensate for the time to get to the work site. This was going to add about $400,000 to the nearly $25 million project going on at that time.

The district decided it would be more prudent in terms of time and money to have the workers use the tennis courts as a staging area, lose access to them for a season and then have them rebuilt.

The use of these courts has been contentious and controversial since they were resurfaced.



South Tahoe High’s tennis courts are being used for housing for a multi-day football camp. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Tennis players are the first ones to want the courts to remain in good condition. But maybe it doesn’t matter since we aren’t allowed to play on them for more than 16 hours this summer.

What is galling is the duplicity of school district officials. Or maybe it shouldn’t be surprising if one looks at the sports the children of these decision-makers play.

Tarwater did not return a phone call, nor did STHS Athletic Director Tony Sunzeri nor school board President Barbara Bannar.

The courts were covered with tents last weekend. Boys attending a football camp were sleeping there. They were sleeping in the school. They were all over campus.

Several tents remained as a group of tennis players got to the courts Monday. The boys walked on the courts in their cleats. There are signs that say “Tennis Shoes Only”. It is these types of shoes that can ruin the surface of tennis courts. Apparently rules don’t apply to football players.

Chicks with Sticks, of which I’m a member, is a group of

friends paying Lake Tahoe Unified School District $300 to use the courts for one day a week for eight weeks. Members of this group are the only ones allowed to use the tennis courts at South Tahoe High School this summer, according to LTUSD.

Why the public can't use the courts for their intended purpose and football players can muck them up is beyond me.

It took the organizers of Chicks with Sticks more than 16 hours to secure a deal with LTUSD. Sixteen hours is about all the courts will be used – at least for tennis.

The fact that the school district clearly has no policy for how the courts get used, allowed a now retired secretary to make decisions above her pay grade, and gave the organizers the run around is a horrendous way to do business. Tennis could be big business in this town, and on the entire South Shore. One only has to look at what the nonprofit Zephyr Cove Tennis Club Foundation, which is in its second year, has done, to see what a well-run public facility looks like. (ZCTCF operates the six courts owned by Douglas County.)

It is inexcusable that the district says no to tennis at STHS except for eight days this summer, but yes to football players.

The courts are a mess. There is garbage flying around. Trash cans are outside the court, none inside. There is debris – like wood chips – that makes turning an ankle highly likely. Sand in the back of a court is dangerous. (Now I know why each player had to sign a liability form.) A bench is broken and lying in disrepair. A rolling ladder had to be moved so players wouldn't run into it.

It's incredibly sad to see my tax dollars being so misused. It's sad to see tennis courts be locked so people can't play on them. It's sad to see football players be allowed to use them to sleep on, and even more horrendous to hear the click-clack of their cleats on these fairly young courts.

The fact that these boys wouldn’t listen to anyone explain how walking onto the court while we were playing was bad etiquette shouldn’t have surprised us. They had already trashed the courts and were continuing to do so in their cleats. And apparently all of this is OK with LTUSD officials, because, well, football is king.