

Parents-players at odds with STHS soccer coach

By Kathryn Reed

South Tahoe High School girls' soccer coach was exonerated after the school district conducted an investigation, but many who filed the complaints were never interviewed.

The school district said it found nothing to keep Mark Salmon from returning to the sidelines.



Mark Salmon

It was a five-week investigation that recently culminated. The exact date was not disclosed, but LTUSD officials said the parents are still within the 30-day period in which they could appeal the decision to the superintendent. After that an appeal could be made to the school board.

Superintendent Jim Tarwater did not return repeated phone calls. Pat Hartnett, STHS athletic director, deferred comment to the district office.

Because this is a personnel issue the findings are not being released nor is the letter that was reportedly sent to the parents.

Lake Tahoe News this week met with several parents and players who don't want Salmon to return as the varsity coach. One of the nine at this meeting was talked to by the district; this

was a student-athlete. No one in this group had been notified the investigation was over, what the conclusions were, nor had they received the letter the district said was sent to them.

A group of parents, and possibly players, plans to attend the June 13 Lake Tahoe Unified School District board meeting to air their grievances in public and make the elected officials aware of their concerns. For now, their names are not being used, which is to protect the minors.

These girls said they felt bullied and are fearful of retaliation from Salmon. They said he was the ring leader in getting players to not like each other. Some of the girls who had aspirations of playing collegiate soccer don't even want to keep playing high school or club ball if Salmon is involved.

Salmon told *LTN* if the issue doesn't go away he is ready to file a slander lawsuit. One of the parents is ready to file his own lawsuit.

The investigation, Salmon said, proves he has done nothing wrong. He wants to move on.

The parents don't understand how it's over when they were not questioned.

Barbara Bannar, LTUSD board president, said she had heard about the allegations against Salmon out in the community, but the board has not discussed the situation.

"This is something we have to let Bob (Grant) deal with and then as a board make sure it's done. If the parents were not notified, that has to be rectified," Bannar told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The student-athletes have to sign a contract saying they will maintain a certain grade point average and won't drink or use any other drugs during the entire school year. Coaches don't

sign a conduct contract, however, they are not supposed to drink or do any drugs around the students. Plus, it's illegal to do so on campus.

The allegations are that those rules have not always been followed, and that the coach has supplied alcohol and told players to lie about it.

Salmon had disparaging, angry comments about who he believes are his accusers.

The high school parents and students accused Salmon and the school as a whole of allowing ineligible players to participate in games based on grades. They contend this goes on for athletes in other sports as well.

Bob Grant, who handles these types of complaints for LTUSD, acknowledged multiple complaints had been filed against Salmon. He could not discuss the details.

When asked if he had seen the animated gif Salmon sent in a group text to his players that says, "Shoot yourself in the head with a larger caliber bullet – cheers," Grant would not comment.

Salmon told *Lake Tahoe News* the image was taken out of context on a long thread of texts, and that it was meant as a joke that he should shoot himself in the head, not a player, and never literally.

Salmon said since that came to light his policy is to only communicate soccer related information to students via text.

Above that message was the comment from Salmon to his players that said, "Hey retards... Play sea battle on your own damn thread."

Salmon has been the varsity coach for the last two seasons, and was the JV coach two years before that. While he has not signed a contract to coach the 2017 season, the district is

assuming he will do so. Coaching contracts in LTUSD are usually on a year-to-year basis.

While it is preferred to have a teacher be a coach because of the familiarity with the students and being more of a presence, that often isn't the case at STHS.

Salmon also knows many of the high school players through the South Tahoe Futbol Club, which he has been part of for nearly a decade. This club sports program brings the annual Cufa soccer tournament to the South Shore.

Nick Arbelaez, head of coaching for the club organization, said no complaints have been filed against Salmon.

"It's been the reverse. We've had parents thanking us for Mark being their coach and for everything he has done," Arbelaez told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The NIAA, the governing body of high school athletics in Nevada and to which STHS belongs, doesn't get involved in this level of complaint. Bart Thompson, NIAA executive director, told *Lake Tahoe News* that sportsmanship and recruiting are the types of issues they tackle with coaches.