

CHP officer arrests Pop Warner coach after verbal spat

By Susan Wood

In an apparent show of testosterone, a confrontation at South Tahoe High School this week that led to an arrest of a Pop Warner coach by a California Highway Patrol officer has turned into a legal battle with opposing investigations.



Defensive coach Jim Durham was arrested and later released Tuesday evening after sharing a heated discussion about trespassing with CHP Officer Alton Randall, who removed Durham from the football field in front of many parents, players and other coaches.

Consequently, Durham and the Pop Warner league have retained an attorney, and the CHP South Lake Tahoe division will conduct an internal investigation of the incident.

According to the CHP, Randall was on duty that night as he responded to motorists parking in an illegal parking zone and walked through the fencing where the teams practice. Durham approached the officer and allegedly told him he was “not allowed on the field,” CHP Lt. Tim Malone explained of the state agency’s investigation.

The two men were terse in their exchange until the coach became “animated, aggravated and approached the officer in an aggressive manner,” Malone added.

“(Randall) told him to stop and not approach any further,” Malone told *Lake Tahoe News*. From there, the uniformed officer pulled out his Taser stun gun but “he did not deploy the

Taser.”

Durham was arrested on charges of obstructing, delaying and resisting an officer. He was released and not booked into custody. Malone would not say if Randall has a history of being in confrontations. He was not placed on any type of leave.

The case may end up with the El Dorado County District Attorney’s office, but Tahoe’s Assistant District Attorney Hans Uthe has not received it, he told *Lake Tahoe News* Friday.

No report was made by the South Lake Tahoe Police Department.

The highly charged incident stunned Lake Tahoe Unified School District Superintendent Jim Tarwater.

“I’ve never in all my years had that happen on school grounds,” Tarwater said Friday.

CHP has jurisdiction to enforce the traffic laws. It’s unclear how the traffic ended up on a football field.

“Going out on a field – that I don’t know about,” Tarwater said, characterizing the confrontation as “unconventional.”

The incident has become a serious matter for Pop Warner, which issues its own local, regional and national codes of conduct. The question of a possible wrongful arrest arose.

South Tahoe Pop Warner President Chuck Leonard declined Friday to speak to the legal matter and deferred all questions to their attorney Al Villalobos.

Villalobos insisted that people on the field recall a different version of the exchange between the two men and hopes to get to the bottom of the matter after the league completes its interviews with witnesses.

“Pop Warner is investigating the incident between Officer

Randall and coach Jim Durham, and (the youth athletic organization) is very concerned about allegations of inappropriate police conduct in front of 100 players, coaches and parents," he said.

He stopped short of saying whether the incident will lead to a suit against the state or the officer, but he didn't rule it out.

Villalobos declined to comment further while the matter is being investigated.