

Sports academy to be offered in S. Tahoe starting this fall

By Kathryn Reed

In a 4-0 decision, the Lake Tahoe Unified School District board voted to launch the South Lake Tahoe Mountain Sports Academy.

Board member Judy Cefalu was recused because her son, Chris Cefalu, is one of the owners of Tahoe Sports & Entertainment. TSE will bring the hockey and figure skating components to the academy.



Sierra-at-Tahoe will be the mountain where skiers and snowboarders will train.

While all the particulars have not been worked out, the plan is for the academy to be running at the start of the school year in the fall.

“When we first went to the city, education was a component of it,” Chris Cefalu told the board. His company took over operation of the South Lake Tahoe Ice Arena last summer with the idea of increasing opportunities on the ice.

He envisions a handful of people being involved the first year, growing to maybe 10 in year two, and possibly having enough youths to field a team in year three. These would be traveling teams. The hockey season runs August-January.

Amy Jackson, who has a background in competitive figure

skating, will be the counselor for the students. She works at Mount Tallac High.

“I do understand the mentality of competitive athletes. They do need flexibility from teachers and support staff,” Jackson told the board during the March 27 meeting.

Academic components would be structured to fit the schedule of the respective sports involved.

Board member Sue Novasel during the study session before the meeting and during comments before the vote was taken kept bringing up concerns about possible NIAA issues and wanting Heavenly Mountain Resort – where she skis – to be involved.

Employees from Heavenly Resort and Heavenly Foundation were in the audience Tuesday night. It was a packed room for the study session, with about two dozen people.

As for the high school sports issue, the academy is about training high caliber athletes. While some in the academy may ride for South Tahoe High, the academy is not about the high school ski team, plus there are no high school hockey teams in the NIAA.

Maddie Bowman, a South Tahoe High senior who took silver in the superpipe at this year’s Winter X Games and is second overall in the Dew Tour rankings, told the board, “I think this is a good idea.” She said an academy would help student-athletes be more successful.

Educators believe the academy could grow to include other sports and involve all grade levels.