

# Letter: LTUSD stood by and did nothing

To the community,

I want to thank all of the parents and students that supported our efforts to have Mark Salmon removed as the girls soccer coach from the South Tahoe High School program. This was very upsetting for all of us that attended, testified and provided or even attempted to provide information to the school district. It appears that the school district does not care about the best interests of the students, violating laws or even common decency.

I will in this letter provide to you, the people of Lake Tahoe, the facts as were provided to the school and let you make your decision. I will start with the least objectionable information provided and go to the most disturbing.

First, I would like to say that my family and I moved from Lake Tahoe due to the school's and especially the school board's lack of concern over all of these events. I had spent over 35 years in the legal community, representing families and minors in the system. I even had to represent a high school student that the school suspended for smelling of tobacco and nothing more.

My wife and I were supporters of the soccer program run by Mark Salmon. We attended all of the games, both home and away. After each away game where there was a sleep over the parents and team would go to dinner and after that we would usually congregate in coach Salmon's room. Alcohol was always consumed by the adults. We did not know this was strictly against school policy. We did not learn this until some time later when we had a meeting with Pat Harnett, the athletic director of the high school. The fact that drinking occurred was of

course denied by both Salmon and specifically the assistant coach Brian Hogan. Mark even received a bottle of alcohol and shot glasses from the team at the awards ceremony attended by Harnett.

The next concern was that it became apparent that there was a tremendous amount of bullying going on within the team and it was, what we as well as many other parents perceived as those who Mark played against each other to get in his good graces. The bullying became both verbal and physical and was addressed by the parents over the span of several years. In fact some of the girls quit the team due to this practice. One set of parents filed a complaint with the school district a year prior to our complaint about Mark bullying and being abusive toward their daughter and to the best of their knowledge it was never heard, nor were they ever consulted about it despite repeated requests. This parent also confronted both the school board and Superintendent Jim Tarwater requesting action. This parent also as will be addressed, told the school board that their child admitted to being one of several the girls that ate the controlled substances on the soccer team trip to the regional championships in Winnemucca, a fact that Coach Salmon and his staff tried to and did cover up.

After the bullying got so extreme, I notified the school district as well as Salmon. Our daughter was dreading going to school and was becoming physically ill due to this abuse. While on the teams internet site, she was playing a game with another soccer player, Mark sent her a GIF file saying, "Go shoot yourself in the head with a large caliber bullet, cheers."

We were appalled that with all of the issues being raised over bullying and improper use of the internet that this conduct would be accepted by Dr. Tarwater and the school board. Coach Salmon might have had an excuse for that one but how did he get around the message that was sent to others "F- you f- all of you Coach Mark." These were printed out and provided to the

school district as well as their investigator Bob Grant. There were also texts and information that was provided where Coach Salmon, in response to girls saying they wanted to quit his club team, that his response in writing was, "You will never play soccer in this town again." This was the tip of the iceberg.

After complaining to the school board in an open meeting about the bullying, his daughter posted a very long article about myself and our family. It accuses me of suing everyone and our daughter of doing drugs in large bold print. I immediately had evidence to show that not only was this not true but it was presented to the school board and Dr. Tarwater. That evening I received a telephone call from Bob Grant stating he spoke to the Salmons and they stood by what their daughter posted. When this was brought to the school board's attention they said we could not discuss it in an open board meeting because the information was about their employee, yet it's clearly OK for him and his family to post false information about his ex-player. This was not the first or last time he has made false representations about drug use by players who quit his team. Other parents have made this same complaint against Coach Salmon to the district.

After the regional games in Winnemucca I learned that four or five of the girls ate marijuana brownies on the bus ride and Mark was aware of this. He held a team meeting that night where the girls admitted to the team they made a mistake and the team was sworn to secrecy. The punishment under Nevada Interstate Athletic Association rules is a six-week suspension from team sports.

They were allowed to play the very next game. They did miss the first game but other than that no consequences. The fifth girl that ate the brownies suffered no consequences as she snitched off the other four. After I learned of this I went to meet with Justin Zunino, the assistant principal and assistant athletic director. He seemed appalled and told me he would

investigate it and get back to me. I waited about a month and never heard from him. It wasn't until our daughter was asked by another teammate to join her in filing a complaint against Salmon for bullying that I approached Harnett. We met for over an hour with myself, my wife and daughter. He said he had never heard of the allegations of the drug cover up or abuse.

I even suggested that the team be given a drug test, but this was declined.

After that we went to the school board and filed a formal complaint, knowing the cover up was in place. We met with Bob Grant the investigator. We were one of several parents and students that met with him. He never met with many of the complaining parents, even the one whose daughter admitted eating the marijuana brownies and had filed a previous complaint for bullying. He just flat out failed to do his job. He said he was informed by an adult that that student just wanted to get it behind her so he never spoke to her. Her parents never told Grant any such information and wanted to speak to him.

Many parents went to speak to him, signed in and never received a call or interview. We met with Dr. Tarwater and gave him the video clips, text messages and names of the girls that ate the brownies. He did absolutely nothing.

At the last of three school board meetings we attended, I volunteered to provide my daughter's test results, offered to pay for Salmon and his family as well as other soccer girls to be drug tested. They refused the offer. Wonder why? Do they know what the results would be? Maybe they don't care. My offer still stands. Under NIAA the team is subject to drug and alcohol testing as well as not to consume tobacco. At that board meeting, Coach Hogan said since I was a criminal attorney I twist the truth; it was not marijuana brownies it was edibles , marijuana gummies. Guess that makes it OK. The other coach told the board that the coaches made some mistakes

and could have handled things better; even this fell on deaf ears.

I know this is a long letter, but it's just a brief summary of the lack of concern on behalf of the district. So let's raise our glasses and toast the school board, Dr. Tarwater, Bob Grant, Coach Salmon and Hogan for the wonderful cover up and experience they provide in teaching the next generation how to act.

Well, one thing I do know is that this school board and district should be embarrassed and ashamed of the way they accept this conduct by one of their employees. They send a clear message, bullying, drugs and alcohol are all OK if you are a student athlete.

**Paul Palant, Hawaii**