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## Campolindo hazing incident lands students suspended, coach off team

By Jon Kingdon

When the Campolindo boys soccer team finished last season with a 20-4 record, it was anticipated that this was going to be another successful year for the Cougars. But that was before a Nov. 8 hazing incident directed at the five new players on the team, which led to the suspension of the soccer program for one month while the incident was being investigated, the firing of the head coach Miguel Camancho, and the expulsion or suspension from the team of nine of the players, seven of whom were expected to be starters this season.

John Nickerson, the superintendent of the Acalanes Union High School District, first heard of the incident from Campolindo's principal, John Walker, who called it "very serious."

"It was the new players to the varsity team that were hazed," Nickerson said. "They were all interviewed and it was a very thorough investigation with very clear findings of fact."

No one has been willing to go on the record as to what actually transpired with the hazing incident but the soccer team and their parents appeared before the AUHSD governing board on Dec. 11 and were given the opportunity to express their opinions and reactions to the punishment on the players.

Since there has not been any official statement as to what occurred, rumors have run rampant about the suspended players. One of those players spoke at the meeting about how difficult it has been for him since the suspension: "The impact has gone far beyond not only being able to play games. It has created a darkness that we cannot pull ourselves out of. Vicious and vulgar rumors have been spread. It's critical for all of you to understand that the awful things that have been said about us and about what happened are not true."

Keith Pearce, whose son is still on the team complained about "the injustice which includes letting the gossip of high school teenagers fill the void of communication and transparency about the incident and how it was being handled."

There were admissions of wrongdoing from the parents and the players, though the unanimous feeling from the group was that the punishment did not fit the crime and that "they're teenagers that made mistakes."

John Chambers, father of one of the hazed players, said, "Everybody agrees that it was wrong and inappropriate. There has to be some sort of limit on punishment. And that's where governance comes in. You're the governing board and from my perspective, this is your opportunity to provide governance."

Brian Ahern, a father of one of the suspended players, cited a comment by Walker regarding discipline from an article in the Campolindo school paper, La Puma, from last year: "We have great students here at Campo. And sometimes they make mistakes. Our jobs as educators is to help them work through those mistakes and insure that it doesn't happen again. And we've got to use a variety of tools for that."

Three of the players that were hazed all denied they were harmed in any way: "The truth is, these boys did not hurt anybody," one player said. "All they wanted to do was to welcome us to the team the way they had been welcomed."

Miguel Camancho, who was in his first year coaching at Campolindo and has not been accused of having any knowledge or involvement with the hazing of the players, was not at the board meeting but later spoke highly of the players: "They're all good kids that just wanted to get out on the field and play. I learned on the following Thursday (Nov. 14) that something happened (from) Principal Walker. The next thing I learned was that I was being let go on Nov. 25. He told me that they were going to move in a different direction with no other explanation than that."

According to AUHSD policy, "hazing" means committing an act against a student or coercing a student into committing an act that creates a substantial risk or harm to a person in order for the student to be initiated into or affiliated with a student organization or for any other purpose. Consequences are suspension with the possibility of expulsion. Nickerson noted the school district considers hazing activities of any type to be inconsistent with the educational goals of the school district and are prohibited at all times. "The players should have been informed of the policy," he said.

Though the parents and students were appealing for reinstatement of the players and the coach, Nickerson said there is not an appeal process for disciplinary actions like this, and while the governing board of the district can ask that certain things be done, they don't have the authority to overrule that disciplinary action.

Nickerson endorsed the students coming before the governing board: "I thought it was important and a good thing that they advocated for themselves."

Camancho has not talked with the players since he was released from his position. "I'm more worried about the boys," he said. "It's not more important for me to coach. It's more important for the players to get their season back."

After losing their first four games of the season without scoring a goal (one game was a forfeit), Campolindo won their first game on Dec. 16 against Deer Valley 7-0.

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