

Our View: Latest plays at UI Athletics like a spear to fans' hearts

Lee Rozen/Moscow-Pullman Daily News Editorial Board

The University of Idaho Vandal football team lost to the University of Southern California Trojans by 50 points Saturday.

Embarrassing? Not really. They came within seven points of beating the pre-game point spread.

What's humiliating - and we keep hearing this word from friends and alumni of the UI all over town - is the way the athletics department insists on special favors for its misbehaving players, and then tries to cover it up.

This isn't really about those players, one of whom keeps making illegal plays off the field but really good ones on the field.

It's about an entrenched athletic administration that seems to have difficulty accepting reality or teaching it to the players.

The reality is that without deep-pocketed football-loving alumni - like Nike's Phil Knight at Oregon - or a humongous TV contract - like the Pac-12 Network provides WSU - or both, the Vandals can't build shiny state-of-the-art facilities that would attract top tier football recruits to our small town.

Yet the UI insists on playing above its natural level and recruiting players who aren't necessarily students in hopes of eking out a dollar or a win at any cost, fans be damned.

That puts a lot of pressure on the coach, who, when reporters write about the team's struggles, cusses them out.

And when players are caught stealing from the VandalStore, the administration does everything in its power to cover it up, until this newspaper gets the police reports for this incident - and others - to compare how football players and other students are treated when caught.

We found students are prosecuted; football players aren't, despite unbelievable protestations by UI President Chuck Staben.

The UI assures you the players have been disciplined, but nothing more. You are just supposed to believe.

We wanted to tell you how that decision was reached, and asked the university for about 10 days of email on the subject sent by two bookstore managers, the sports information director, the coach and Athletic Director Rob Spear.

The UI's helpful reply, stripped of legalese: Pay us more than \$1,000 up front so we can pay \$60 an hour for an IT technician to spend 20 hours finding those emails. (We think that's absurd pay for an absurdly long search.) Then we'll cut out anything we can justify, charge you for doing that, and then give you the emails.

Later, they actually read Idaho law and decided they could only justify \$700 up front.

Hillary Clinton would be proud.

UI friends and alumni sure aren't.