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Stadium Name Game Pops Up in Sumner

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Editorial

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It's a lamentable sign of the times that the Sumner School District is even exploring the idea of selling naming rights to its venerable Spartan Stadium. But it's understandable, given the increasingly tight budgets many school districts face.

Sumner school officials had to dip into the district's \$6 million savings account for \$852,000 in order to balance next year's budget without cutting programs or staff. So selling naming rights to the stadium – something that's been done at a few high schools in other parts of the country – could be a creative way to raise upwards of \$500,000 over 20 years.

School officials caution that the income might end up being substantially less than that - perhaps only \$25,000 over five years - and that no decisions have been made yet on how the money would be spent. Depending on how much the naming deal brings in, funds might go toward avoiding "pay-for-play" athletic fees such as those charged in the Federal Way and Bethel districts. Other potential uses include stadium maintenance and upkeep, classroom costs or a combination of any of those purposes.

Spartan supporters might cringe at the prospect of renaming the 50-year-old stadium in downtown Sumner. But the name has to be changed whether the rights are sold or not. When the district's new high school opens in Bonney Lake in 2005, its teams will share the stadium with the Sumner High School Spartans. It wouldn't be fair for one school to seeming-ly have the home field advantage.

Needless to say, if the district moves forward on selling naming rights to the stadium, it should reject sponsors whose products are associated with activities youth shouldn't indulge in - such as drinking, smoking and gambling.

The ideal solution to the naming rights issue would be for the stadium to be named for someone in the community - past or present - who has made a difference: a historical figure, a celebrated alum or civic leader. Naming the stadium after such a luminary would be more meaningful to a community so proud of its roots and character. But that would require a donor or donors to purchase the naming rights in order to honor such a person.

If that option doesn't materialize, the school ultimately would have to decide whether the community would accept a stadium name like, say, "Wal-Mart Field."