

Assault charge against Rooney withdrawn

AFP, Manchester

A student who said he'd been assaulted by England striker Wayne Rooney has withdrawn his claims, police said here Wednesday.

Police launched an investigation into allegations that the Manchester United forward assaulted Patrick Hanrahan, 22, in the early hours of March 22 after the student taunted him in Manchester's Tiger Tiger nightclub.

Hanrahan made a formal complaint against Rooney, after telling his story in The Sun tabloid, Britain's biggest-selling daily newspaper, 16 hours after the alleged incident.

But Greater Manchester Police said Hanrahan had withdrawn his allegation and they would not be pursuing the matter.

A force spokeswoman said: "We were informed that the complainant did not want to pursue the allegation."

"We took a retraction statement from him and officers will not be pursuing the matter any further."

Rooney, 19, who moved from Everton to United in a pre-season move worth some 27 million pounds, was due to play for England later Wednesday in their World Cup qualifier against Azerbaijan at Newcastle's St James' Park.



PHOTO: AFP

WHEN THINGS GOT OUT OF HAND: A FIFA official and an unidentified team staff tries to restrain North Korean captain Ri Myong Sam (R) who goes after the referee after the sending off of Nam Song Chol during the World Cup qualifier against Iran at the Kim Il-Sung stadium in Pyongyang yesterday.

Iran prevail in DPRK

Outrage in Pyongyang

AFP, Pyongyang

Iran overpowered North Korea 2-0 in Pyongyang on Wednesday in a spiteful Asian World Cup qualifying match in which the home team and crowd of 70,000 at Kim Il-Sung stadium reacted furiously to their loss.

A first-half goal credited to Mehdi Mahdavia but which appeared to be a deflection off some clumsy North Korean defence gave Iran early breathing space in a very tight start to the game.

In the second half, Javad Neekonom capitalised on some brilliant lead-up work by Ali Karimi and Vahid Hashaemi to score from close range in the 79th minute.

The North Koreans, frustrated throughout the game by what they saw as decisions going against them, reacted angrily to not getting a hand-

ball verdict in the penalty box in the dying minutes. They converged en masse on referee Mohammed Kousa.

The match was held up for more than five minutes as Kousa retreated from the angry pack of North Korean players and bottles from the crowd were thrown onto the athletics track surrounding the pitch.

Match officials were forced onto the pitch to help Kousa, who finally restored order and handed a red card to North Korean defender Nam Song-Chol.

After the final siren, Kousa and the two other referees were left standing on the pitch for more than 20 minutes as more bottles, some chairs and other objects were thrown from the crowd.

Police lined the athletics track as tens of thousands of fans remained in the stands and booed in an extremely tense stand-off. It ended when the referees finally ran off the pitch as more bottles were thrown in their

direction.

Objects were also thrown at the Iranian team, who were forced to stay on the field for about 10 minutes and were then prevented from leaving the stadium immediately after the match by a mob outside.

"My players tried to go to the bus (to leave the stadium) but it was not possible. It was a very dangerous situation," Ivankovic told AFP.

He praised his team for their courage and concentration in playing out the game.

"I am very satisfied with my team because they showed in a really warm situation, they can do everything," he said.

"They showed big courage. They showed they are an excellent team because in this situation it is not easy to win."

Iran have now reached the half-way mark of the qualifying round on seven points. They are in prime position for a World Cup finals berth after a 2-1 home win against Japan

last week and a goalless away draw with Bahrain in February.

North Korea languish at the bottom of Group B with no points after three consecutive losses.

The top two teams in Group B gain direct entry into the World Cup finals in Germany next year.

The third-place finishers in the two Asian groups will play off against the fourth-placed team in the North and Central American and Caribbean Zone.

Iran went into the game without inspirational captain Ali Daei, who travelled with the team but did not play after injuring his hamstring in the Japan match.

However, Iran have a depth in attack that is the envy of the rest of Asia, with 2004 Asian Player of the Year Ali Karimi, Neekonom and SV Hamburg's Mahdavia leading the charge on Wednesday.



Did U Know?

Sourav Ganguly, in the three-Test series, recorded the lowest ever batting average of his career - 9.60 (48 runs in five innings).

Pakistan tune up well for ODIs

AFP, Hyderabad

Pakistan warmed up for their upcoming one-day series against India with a comfortable eight-wicket win in a warm-up game here on Wednesday.

Opener Salman Butt and Shoaib Malik produced fluent knocks against an India A side as Pakistan, who squared a preceding three-Test series 1-1, reached their target of 190 with four overs to spare.

Left-handed Butt was cautious during his 124-ball 70, which came with five fours, while Malik slammed a quickfire 81 not out off 78 balls with eight boundaries including four sixes.

Stand-in skipper Abdul Razzaq was not out on one.

Earlier, Pakistan restricted India A to 189-7 in their allotted 45 overs.

Suresh Raina, who plays for Uttar Pradesh state in domestic cricket, top-scored with 55 off 65 balls with five fours while Sritharan Sriram chipped in with 38 for the second-string Indian side.

Pakistan, who rested skipper Inzamam-ul-Haq, vice-captain Younis Khan, frontline batsman Yousuf Youhana, all-rounder Shahid Afridi and pace spearhead Mohammad Sami, used seven bowlers in the match.

Navedul Hasan was the pick of the attack as he struck two early blows. The seamer bowled Shikhar Dhawan for eight and then removed the other opener Mahender Dhoni for three to finish with figures of 2-42.

BRIEF SCORES

INDIA A: 189-7 in 45 overs (Raina 55, Sriram 38, Naved 2-42)

PAKISTAN: 190-2 in 41 overs (Malik 81 not out, Butt 70)

Depleted WI face big challenge against SA

AFP, Georgetown

A depleted West Indies will be looking to prove their detractors wrong in the opening Test of four against South Africa that begins here on Thursday.

Long-standing left-handed batsman Shivnarine Chanderpaul walks out on home soil at Bourda Oval leading a West Indies side that has been ravaged by the fallout from the sponsorship row between the West Indies Players' Association and current and previous team sponsors in recent weeks.

Several times in his distinguished career Chanderpaul has shown immense fighting qualities with the bat that will not be out of place now, and should not be lost on a side in which there is no Brian Lara, Ramnaresh Sarwan, Chris Gayle, Dwayne Bravo, and to a lesser extent Fidel Edwards.

In an era in which West Indies find themselves languishing at the bottom of the ICC Test Championship table, the loss of Lara, Sarwan, Gayle, Dwayne Bravo and Edwards can be compared to the sort of severe damage that any of the hurricanes can snake through the Caribbean annually would normally leave in their wake.

In the last year, all but Lara signed personal sponsorship contracts that the WICB believes is in direct conflict with its team sponsorship agreement.

The WICB, acting on legal advice, indicated that Lara's contract was not in breach of the agreement, and offered the master batsman a place in the side.

Lara offered a non-committal response in which he said he did not want to offend either the board or his teammates by agreeing to play or not to play, and in the end, the WICB chose to leave him out of the squad.

West Indies' Australia-born coach Bennett King believes Chanderpaul's side can overcome the mental stress that they have had to deal with over the last few weeks and offer a stiff

challenge to the South Africans.

"Any Test series against any country is difficult and I think this will be a lot closer than people are thinking, and I am expecting this side to give a good account of itself," he said.

The Test affords several borderline players, as well as three newcomers, an opportunity to get their names in the headlines and King hopes they will seize it with some passion and diligence.

Among the borderline players given another chance to establish themselves are opener Devon Smith, fellow batsman Daren Ganga, all-rounder Ryan Hinds, along with fast bowlers Daren Powell and Corey Collimore.

A solid performance from the uncapped triumvirate of batsmen Narsingh Deonarine and Donovan Pagon, as well as fast bowler Dwight Washington, could also see them gaining more regular appearances.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Courtney Browne, who has been named vice-captain, and fast bowler Reon King have been recalled after a long period of absence from Test cricket.

This leaves Chanderpaul, opening batsman Wavell Hinds, and left-arm fast bowler Pedro Collins with all the work to bring stability to the side.

South Africa however, firmly believe they can continue to dominate West Indies, despite the cracks in their own arsenal. In the last year, the South Africans have plummeted from the No. 2 position on the Test table.

The visitors have won 10 of the 13 Tests they have contested against West Indies though, including a 2-1 series triumph, under Shaun Pollock, on their previous trip four years ago.

South Africa's hopes for some shock treatment for Chanderpaul's fledgling side hit a snag with the news of the delayed departure of Pollock. The veteran fast bowler will only arrive in the Caribbean when he has fully recovered from the chronic tendonitis in his left ankle and will miss the first Test.

TEAMS

WEST INDIES (from): Shivnarine

Chanderpaul (captain), Courtney Browne (vice-captain), Pedro Collins, Corey Collimore, Narsingh Deonarine, Daren Ganga, Ryan Hinds, Wavell Hinds, Reon King, Donovan Pagon, Daren Powell, Devon Smith, Dwight Washington.

SOUTH AFRICA (from): Graeme Smith (captain), Nicky Boje (vice-captain), Mark Boucher, AB de Villiers, Boeta Dippenaar, Herschelle Gibbs, Andrew Hall, Jacques Kallis, Charl Langeveldt, Andre Nel, Makhaya Ntini, Ashwell Prince, Jacques Rudolph, Monde Zondeki.

Umpires: David Shepherd (England) and Aleem Dar (Pakistan).

Shahadat, Shahriar

FROM PAGE 13

The preliminary list has six pacers and four left-arm spinners and just one all-rounder in veteran Khaled Mahmud, who is likely to be considered for only the one-day side despite a superb run of form in the domestic first class competition for Dhaka.

"We have packed the preliminary side with pace bowlers considering the English conditions which traditionally assist seamers," said Faruque.

Bangladesh will play two Tests in their first ever series in England and then take part in a triangular one-day tournament with Australia and the hosts.

The preliminary camp starts on April 4 and the players have been asked to report to coach Dav Whatmore at the Army Stadium at 9am on that day.

PRELIMINARY SQUAD

Habibul Bashar, Khaled Mashud, Khaled Mahmud, Mohammad Ashraf, Javed Omar, Rajin Saleh, Nafees Iqbal, Aftab Ahmed, Tushar Imran, Shahriar Nafees Ahmed, Mohammad Rafique, Manzarul Islam Rana, Enamul Haque, Mashrafe Bin Mortuza, Tapash Baisya, Nazmul Hossain, Anwar Hossain Munir, Talha Jubair, Shahadat Hossain Rajib and Abdur Razzak Raj.

Korea, Japan back on track

REUTERS, Seoul/Saitama

South Korea endured a nervy finish to see off Uzbekistan 2-1 in their 2006 World Cup qualifier Group A game in Seoul on Wednesday.

Arch foes Japan meanwhile, overcame Bahrain 1-0 in a Group B clash thanks to a Mohamed Ahmed own goal to get their World Cup qualifying campaign back on track.

Second-half goals from Lee Young-pyo and Lee Dong-gook looked to have put Korea in control but a strike from Alexander Geynrikh with 11 minutes to go had the 62,000 crowd praying for the final whistle.

"We were unlucky in the first half not to score, but as long as you don't have a goal it's a bit scary," said South Korea coach Jo Bonfrere.

The result put Korea back on top of the Asian zone Group A table although Saudi Arabia can reclaim that spot with victory against Kuwait later on Wednesday.

At Saitama, Japan needed maximum points after last Friday's 2-1 setback in Iran but they were struggling to break down Bahrain's stubborn resistance until Ahmed's clumsy error in the 72nd minute.

Japan moved second in Group B on six points from three games in the last round of Asian qualifying for next year's World Cup.

Iran have seven points after beating North Korea 2-0 in Pyongyang earlier in the day. Bahrain have four points with North Korea having lost their three games.

The top two teams from each of Asia's two groups of four advance automatically to next year's World Cup in Germany. The two third-placed Asian teams face each other for the right to contest a two-leg playoff with a CONCACAF zone team and earn a possible fifth World Cup spot for Asia.



Rui Costa and family have close shave

AFP, Milan

AC Milan midfielder Manuel Rui Costa has expressed his relief after he and his family escaped unhurt from an emergency landing made by his private jet at the city's Malpensa airport on Tuesday.

Firefighters sprayed foam on the runway as the aircraft skidded onto the tarmac after its undercarriage failed to deploy. The eight passengers on board were unhurt.

On board the flight, which was returning from the Egyptian seaside resort Sharm El Sheikh, were Rui Costa, his wife and two children, his mother and father, a friend and the babysitter.

The incident forced the closure of Italy's biggest airport for around an hour.

Rosel dazzles

FROM PAGE 12

BARISAL-KHULNA

Left-arm spinner Nadif Chowdhury claimed four wickets and left-arm paceman Anisur Rahman picked up three as Khulna were bundled out for 226 resuming the day on 103-4.

With a huge 158-run first innings lead, Barisal thrived on two half centuries by Raqibul Hasan and Proshenjit Bose to post 210-4 when balls were drawn.

One-down Raqibul hammered 88 with the help of 13 fours and two sixes while Proshenjit, who hit 93 in the first innings, was not out on 52.

CORES IN BRIEF

RAJSHAHI-CHITTAGONG

CHITTAGONG: First innings 206 and second innings 209 all out in 61.5 overs (Masum 95, Rabbi 21, Dhiman 41; Shuvo 5-75, Farhad 3-26).

RAJSHAHI: First innings 180 and second innings 239 for 5 in 61 overs (Zahirul 12, Farhad 12, Nayeem 60 not out, Hasanuzzaman 107, extras 39, Alamgir 2-35).

Result: Rajshahi won by five wickets.

DHAKA-SYLHET

SYLHET: First innings 313 all out in 139.4 overs (Golam Rahman 116, Moniruzzaman 11, Parvez 35, Kapali 54, Mabud 32, Rezaul 26, extras 15; Talha 2-38, Mahmud 3-63, Ashrafu 4-66).

DHAKA: First innings 2 for no loss in 2.4 overs (Rashedul 1 not out, Anwar 1 not out).

KHULNA-BARISAL

BARISAL: First innings 384 and second innings 210 for 4 in 40 overs (Hannan 17, Raqibul 88, Shahin 29, Proshenjit 52 not out, extras 16; Ashrafu 2-25).

KHULNA: First innings 226 all out in 72.2 overs (Sadat 19, Shaiful 24, Tushar 27, Rana 19, Jamaluddin 30, Sahagir 47, Russel 21, Rzzak 20, extras 19; Anisur 3-48, Nadif 4-39, Arman 3-46).

Dev stands

FROM PAGE 12

nent -- it happened to Sunil Gavaskar, to me and Bishen Bedi.

"It happens to every cricketer and we have to understand we are very emotional people but it's not end of the world.

"People will become all right in a couple of days and make a decision for the country."

Mind your shins!

REUTERS, Montevideo

Uruguay have warned Brazil striker Ronaldo to wear lots of shin pads when he faces them in Wednesday's World Cup qualifier.

Coach Jorge Fossati said that he would not be lured into a false sense of security by Ronaldo's recent drop in form.

"None of us are daft enough to think that he's going through a bad patch and therefore we don't have to be careful with him," Fossati was reported as saying by Uruguayan media.

"If he plays, then he should wear lots of shin pads because its going to be tough for him."

Uruguay captain Paolo Montero, who has played for Juventus for more than a decade, is regarded as one of the world's toughest defenders and holds the Serie A record for red cards.

His partner at the centre of the defence, Brazil-based Diego Lugano, also has a reputation for tough-tackling.

Uruguay, who have never lost at home to Brazil in a competitive match, are fifth in the 10-nation South American qualifying group with 15 points from 12 games. Brazil are

second with 23 points.

Ronaldo, who is going through one of the most barren patches of his career, says he accepts the pressure and that scoring goals is the only way to silence his critics.

"The problems will be over when the ball starts going into the net," he told Brazilian media in Montevideo.

"It's not up to me to agree or disagree with the critics," he added. "I do my own self-criticism, when I put my head on the pillow at night and think about what I could have done differently."

His international form has also suffered and he played poorly in Sunday's 1-0 World Cup win over Peru, despite laying on the winning goal for Kaka.

"The Brazilians are demanding and have become used to winning titles," Ronaldo said. "I don't think that's going to change. Football is one of the few things that can still bring happiness to the Brazilians. I accept the pressure."

"I didn't get where I am today by chance," he added. "Nobody gave me anything. I have my merits."

Ronaldo will be playing his first match at Montevideo's historic Centenario stadium, venue of the first World Cup final in 1930.

Johansson for Beckenbauer

AFP, Munich

UEFA president Lennart Johansson has backed West Germany's 1974 World Cup victor Franz Beckenbauer to succeed him when he steps down in 2006.

FIFA president Sepp Blatter has already tipped Beckenbauer for the post and Swede Johansson gave his seal of approval to 'the Kaiser' on Wednesday.

"Why shouldn't he replace me?," asked Johansson. "Franz was an excellent player and manager."

"He was DFB (The German Football Federation) vice-president and is currently Bayern president and head of the 2006 World Cup organising committee."

Beckenbauer, 59, has thrown his hat into the ring for the UEFA presidency with France's 1984 European championship hero, Michel Platini, his main rival.

"It would be a shame if he (Beckenbauer) decided to run in the same year I am standing," said Platini to magazine SportBild. "He could have put himself forward for the post ten years ago."



PHOTO: AFP

KING OF FOOTBALL MEETS PRESIDENT OF SAMBA LAND! Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva (R) listens to Argentine legend Diego Maradona (L) next to the Brazilian Foreign Affairs Minister Celso Amorim during a break in the heads of state (Venezuela, Colombia, Brazil, Spain) quadripartite summit in Puerto Ordaz, 550 km from Caracas, Venezuela on March 29. Maradona is in Venezuela to attend the opening of the Under-17 South American soccer championship in Maracaibo.

Ponting expects tougher Ashes

AFP, Sydney

Australia Test captain Ricky Ponting said Wednesday he hoped the upcoming Ashes series would be the closest in decades after recent clashes with England failed to meet expectations.

Arriving back in Australia after crushing New Zealand in both the one-day and Test series, Ponting said a resurgent England would ensure a close Ashes contest this northern summer.

"We've said that about the Ashes before and it hasn't been," Ponting told reporters. "But I think this England side have a different feel to them."

"If you watch they way they play and how they've gone about their

cricket, they have a bit of a winning habit and winning culture which they haven't had for a while."

England have not won the Ashes since 1987 and are ranked at number two in the latest International Cricket Council Test rankings, behind runaway leaders Australia.

Ponting said his team's ranking reflected its consistent form over an extended period.

The Australian captain refused to enter the debate on whether Test pace discard Brett Lee should defy Australian selectors by accepting an offer to play English county cricket in a bid to sharpen his fitness and claim an Ashes spot.

"It's a decision that has to be made by the individual and what they think is best for their game," Ponting said.

Lee's manager Neil Maxwell appeared to rule out a county cricket

stint, saying the paceman was already in good physical shape, despite his lack of cricket recently.

"It's unlikely at this stage," Maxwell told reporters. "He's got pretty good fitness levels and (Australia) have got a training camp in May, so he'll maintain fitness."

Bandarban cricket

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Bandarban Brothers Union defeated Ruma Upazila by seven wickets in the Bandarban DSA Cup Cricket League at the local Stadium yesterday.

Having shot out Ruma Upazila for 67 runs, Brothers stormed to the target inside just ten overs.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Mexican entree

5 Prunes

9 Snoop

12 "Bonanza"

13 Part of the foot

14 "— was saying, ..."

15 Georgia school

17 Pooch

18 Contact, for one

19 Enjoyment

21 Fluctuate

24 Chime

25 Egress

26 Bee

30 The whole shooting match

31 Basin

32 "To Wong ..."

33 Tension relief

35 Frizzy do

36 "— for All Seasons"

37 Moolah

38 Jeans

40 Poker holding

42 Altar affirmative

43 New Jersey school

48 Actress

49 Host

50 Vacillate

51 Meadow

52 Paradise

53 Went like 90

DOWN

1 High-lander's topper

2 Big bother

3 Daytona entry

4 Brunch offering

5 "The — King"

6 Burden

7 Home-office eopt.

8 Money of Israel

9 Massa-chussets

22 Wheel-base terminus

23 Pennsylvania school

24 Ernie's buddy

26 Former ugly duckling

27 Place for 11-Down

28 Asta's mistress

29 Suitable

31 Instance

34 Charles collar

35 Colum

37 Paper Mate rival

38 Pickle type

39 Falco of "The Sopranos"

40 Language

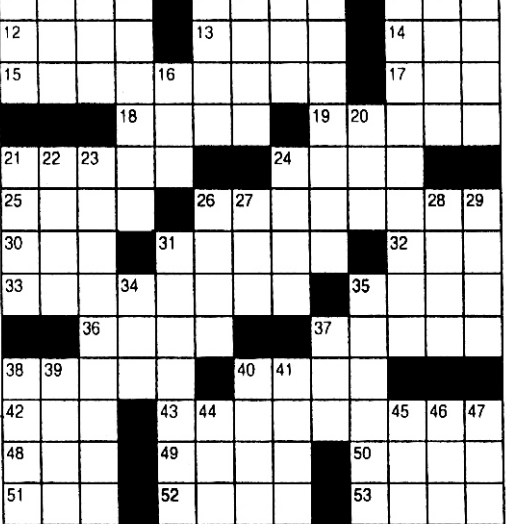
41 Unsigned (Abbr.)

44 Roulette, bet

45 Snake eyes

46 Skull tool

47 Comedian Louis



CRYPTOQUIP

T Q Q B U S C R T R S K O

U S Q V O T A L E Y L K Q Y X V V S C R

I T R S H A X B O E I L Q L L C

T Q T H X H L - T O O O X Q Q

Yesterday's Cryptquip: I GUESS THE WORLD'S SECOND-BEST WRITING IMPLEMENT COULD BE CALLED THE PEN ULTIMATE.

Today's Cryptquip Clue: V equals P

The Cryptquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.