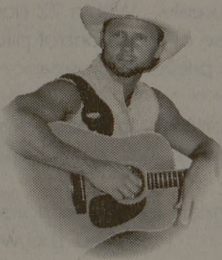


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Charge thrown out in Mesa trial

CLEVELAND (AP) — The jury in Jose Mesa's rape trial can consider whether Mesa was guilty of the reduced charge of gross sexual imposition, instead of a charge of rape.

In addition, the judge threw out a felony assault charge against the Indians star reliever, saying the state did not prove Mesa intended to hurt one of the women.

Cuyahoga County Judge Thomas Curran ruled Monday that the jury of six men and six women may con-

sider whether Mesa was guilty of the reduced charge of gross sexual imposition, instead of a charge of rape.

In addition, the judge threw out a felony assault charge against the Indians star reliever, saying the state did not prove Mesa intended to hurt one of the women.

Defense lawyer Gerald Messerman rested his case without calling

anyone to the stand. Then, in closing arguments, he mocked the police investigation and challenged the truthfulness of Mesa's accusers.

"What we have here is a story that is chameleon-like," Messerman said. "If we have to be yellow, we'll be yellow. If we have to be red, we'll be red. It's tough when you have to become a scotch plaid."

Brock Marion denies Ravens, picks Dallas

IRVING (AP) — A few weeks ago agent safety Brock Marion thought he was a Baltimore Raven. On Monday he rejoined the Dallas Cowboys and he could not be happier.

Marion attended a March 20 conference at the Ravens' training complex to announce he had agreed to a reported four-year, \$6.5 million deal. Instead, team owner Art Modell said he wanted more doctors to examine Marion's left shoulder, which he broke in November.

After more tests, the Ravens' agent Jordan Woy they were interested. Woy continued talking to them until late last week, then the Cowboys and quickly worked out a one-year deal with incentives.

The signing came at a good time for the Cowboys. With the draft less than two weeks away, they no longer worry about finding a safety. Marion will resume his spot in one of the NFL's secondary alongside safety Woodson and cornerbacks Sanders and Kevin Smith.

Milwaukee defeats Rangers in opener

MILWAUKEE (AP) — Spring training came early to County Stadium on Monday.

Mike Matheny hit a grand slam and the Milwaukee Brewers beat the Texas Rangers 5-3 in their opener in front of 42,893 fans, some of whom littered the field with away baseballs, causing three ejections and threatening the first forfeit of the club's 28-year history.

Although nobody was injured, the game was delayed three times. Texas manager Johnny Oates protested the game under protest. He pulled players off the field twice in the second inning, with the delays lasting 16 minutes.

Dallas has sad scoring in second quarter

DALLAS (AP) — Who says the Dallas Mavericks have had a forgettable season? The 1996-97 squad made its mark all over the scoreboard, although it has been for the wrong reasons.

A year that began with high hopes reached another record Sunday as Dallas scored just two points (both on free throws) in the third quarter of an 87-80 loss to the Los Angeles Lakers.

No NBA team has ever come close to being shut out for an entire period. The previous worst-scoring quarter was four points, by the Sacramento Kings and the 1972-73 falo Braves. That Kings' team is only other that failed to score a basket in a quarter.

The Mavericks actually led 51-48 at halftime when they forgot how to score. They were stuck on 51 points until Derek Harper made two foul shots 1:51 left in the third quarter.

Cooke memorial set for Thursday

WASHINGTON (AP) — A memorial service was planned for Thursday at Trinity Episcopal Church in Upperville, Va.

"He was one of those rare players who was a tough guy, a super athlete, and he was always better than things were at their worst," said Coach Gibbs, who coached the Redskins from 1981-1993.

President Clinton said Cooke was a "straight-shooting style" player and of the fans earned him respect and admiration throughout the sports world.

The family was expected to issue its first statement later today. There's little doubt the construction of the \$160-million stadium in suburban Maryland will continue.

49ers first to offer partner benefits

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — The San Francisco 49ers will offer domestic partner benefits to all 220 team employees and players, team president Carmen Policy said today.

The team is the first in the National Football League to offer the program, which basically gives unmarried couples, gay and straight, the same health care and benefits as married couples.

At a news conference with officials, Policy said the plan comes with a city ordinance requiring companies doing business with the city offer such benefits.

"The 49ers accept our responsibility in terms of domestic partner legislation," Policy said. "San Francisco is San Francisco because of its diversity."

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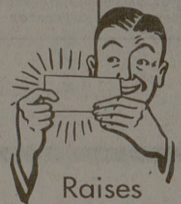
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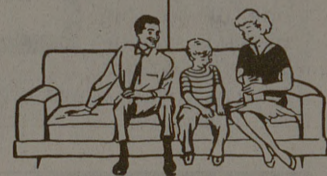
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