

Impromptu football drill hurts player

ATLANTA (AP) — Georgia Tech had just finished a routine practice when coach George O'Leary decided to teach a hard lesson to a second-string offensive lineman who was struggling to make his blocks.

O'Leary handed 314-pound Dustin Vaitekunas a football and told him to stand alone against four defensive linemen coming at full speed. The coach said the four-some was not supposed to hit Vaitekunas, only give him an idea of how a quarterback feels when blockers miss their assignments.

But Vaitekunas was pummeled by at least two of his teammates, leaving him sprawled on the ground for several minutes, gasping for breath.

Vaitekunas left Georgia Tech the following day and vowed never to return, and his mother is threatening to pursue criminal charges against O'Leary. The coach said it was simply a breakdown in communication and he would never do anything to harm a student athlete.

"I think the whole thing is getting blown out of proportion," O'Leary said Tuesday. "My track record is pretty good with my players. I coach hard but I coach fair."

Still, the case comes after Bob Knight lost his basketball coaching job at Indiana — his troubles beginning when he struck a player in the neck — and NHL veteran Marty McSorley was convicted of assault for whacking an opponent with a hockey stick.

"I see this as assault and battery," Wanda Charpring, the player's mother, told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution in a story published Tuesday. "I want O'Leary arrested. He tried to kill my son."

An official at the Georgia Tech police department, who refused to give his name, said no charges had been filed as of late Tuesday afternoon. Charpring also sent letters to Georgia Tech athletic director Dave Braine and David Thompson, the Atlantic Coast Conference's assistant commissioner for NCAA compliance.

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— Wanda Charpring
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Braine conducted his own investigation of the Sept. 25 practice and found no reason to discipline O'Leary. Thompson did not immediately return a message left at ACC headquarters in Greensboro, N.C.

"George is not a brutal coach," said Braine, adding that he watches at least two practices a week. "He did not intend for that kid to get hurt."

At first glance, the incident seems tame in comparison to the harsh treatment doled out by old coaches such as Bear Bryant, Woody Hayes and Vince Lombardi. But times have changed. Coaches are expected to treat players with a degree of civility and respect. Blatant physical punishment is off limits.

"You can't put George O'Leary in the same league with Bobby Knight," Braine said. "He's never had anything like this happen before. He's never had a complaint. He's trying to do the right thing."

"You expect to get hit; that's football," Vaitekunas told the newspaper. "What [O'Leary] did was over the line, when you're just standing there and four guys are ordered to crush you."

Charpring and Vaitekunas did not immediately return a message left by the Associated Press at her home in Chapin, S.C.

Defensive end Greg Gathers was one of the players who took part in the drill. "He just stood there," Gathers said. "I don't know if he was fatigued or what. But he didn't protect himself."

Hull helps Stars down Leafs

TORONTO (AP) — Brett Hull is nothing like his Hall of Fame father. He is better.

Hull scored his 611th goal, breaking a tie with his father, Bobby, as the Dallas Stars defeated the Toronto Maple Leafs 3-1 Monday night.

"Totally opposite," Hull said when asked to compare his style of play to that of his father. "I think it makes it more special."

"The first thing you should notice is 'Holy cow, this kid can't skate a lick and his father was one of the most graceful guys to ever play the game with power and speed,' and I'm the dead opposite. I play the game more from the brain as opposed to the body."

Hull is three goals short of passing Mario Lemieux for eighth place on the career list.

"No matter how many goals I've

scored, I'm certainly not flashy, and when you're not flashy you almost look like a plumber out there and they forget about you," Hull said.

"Plus I'm not a big celebrator or very physical, so you don't have people thinking about you and that's how to stay invisible."

In other NHL games Monday, Boston beat Florida 4-2 and Los Angeles clobbered Columbus 7-1.

Toronto coach Pat Quinn, who once played against Bobby Hull, said the only similarity between the Hulls is their hair color. Both are blond.

"Bobby was the dominate one. He was 'Give me the puck, and I'll bull through everybody,'" Quinn said. "Brett has always gotten himself into a position where a good playmaker could find him. Brett has that incredible talent." He showed that talent Monday night.

Hull one-timed a pass from Brenden Morrow to tie the game in the third period.

"That's what he gets paid for — those goals in the slot like that," Morrow said. "There's no one in the league who can fire the puck like that. It's lethal. They had taken it to us for two periods and that goal lifted our team."

Less than two minutes later, Derian Hatcher took a pass from Hull, sent a shot that deflected off the boards to Morrow, who fired it past Toronto goalie Curtis Joseph, who finished with 20 saves.

Morrow and Hull, who each had a goal and two assists in the third period, assisted on Joe Nieuwendyk's goal with 6:02 remaining in the game.

Dallas goalie Ed Belfour stopped 30 shots.

Sports in Brief

Olympic officials call for truce in 2004 planning

LONDON (AP) — A top IOC official has called for a "truce" among squabbling Greek organizers and government officials as they struggle to rescue the troubled 2004 Summer Olympics.

Jacques Rogge, the International Olympic Committee executive with control over the Athens Games, said the Greeks must overcome three years of delays.

"I would call for a four-year truce," Rogge said Tuesday in an interview.

Athens, host of the first modern Olympics in 1896, has been plagued by bureaucratic delays since being awarded the 2004 games in 1997.

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