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NEWS IN BRIEF

Cold postpones Astros game

PITTSBURGH (AP) — The Houston Astros-Pittsburgh Pirates game Tuesday night was postponed because of cold weather and the threat of snow showers and rain later in the evening.

The game was called at 5:20 p.m., even though it wasn't raining, temperatures were still in the 40s and the pitchers for both teams were throwing and running on the field.

The game will be made up as part of a 5:05 p.m. doubleheader Sept. 9 during what now becomes a five-game series Sept. 9-12.

The teams did not want to play a doubleheader Wednesday night because they have an afternoon game Thursday. After this week, the Astros do not play in Pittsburgh again until September.

The postponement was the Pirates' second during what was supposed to be a 10-game homestand. Their scheduled game Thursday against the Cubs was postponed until May 28.

Jockey caught with shocker

ALBUQUERQUE (AP) — The state Racing Commission has suspended a jockey caught with a small device that generates an electric jolt to prod race horses to run faster.

The racing license of Abdel Torres, 21, of Odessa, Texas, was suspended for five years, and he was fined \$1,500 last week, said India Hatch, commission executive director.

A commission investigator, conducting a random jockey search, discovered the buzzer Feb. 21 wrapped in a bandage on Torres' wrist at Sunland Park racetrack, Hatch said.

A second buzzer was dropped by someone in the group of jockeys being searched, but investigators could not determine which jockey had it, she said Monday.

The horse Torres was riding before the discovery, Taken for a Dream, did not win the race, Hatch said.

Torres' racing license could be reinstated in three years, but he would remain on probation for two years after the reinstatement, she said.

Before the bust, a buzzer had not been found at any of the state's four racetracks in at least 10 years, Hatch said.

"If they're starting to reappear, we're just going to crack down. That's why we're here — to keep it clean," she said.

Texans release safety Dennis

HOUSTON (AP) — The Houston Texans on Tuesday released safety Pat Dennis and tight end Rashod Kent after offseason acquisitions made them expendable.

Dennis, 25, is a four-year veteran who joined the Texans in 2002 but played sparingly because of injury. The Texans created a crowd at safety last weekend by drafting two and moving Marcus Coleman to free safety from cornerback.

Kent, 23, was a basketball player at Rutgers who switched to football when he joined the Texans in 2002. The recent signing of veteran Mark Bruener made him expendable.

U.S. Olympic officials crack down on steroids

By Bob Gloster
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN FRANCISCO — Exactly 108 days before the start of the Athens Games, U.S. Olympic officials are pleading with federal authorities for help in trying to make sure no drug cheaters qualify for the American team.

"We're concerned first that we have a clean team participating in the games. Secondly, we are concerned we have a team that is free of speculation about whether it is clean in these games," U.S. Olympic Committee chief executive Jim Scherr said in a telephone interview with The Associated Press.

"And we do not want any lingering suspicions or positive tests coming out of the games."

The USOC is not just targeting athletes who have failed drug tests. Instead, officials hope to utilize a clause in the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency's rules to bar athletes who acknowledge the use of steroids and other banned substances, including in grand jury testimony.

Section 9 of the USADA's protocol gives that agency the authority to bring a drug case against an athlete in lieu of a positive drug test "when USADA has other reason to believe that a potential doping violation has occurred, such as admitted doping."

"Our image is going to be just fine if we send a clean team," acting USOC president Bill Martin said in a telephone interview Monday. "The last thing we want to happen is to select the wrong folks."

"America does not want to send a dirty team to Athens, but the ball's not in our hands right now. Time is truly of the essence."

Martin and Scherr want the USADA to get access to grand jury transcripts in the Bay Area Laboratory Co-Operative case involving the alleged distribution of steroids to top athletes.

While such grand jury proceedings are secret by law, the Senate Commerce Committee chaired by Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., has issued a subpoena for the BALCO testimony.

That could override the secrecy provision, according to Rory Little, a Hastings College of the Law scholar and a former federal prosecutor in San Francisco.

Little said it would be "highly unusual for the Department of Justice to be giving up grand jury material in the middle of an investigation." But even if the Justice Department challenged such a subpoena, Little said, a court could order that such documents be released.

Justice Department spokesman Mark Corallo said Monday he did not know whether any material had been turned over to McCain's committee. Rebecca Hanks, a spokeswoman for McCain, declined to comment.

According to an AP poll released Monday, 92 percent of Americans believe the use of steroids and performance-enhancing drugs by Olympic athletes is a problem.

Forty-three percent of those responding to the survey called it a major problem; another 49 percent see it as a minor problem.

Only 6 percent don't consider it a problem.

Craig Masback, the head of the U.S. Track & Field, hopes evidence of drug use is unveiled as quickly as possible "so that the guilty will be punished and the innocent will be cleared of suspicion."

"That is all we can do," Masback said. "We did not do the tests, we did not test the samples. We did not do a federal investigation, we did not do the affidavits, we were not at grand jury."

Last weekend, two U.S. Olympic stars — Marion Jones and her boyfriend, Tim Montgomery — were connected in reports to BALCO founder Victor Conte.

The San Francisco Chronicle reported that Conte told federal agents he gave steroids to Jones and Montgomery.

Jones, who won five medals at the 2000 Olympics, and Montgomery, a world record-holder at 100 meters, repeatedly have denied steroid use.

An attorney for Jones said he never received steroids from Conte. An attorney for Conte said he never provided steroids to Jones and Montgomery, and never gave information to federal agents.

Jones and Montgomery are among dozens of athletes — including baseball slugger Barry Bonds and Jason Giambi — who testified before the grand jury that indicted Conte. No athletes were indicted.

Conte and three other men, including Bonds' personal trainer, have been charged with providing steroids to professional athletes. All pleaded innocent.

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