

BASEBALL

NEW YORK

Before arbitration, Texas gives Teixeira contract

All-Star first baseman Mark Teixeira agreed to a \$15.4 million, two-year contract Tuesday with the Texas Rangers, and former teammate Alfonso Soriano asked the Washington Nationals for a \$12 million, one-year deal.

Soriano's figure was the highest submitted among the 44 players who swapped proposed salaries with their teams.

More than half of the 100 players who filed for salary arbitration Friday settled before Tuesday's exchange of figures, and nearly all will reach agreements without hearings, which will be scheduled for next month in St. Petersburg, Fla.

More than two dozen players reached agreements Tuesday, including Washington catcher Brian Schneider (\$16 million for four years), Houston closer Brad Lidge (\$3,975,000), Los Angeles Angels closer Francisco Rodriguez (\$3,775,000), St. Louis pitcher Jason Marquis (\$5.15 million), new Texas pitcher Adam Eaton (\$4.65 million), Pittsburgh pitcher Kip Wells (\$4.15 million) and Toronto pitcher Ted Lilly (\$4 million).

SANTO DOMINGO, Dominican Republic

Rodriguez to play for U.S. team in tournament

ESPN reported late Tuesday night that New York Yankees third baseman Alex Rodriguez has decided to play for the U.S. team in the World Baseball Classic later this year.

Rodriguez originally was among 60 players on the Dominican Republic's preliminary roster for the tournament when teams were announced Tuesday.

The AL MVP, eligible to play for the United States and the Dominican Republic, said last month that he intended to play for the Dominican team, then said he wouldn't play at all because he didn't want to offend either country.

He wasn't included on the U.S. team's roster but will be added.

RACING

INDIANAPOLIS

Youngest Andretti solid in first IRL IndyCar testing

Marco Andretti is a fast learner. The 18-year-old IRL rookie completed his first test session as an IndyCar Series driver and impressed both his father, Michael, and grandfather, Mario, with his rapid progress. Now he's got two months to prepare for his debut race at Homestead-Miami Speedway.

"Everything was a bit of an unknown to me until I got into the car, but now the questions are starting to be answered," said the youngest Andretti, who tested for two days in Florida on the Sebring International Raceway's 1.6-mile road course. "In that regard, it was good to finally get some time in the ArcaEx car."

Last season, Marco won three of six races in the IRL's developmental Infiniti Pro Series. On the road course at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, he led from start to finish and increased his lead on almost every lap.

FOOTBALL

SOUTH BEND

Three Notre Dame players get early jump on school

Three students who played high school football in the fall started classes at Notre Dame on Tuesday, marking a change in the school's long-time policy against mid-year admissions.

Running back James Aldridge of Merrillville High School; offensive lineman Chris Stewart of Klein High School in Texas; and George West, a defensive back and wide receiver from Northeast Academy in Oklahoma City became the first recruits in years to enroll at Notre Dame for the spring semester.

Recruiting analyst Tom Lemming said Notre Dame may have been the final school to make the change. He said the policy had hurt the Irish because some recruits had not considered Notre Dame because its policy that prevented them from enrolling early and having a better shot at competing for playing time.

"It's something that had to be done in order to compete with other schools," Lemming said. "For a number of top stars, they were out of the recruiting race until the beginning. I would say at least 10 percent of the top 100 players."

Broncos ready for 'Bus'

Denver steps up contact in practice to prepare for big back

By EDDIE PELLIS

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DENVER

Every so often during the past 15 years or so, hard-hitting Broncos safety John Lynch has had to gird up for a confrontation — a rite of passage is more like it — that almost every defender must face at some point in his career.

Tackling Jerome Bettis. "They're all memorable when they're against him," Lynch said of the hits and punishment he and Bettis have dished to each other through the years, both in college and the pros. "You've just got to bring a lot because you know he's carrying a lot."

Denver defensive lineman Gerard Warren, who faced Bettis twice a year during his seasons in Cleveland, describes Pittsburgh's big fella as a bowling ball rolling down hill. Domonique Foxworth, a rookie cornerback from Maryland, concedes "we never saw anyone quite that big in the ACC."

If form holds, though, Foxworth, Lynch, Warren and all the Broncos will see Bettis about 15 times Sunday when the Steelers come to Denver for the AFC title game.

Most of those encounters will come in short-yardage situations or near the goal line. Some might come with a win or loss hanging in the balance.

Coach Mike Shanahan's tip: "It's got to be a group effort."

Barring moving a 270-pound offensive lineman onto the scout team, there is no real way for the Broncos to emulate Bettis this week in practice. And even if a lineman would make the move, he

probably couldn't, well, make the moves Bettis does.

"Anytime you've got a back listed at 265 who's probably 280 and still has nimble feet like a 225-pound guy, it's going to take more than one guy to take him down," Broncos defensive line coach Andre Patterson said. "He's got great size and great feet. That's the combination that makes it so difficult. That's what makes him so special."

The Broncos insist they have confidence, mainly because of what they've been doing all year.

Tackling on this team was not great in 2003 or 2004. So since training camp started, there has been extra time devoted to wrapping up and taking people down.

Most NFL teams, afraid of risking injuries, don't encourage much contact in practice. During training camp, Broncos players were constantly on the ground.

And once the regular season started, they've opened most practices with tackling drills. "We've done it more than most teams I've worked with," said Patterson, who has coached with the Browns, Cowboys, Vikings and Patriots before the Broncos.

As much as form counts when trying to make a tackle, especially on a guy like Bettis, Patterson believes it's a "want-to" thing more than anything.

"It's always what's pumping in your chest," he said.

During his illustrious 13-year career, which many think will come to an end after this season, Bettis has a way about making players lose their will to hit him.

"He's the size of a tight end," Foxworth said. "Just shorter and wider."



Pittsburgh Steelers running back Jerome Bettis, top right, follows the block of Dan Kreider for a touchdown during Sunday's game against the Colts.

Cowher supports officials, not Porter

By ALAN ROBINSON

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PITTSBURGH

Following a trying weekend filled with reversals, replays and reprimands, NFL officials got a strong show of support from an unlikely source: Pittsburgh Steelers coach Bill Cowher.

Cowher not only refused to criticize the officials for reversing upon review a possible game-clinching interception by Steelers safety Troy Polamalu against the Colts (the NFL later said the reversal was wrong), but he gave them a vote of confidence on Tuesday.

"Our officials are doing the very best that they can do. Obviously, at times, there's going to be mistakes made," Cowher said. "To me, those guys are human

like the rest of us, and we're moving on."

Cowher also dismissed linebacker Joey Porter's angry comments that the officials were determined to get Indianapolis into the AFC Championship game, calling them ridiculous.

Porter criticized the officiating repeatedly during postgame interviews, saying, "At one point, I didn't think the refs were going to let us out of here with a victory."

Cowher, no doubt trying to temper Porter's unusually strong comments, said that the Steelers have a 15-minute cooling off period for players but that, "we've got some guys who could probably use a little longer than that."

"Joey's comments at the end of the game were certainly made out of frustration," Cow-

her said. "But there's no conspiracy or things of that nature. That's ridiculous."

The call that most upset the Steelers during their dramatic 21-18 win Sunday against the top-seeded Colts in Indianapolis came when Polamalu made a diving interception of a Peyton Manning pass with Pittsburgh trying to preserve a 21-10 lead with 5½ minutes remaining.

Officials ruled that Polamalu never made an interception because he lost the ball while trying to get up and run.

Cowher declined Tuesday to talk about that call or any others.

"I know a lot of talk has taken place with the officiating," he said. "The biggest thing to understand is that all of our questions have been answered. The league got back to us about that."

Steelers fan recovers

Talk about a heart-stopping game between the Pittsburgh Steelers and Indianapolis Colts.

Terry O'Neill, 50, of Pittsburgh, was watching the game at a bar and had a heart attack seconds after Jerome Bettis fumbled trying to score from the 2-yard line late in the fourth quarter.

Quarterback Ben Roethlisberger prevented the Colts' Nick Harper from returning the recovered ball for a touchdown, and the Steelers hung on to win.

O'Neill, who was recovering at a hospital, will have a pacemaker implanted to control an irregular heartbeat and he was prescribed medication to deal with the hypertension.

He will watch Sunday's game against Denver from home.

• Changes

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

become unrestricted free agents. So too will Mike Vanderjagt, the NFL's most accurate kicker, and defensive tackle Larry Tripplett, a key backup who just completed his best season.

Polian said Wayne would definitely return, perhaps an indication the team will use the franchise tag to retain Wayne. A telephone message from The Associated Press was left for his agent, David Dunn, on Tuesday.

But there are other areas Polian must contend with after Sunday's 21-18 loss to Pittsburgh.

The top priority, Polian said, is making sure the Colts are more effective running near the goal line.

"People say we've got to find a guy who can run it up in there, and maybe we do," Polian said. "The bottom line is we've got to be a better goal-line running

team and a better red-zone running team."

Polian did not indicate whether a new philosophy could signal the end of James' career in Indy. James has spent all seven seasons with the Colts and rushed for more than 1,500 yards and 13 touchdowns this year. He was a free agent last year, and the Colts kept him then by using the franchise tag.

Polian also gave agent Drew Rosenhaus permission to seek a trade last spring, but Rosenhaus could not work anything out. Rosenhaus declined comment Monday when asked about James' future with the Colts.

"I'm never going to beg or that stuff; I'm going to go with the flow," James said recently. "If you want to do something, cool. If not, cool."

Polian acknowledged that the Colts may seek a bigger back for short-yardage situations and place a greater premium on running in the postseason.

"You must run the football in the playoffs," he said. "Fifty-seven yards is not near enough. We can get better at goal line as a running team, which is something we have not been, and we have not been for a long time."

Dungy said one complication

in free agency is the lack of a new collective bargaining agreement. If a deal can be completed before free agency starts, then the Colts may have a greater flexibility to re-sign players such as James, Wayne and Brock.

If not, the Colts could lose some key ingredients to their high-scoring offense and improved defense.

Brock's agent, Kevin Pompey, said the Colts have already expressed interest in bringing back his client.

"We were very appreciative of that call, because Raheem would like to be back in Indy," Pompey said.

Another other concern is pass protection. Although the Colts allowed a league-low 20 sacks this season, they struggled to protect two-time MVP Peyton Manning on Sunday. Manning was sacked five times and routinely knocked down and hurried.

That forced Manning to hurry throws, which routinely sailed over the heads or wide of receivers. He blamed the subpar offensive performance on poor blocking, and Polian agreed.

"We've got to find out what we did incorrectly and get it fixed," he said. "When you don't block the way we did, that's something that you've got to find out why."

• Wave

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

to increase their intensity and made them swim longer and farther.

During a typical practice, the Woodmen swim between 7,000 to 8,000 yards. But during the break, the Woodmen practiced a combined four hours a day and covered about 12,000 yards daily.

"It was a huge increase in yardage and intensity," said Mynsberge, who set records in the 100-yard breaststroke and the 500 freestyle on Jan. 12. "Coach pushed us harder to do more yards."

"It was a lot more faster swimming and a lot longer swimming, which made the difference."

Senior MaryAnn Wiser acknowledged the two-a-day practices helped her swim faster. She already has set more records this season than any swimmer in the boys or girls programs.

The leader of the girls team, Wiser has set individual records in the 200 freestyle, the 200 individual medley, the 100 backstroke and the 100 butterfly.

She also was a member of the record-setting 200 freestyle relay team, along with sophomores Mackenzie Hassee and Megan Webber and freshman Samantha Ashworth.

"(Two-a-day practices) made us a lot stronger," Wiser said. "They worked with our endurance. Being able to swim even when we're tired is something we haven't been able to do in the past."

"Being in the water for so long helped us. We adjusted and got tougher this season."

Besides producing faster swimmers, Greenwood also is gradually increasing the size of its teams.

Three years ago, the girls team had only seven members; the boys team had eight.

O'Neill, a former standout swimmer at Greenwood, attributes the steady growth to creating more interest in middle school. Many of those students swim year-round.

During the school year, those students can swim on the Greenwood Middle School team. During the summer, they can participate in the Greenwood Gators club program.

"We're trying to get kids in and swimming year-round at a younger age," O'Neill said. "We're trying to make sure the teaching and training are in place to help them keep improving."

"The kids who've been in the program

and have continued to improve have stuck around and enjoyed it."

Now that times are improving, the next goal is to get even more kids involved in community swimming programs to bolster numbers at the high school.

"We're a smaller team that struggles a little bit with depth," said O'Neill, noting that Greenwood's schedule is a little friendlier near season's end. "The teams we face in the second half of the season have (low numbers) in common with us."

"Now we have a better shot at putting up some points and coming out with a win." Wins are nice, but the objective is to keep getting faster.

"We're more focused on swimming faster and trying to swim our best times," O'Neill said. "When everybody is improving and getting better, the meets will take care of themselves."



MANGINI



PAYTON

Saints, Jets build with new coaches

The Associated Press

The New Orleans Saints and New York Jets have new head coaches.

New Orleans will hire Dallas Cowboys assistant Sean Payton to his first NFL head coaching job, a team official familiar with the decision said Tuesday.

The Saints' official was speaking on condition of anonymity to because the formal announcement wasn't expected until today.

New England Patriots defensive coordinator Eric Mangini was introduced as the Jets' new coach Tuesday.

Payton has been a quarterbacks coach for three seasons under Bill Parcells in Dallas. He also held the title of assistant head coach.

Before that, he was a New York Giants assistant, a stint that included that team's NFC Championship in 2000.

Payton was one of five candidates interviewed by the Saints at the team's headquarters last week. The others were Jets defensive coordinator Donnie Henderson, Cleveland Browns offensive coordinator Maurice Carthon, former Green Bay head coach Mike Sherman and former St. Louis Rams coach Mike Martz.

Payton will succeed Jim Haslett, whose tenure lasted six years. The Saints were 3-13 in 2005, a season in which all of their "home" games were played on the road because of Hurricane Katrina. The Saints were a .500 team during Haslett's first five seasons combined.

Mangini has worked for Bill Parcells and Bill Belichick, learning from two of the greatest coaches in the NFL. The Jets are banking on that pedigree to lead them back into the playoffs.

Mangini, who turns 35 on Thursday, becomes the youngest head coach in the league.

Terms of the deal weren't known, but it is believed he will get between \$2 million and \$2.5 million per year for five years.

"Being compared to Bill Belichick is one of the highest compliments you can be paid," Mangini said. "I am not Bill Belichick, I am not Bill Parcells. I am Eric Mangini."

"I'm going to approach it my way. I'm going to take the experiences and the lessons that I learned from those guys, and I'm going to apply that to my team."

Harper's wife out of jail, to face charges in June 6 trial

The Associated Press

NOBLESVILLE

The wife of Indianapolis Colts cornerback Nick Harper will not face a felony battery charge for cutting him with a kitchen knife, a judge ruled.

Daniell Harper, 31, still faces a criminal recklessness charge. She was released from jail on \$5,000 bond Tuesday after spending the weekend in the Hamilton County Jail.

"The court has previously determined that there was no probable cause for battery," said Magistrate Karl Hadley. He said the decision was made by presiding Superior Court 3 Judge William Hughes, who reviewed documents submitted by police and prosecutors before Tuesday's initial hearing.



NICK HARPER

Hamilton County Prosecutor Sonia Leerkamp said the judge apparently did not allow the battery charge because Nick and Daniell Harper both claimed the stabbing was accidental.

Daniell Harper was arraigned on closed-circuit television from jail Tuesday, and Hadley entered a plea of not guilty on her behalf. Pretrial hearings were set for March 21 and May 15, and her trial was set for June 6.

Nick Harper was treated at an Indianapolis hospital Saturday after deputies and paramedics found him with a puncture wound to his right knee, police said. His wife told authorities the stabbing was accidental, sheriff's department Sgt. Kevin W. Fessel said.

"I don't think this began as a violent confrontation between the two," said Hamilton County Sheriff Doug Carter. "I think this began as a conversation between the two that escalated."

Police said Daniell Harper told them she was upset because her husband would not speak to her.