

Coates charged with assaulting girlfriend

The Pro Bowl tight end for the New England Patriots was released on bail Sunday night

By Howard Ulman
The Associated Press

WRENTHAM, Mass. — Ben Coates of the New England Patriots pleaded innocent today to charges he threw his girlfriend against a car and threatened to beat her.

The 28-year-old tight end was arrested at his Franklin home Sunday night. Jennifer Marshall, 27, of Norton, was treated and released from the hospital, Franklin police said.

Coates was released on \$1,000 cash bail after Judge Gilbert Nadeau ordered the amount increased from the \$500 bail set at his arrest.

"He is absolutely innocent," said defense lawyer Peter Barlow. "I'm certain that at the end of this ... legal process, it will be clear that Ben did nothing wrong. He wants to get back to practice."

Coates, 6-foot-5 and 245 pounds, told police he pushed Marshall to defend himself. He said they were not dating any-

more.

Police said Marshall — who has a child with Coates — went to Coates' home because she suspected he was having an affair and spotted an unknown car in his driveway.

Coates is said to have become enraged and they began arguing. Coates then shoved Marshall several times, slammed her against the hood of a car and said, "I'll knock you out," according to a statement she gave to police.

Coates is married and has three children, but they live in North Carolina during training camp and the regular season, said Patriots vice president Don Lowery, who attended the court appearance.

Coach Pete Carroll was expected to comment later in the day at training camp in Smithfield, R.I. Patriots owner Robert Kraft declined comment on the incident.

Coates, an All-Pro each of his last two seasons and a Pro Bowl player each of his last four seasons, is the highest-paid tight end in the NFL. In 1994, he set an NFL record for receptions by a tight end with 96. He is entering his eighth season with the Patriots.

A-Rod: Part of stellar 90s class

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101 homers in his career, a mark Rodriguez should match in three years if he stays on pace in 1998. Wagner also stole 720 bases in his career. At his current pace, A-Rod should approach around 500 career thefts. However, he is the fastest player on the Mariners, and his SB totals have jumped from 15 in 1996 to 29 last year to a projected 44 this season. Should he keep improving his steals totals, Rodriguez could also set the career record for thefts by a shortstop.

One other thing to consider about Wagner, typically considered the best ever at short, is that he played at the turn of the century, when league-wide statistics were higher than today's. Also, he played in the days of segregation. More likely than not, Wagner was the fifth- or sixth-best shortstop in organized baseball in his day. Those above him just happened to play in the Negro Leagues, and thus received less acclaim. Add to that the lack of talented pitchers the Negro Leagues would have supplied, and Wagner's numbers begin to lose their luster.

And that doesn't even consider Latin players, who weren't in

the majors in those days but account for some of the most athletic position players in the league now, as well as the game's most dominating pitcher, Pedro Martinez.

Finally, the most convincing argument for A-Rod's *not* being considered the best ever: his defense.

Rodriguez has a career fielding percentage of .968. His best year was 1996, when it was .977, but he led AL shortstops in errors with 24 last season. This year he's fielding at a .975 clip and is on pace to commit 18 errors.

The two guys considered the best in the league defensively are Vizquel and Ordonez. Vizquel has a career fielding percentage of .981, including .994 with just three errors so far this season. Does that overcome his .267 career average and 27 career homers? I think not.

Ordonez has a career fielding percentage of just .973 and made 27 errors in 1996. He's on pace to commit 15 this season. Not much better than A-Rod, and Ordonez is hitting .245 with two homers in his three-year career.

Yes, Vizquel and Ordonez

make the spectacular plays, but I would argue that's only because they have to. Both are relatively little men, while Rodriguez is 6-foot-3. Consider their total number of chances at short this season and it's obvious A-Rod is not missing plays the other two would make. Vizquel has handled 478 chances in 98 games for the Indians, Ordonez 432 in 98 games for the Mets and A-Rod 487 in 104 games with the Mariners. Yes, the other two make dazzling stops and throws, but only because they have to.

Of course, I'm assuming Rodriguez is even the best shortstop of his generation, which when considering guys like Nomar Garciaparra and Derek Jeter is arguable as well, I know. I don't have the space to prove it numerically, but a quick check of career and season stats for all three should suffice as evidence enough.

And one other thing: Sorry, Jeter, but Rodriguez is probably the best-looking shortstop ever, as well.

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SPORTS BRIEFS

Wilcox signs with New Orleans Saints

Former Oregon Duck tight end Josh Wilcox was signed to a one-year contract by the NFL's New Orleans Saints on Friday. Terms of the deal were not announced.

The Portland Forest Dragons of the Arena Football League, which Wilcox had signed with earlier this season, placed him on the exempt list on Monday.

Wilcox was in camp last summer with the Minnesota Vikings after leaving Oregon in 1996 following a career in which he was key in the Ducks'

1995 trip to the Rose Bowl. Wilcox was cut one day after the Vikings attempted to move him to linebacker.

The 6-foot-2, 238-pound Wilcox caught 11 passes for 135 yards and a touchdown in the Ducks' 38-20 loss to the Nittany Lions in the Rose Bowl.

Gillespie leaves UO for South Eugene

Former Oregon assistant men's track and field coach John Gillespie accepted the head men's cross country and track and field coaching positions at South Eugene High

School after he was not offered a staff position under new men's head track and field coach Martin Smith.

Gillespie was beaten out by Smith for the job formerly filled by Oregon track legend Bill Dellinger. The 52-year-old Gillespie previously led the Axemen to four state titles in five years of coaching cross country and track before serving as an assistant under Dellinger for 16 years.

One advantage of moving to South for Gillespie will be the opportunity to coach his son K.C., a sprinter at South who will be a junior in the fall.

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