

Newfound circumstances arise in Danton arrest

The Blues player Mike Danton was arrested in San Jose, Calif., on Friday

By Michael Shaw
St. Louis Post-Dispatch (KRT)

ST. LOUIS — Two circumstances appear to have thwarted what authorities have described as a murder-for-hire plot by Blues player Mike Danton to kill his agent.

One was the choice of a young dispatcher for the Columbia, Ill. police as a hit man. A source identified him Tuesday as Justin Levi Jones, 19.

The other was a swift effort among local and federal authorities in three states to ensnare Danton early Friday, after Jones called authorities Thursday morning.

Danton, 23, and Katie Koester Wolfmeyer, 19, of Florissant, were arrested last week on federal charges of

conspiracy and using a telephone in interstate commerce to set up a murder.

Investigators said Danton enlisted Wolfmeyer's help to find a killer, and that she turned to Jones, even though she knew where he worked.

Dan Kelley, the sheriff of Monroe County, who once employed Jones as an intern, put voice Tuesday to a question many must have asked quietly: "If you know (Jones) and know he worked for a law enforcement agency, why would you call him?"

There was no answer from officials. Danton remained in jail near San Jose, Calif., where he was arrested Friday morning. He awaits a transfer to court in East St. Louis, where the case was filed.

Kelley said Jones' internship involved working two to three hours a week with the sheriff's department for two semesters before Jones graduated last spring from Waterloo High School.

The school's principal, Todd Manning, said Tuesday, "He was really focused on what he wants to do. He's a good kid."

Columbia Police Chief Joe Edwards declined to comment.

Jones, contacted at home Tuesday by a reporter, said he could not discuss the case and referred questions to the FBI.

Federal prosecutors say Danton called Wolfmeyer last week, asking her to help him find someone who would kill a hired killer who Danton claimed was coming from Canada to kill him over a debt.

Wolfmeyer presumably knew Danton through her work at the Blues' practice rink at St. Louis Mills in Hazelwood; court documents said she had a "personal relationship" with the Blues forward. It was not clear how she knew Jones.

Prosecutors say Danton offered

\$10,000 to perform the killing in his apartment in Brentwood, while the hockey player was with his team in San Jose. When Jones and Wolfmeyer showed up at Danton's apartment about midnight Thursday, it was not a hit man inside but Danton's longtime agent and mentor, David Frost, 36.

Frost has denied he was the target of a murder plot. He could not be reached for further comment on Tuesday. But sources said he was the one Danton intended to have killed.

A motive was not immediately clear. Court documents said Danton and his intended target had argued the night of April 13 about issues of drinking and promiscuity and that Danton had begged the target not to tell the Blues general manager and ruin his career. Danton scored a goal April 13 in a 4-3 playoff loss to the San Jose Sharks at Savvis Center.

Frost has said the case has nothing to do with drugs or alcohol and that

there was never anyone threatening to go to the GM with any information. Authorities later recorded a sobbing Danton telling the target in a phone call that he "felt backed into a corner and also felt the acquaintance was going to leave him," the complaint against Danton said. So Danton "decided to have him murdered."

A check of court records in Monroe County showed that Jones, who still lives in Waterloo, was placed under court supervision last June after pleading guilty of misdemeanor battery in an incident at the high school in which he was accused of slapping another student and pushing him against a urinal. Jones paid \$75 in court costs and \$441 to the student.

Jeremy Kohler and Derrick Goold of the Post-Dispatch staff contributed to this report. (c) 2004, St. Louis Post-Dispatch. Distributed by Knight Ridder/Tribune Information Services.

Warner's departure favors all those involved

By Bryan Burwell
St. Louis Post-Dispatch (KRT)

ST. LOUIS — One of the harshest facts of athletic life is this everlasting truth: The beginning of a young man's career usually signals the end of an old man's livelihood.

This is the revolving-door existence professional ballplayers grudgingly accept the moment they begin their fantastic athletic journeys. Sooner or later, the same revolving door that so easily swept you in, will rather abruptly kick you out onto the street to make room for some younger gun eager to get his turn at stardom.

Kurt Warner certainly knows this now that he is standing on the outside looking in at the world he once commanded so brilliantly. The two-time NFL most valuable player and rags-to-riches hero of the Rams' Super Bowl championship has lost a bitter,

two-year battle with Marc Bulger. The Rams' QB controversy is over.

Bulger's in, Warner's out. And it's about time. Finally, the nonsense and the useless, endless, nonstop soap opera is over. No more weekly — no, daily — all right, make that hourly updates on the QB controversy. No more looking over the shoulder. No more complaining about deep, dark conspiracies. No more surprise calls to radio talk shows. No more tiresome, divisive speculation. No more sports radio buzz and uninformed, though highly passionate chat room debates.

The Rams needed to make a decision, because the Warner vs. Bulger controversy was a distraction the team could no longer tolerate. The Rams needed to make this decision, and they needed to do it sooner, not later.

Bulger and Warner have both publicly and privately been urging Mike

Martz and Rams management to make a decision. While Warner has been a bit more public, vocal and disruptive, sources close to the situation say Bulger too had repeatedly asked Martz to hurry up and make a choice, just as long as Martz did it clearly and definitively.

Now everyone gets what he wants. Bulger gets the undisputed ownership of the job he believes he earned long ago. Warner gets the freedom to pursue a second chance on a career that has gone progressively south since that Super Bowl loss nearly three years ago, and prove to a world full of doubters that his career is a long way from over.

But there's another harsh reality that both Bulger and Warner are about to face.

Be careful what you ask for.

Both of them are about to prove just how right they are about their

own abilities, or how right their critics are. Bulger gets relief from the controversy with Warner, but if he does not continue to excel, Martz will revert to his fickle ways, and that rookie passer he is sure to draft this weekend will become the apple of his eye. Bulger could eventually suffer the same fate as Warner.

But mostly this is about Warner. He says he's the same guy who was the most magical passer the NFL ever saw during his first three seasons as the Rams' starter. He says he knows he can return to his old form. In fact, he's convinced he never fell off in the first place. He doesn't agree with the folks who say something physical or something mental has turned him into a fragile shell of himself.

He says all he needs is a chance.

But the NFL is full of skeptics. Is there anyone out there who is willing to invest the sort of salary he earned

last season (\$11 million)? Probably not, because most NFL insiders consider him as nothing more than a backup or a stopgap who will keep the seat warm until a young QB grows into the job.

Warner has a lot of mileage on his 32-year-old body now. NFL opponents say he's gun shy. Opposing coaches who've studied his game tapes say his right hand still isn't right. The Rams coaches and players have quietly voiced their concerns about his competitive instincts.

Now Warner gets to prove us all wrong. I wish him well and hope he's right. But sadly, I suspect the golden age of Warner's golden arm is all so much faded glory.

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Bonds homers, but Giants can't get past San Diego

Barry Bonds homered in his seventh straight game; he now has 667 for his career

By David Kiefer
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

SAN FRANCISCO — A night's work for Barry Bonds: One swing and another home run.

As unfathomable as it seems, the San Francisco Giants' slugger made

the most of his only opportunity, homering for the seventh consecutive game to close to a major league record.

Not even Bonds had accomplished such a feat — reaching six twice before — until drilling the first strike he saw inside the right-field foul pole for his 667th career home run. The two-run fourth-inning shot triggered a three-run inning, but it wasn't enough to lift the Giants out of a hole in a 9-5 loss to San Diego before 33,825 at

SBC Park on Tuesday night.

Bonds, who has hit nine of the club's 14 home runs, will attempt to tie the consecutive-games mark shared by Pittsburgh's Dale Long (1956), the New York Yankees' Don Mattingly (1987) and Seattle's Ken Griffey Jr. (1993) in tonight's third game of the four-game set.

He did, however, set a National League with eight homers in seven consecutive games, breaking Long's mark of seven. Mattingly keeps the

major league record with nine.

Though Bonds walked as a pinch hitter April 14 vs. Milwaukee, it did not count against his consecutive-games streaks because he did not have an official at-bat in the game.

Before Tuesday's game, San Diego Manager Bruce Bochy said the Padres wouldn't shy away from Bonds.

"Sure, you should pitch to him," he said. "Where would this game be if we didn't pitch to Babe Ruth?"

Bochy was partly correct. They

walked him three times. But on Bonds' second trip to the plate, pitcher Brian Lawrence fell behind 2-and-0 before delivering a fat fastball right over the plate. After hitting the ball, Bonds lifted his arms high, then pointed toward Raiders defensive lineman Warren Sapp along the first-base line.

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