

Footballer's punch breaks girl's nose



Shark 'snapped' in late-night attack

By JOSH MASSOUD

A CRONULLA first grade rugby league player broke a teenage girl's nose when he punched her in the face yesterday, just hours after the Sharks-Bulldogs match passed off peacefully.

Sharks utility Tevita Latu knocked 19-year-old Brooke Peninton down, causing her to hit the ground head first *The Daily Telegraph* can reveal.

A fight then broke out, with a Bulldogs player who was with the girl rushing in to restrain the New Zealand-born player.

Sporting a broken nose, two black eyes, a swollen lip and bruised mouth, Ms Peninton told how the attack happened outside Cronulla's Kingsway BP service station about 3am.

She said the assault, witnessed by about a dozen people, occurred after Latu began throwing corn chips at her.

"I told him to grow up, but then he threw half the bag at me and started throwing dirt and bark as well. I got up and pushed him away."

It was then Latu snapped.

"He punched me in the face as hard as he could. He didn't care that I was a girl," Ms Peninton said. "I fell back and hit my head



on the concrete. When I put my hand to my face there was blood everywhere."

As NRL went into damage control last night, a witness who asked not to be named, told *The Daily Telegraph*: "I've never seen a guy hit another guy like that, let alone a girl. It was disgusting."

Ms Peninton somehow confronted the footballer and demanded he look at her shocking facial injuries.

"He said, 'I can't, I've got a mother and sisters, I just can't'. I replied, 'How would you like someone to do this to them?'"

"He then looked up and apologised. I said 'It's going to take a lot more than sorry'."

Ms Peninton met Latu while partying with friends from both the Bulldogs and Sharks in Cronulla on Sunday night.

After the final nightspot closed, the group went to the BP for a snack.

The teenager, from Forster on the mid-North Coast, said Latu drank several bourbon and cokes, but "knew what he was doing when he hit me".

The unnamed Bulldogs player and a girlfriend escorted Ms Peninton to Sutherland Hospital, where X-rays revealed she had sustained a broken nose.

Latu has been stood down from first grade pending an investigation, which is expected to result in his two-year deal being terminated. Ms Peninton is yet to decide whether to press charges.

"Hitting a girl or a young woman is unacceptable. It doesn't get much worse," concerned Sharks CEO Greg Pierce said.

NRL CEO David Gallop lamented the incident saying: "It's a very serious matter and we will be expecting a swift report from the club."

Battered ... Brooke Peninton was hit by Latu (left)

Latham is rated the least trusted

THE astounding fall of former Labor leader Mark Latham is now complete after a *Readers Digest* survey voted him the least trusted person among 100 sport, business and political personalities.

Heading the list was burns specialist and former Australian of the Year Fiona Wood, ahead of Professor Ian Frazer, the Queenslander who was pivotal in developing a vaccine to prevent cervical cancer.

At the other end of the scale, Mr Latham unseated Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone for 100th position, Telstra chief Sol Trujillo ranked 98th, while cricketer Shane Warne rated 99th.

Boys and girls pull parents together

PARENTS who have a boy and a girl are more likely to stay together than those with two children of the same sex, research shows.

The Australian National University study also found unmarried parents are more likely to wed if they have a child of each gender.

ANU economist Andrew Leigh analysed 60,000 families from the past five Australian censuses and found small but significant effects of the sex of children on their parents' marital status — with the influence felt most by fathers.

"Among two-child families, one of each seems better for relationships than two of a kind," he said.

Drought returns with a vengeance

THE state is again in crisis, with 90 per cent of NSW either drought declared or close to it.

Six months ago the worst drought in 100 years appeared to have broken, with farmers salvaging some profits for the first time in four years.

But NSW has slipped back into severe drought, with 62 per cent of the state drought-declared and a further 28 per cent considered marginal.

In December, just 18 per cent of the state was drought-declared.

Areas drought declared since last month include Condobolin, Forbes, Young and Wagga Wagga.

Da Vinci opening defies critics

THE *Da Vinci Code* defied critics to have the second biggest global opening weekend in cinema history.

The thriller's \$298 million take ranks it just behind *Star Wars: Episode III's* \$337 million global launch.

In Australia, the film had the largest opening weekend of the year, with takings of \$8.6 million making it the

10th biggest four-day opening in Australian history. The biggest was *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* which took \$14.1 million.

The Da Vinci Code was released in 62 countries although it is yet to be released in India, where the censor recommended it include a disclaimer saying it is a work of fiction.

Heather flees solo to solace



Slovenia, where she once worked and also sought refuge when her first marriage broke up 15 years ago.

HEATHER Mills-McCartney (pictured) has fled England as she struggles to deal with the separation from her husband Sir Paul McCartney.

The 38-year-old, still recovering from corrective surgery to her amputated leg, was on her own yesterday at Gatwick airport boarding a plane to


SonyCentral

SLEEK & SEXY CYBERSHOT



\$499 5.1 MEGAPIXEL DIGITAL CAMERA
SAVE \$200 OFF SONY RRP

At a mere 9.8mm thick, this 5.1 megapixel digital camera is the most stylish of the Sony range. It may be small but it packs outstanding features like a lithium rechargeable battery & charger, 3x optical zoom Carl Zeiss lens, front sliding cover and a huge 2.5" LCD screen.
Limited stock only in silver or black.

+ DIGITAL PRINTS
AVAILABLE IN-STORE

Only at World Square Shopping Centre
Ground Floor, 644 George St Sydney
(02) 9267 8111

All savings are stated as the saving off Sony's recommended retail price. BIN5033_05

look & book *The Whales are back!*
your Port Stephens accommodation & tours www.portstephens.org.au or phone 1800 808 900

7 CMYK2 CMYK OK CORRECTION SIGNATURE ED AD 98 75 50 25 15 8 7 6 5