

## Fla. Teen's Friends: He Wouldn't Pick A Fight

MIAMI (AP) — Wearing a hoodie. Listening to music and talking on his cellphone. Picking up Skittles for his soon-to-be stepbrother. Friends say that's how they would have imagined 17-year-old Trayvon Martin on a Sunday afternoon.

Starting a fight? Possibly high on drugs and up to no good? No, friends say that description of Martin from the neighborhood crime-watch volunteer who shot and killed the unarmed black teenager doesn't match the young man they knew.

"There's no way I can believe that, because he's not a confrontational kid," said Jerome Horton, who was one of Martin's former football coaches and knew him since he was about 5. "It just wouldn't happen. That's just not that kid."

Martin was slain in the town of Sanford on Feb. 26 in a shooting that has set off a nationwide furor over race and justice. Neighborhood crime-watch captain George Zimmerman, whose father is white and mother is Hispanic, claimed self-defense and has not been arrested, though state and federal authorities are still investigating.

Since his death, Martin's name and photographs — in football jerseys, smiling alongside a baby, and staring into the camera in a gray hoodie — have been held up by civil rights leaders and at rallies stretching from Miami to New York demanding Zimmerman's arrest.

## Obama Weighs In On Shooting Of Florida Teen

WASHINGTON (AP) — Urging Americans to "do some soul searching," President Barack Obama injected himself into the emotional debate over the fatal shooting of a teenager in Florida, turning the racially charged case into a personal matter for the nation's first black president.

"If I had a son, he'd look like Trayvon," Obama said Friday.

Obama's words also catapulted the death in Florida of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, already the focus of major national attention, into the presidential campaign. Three Republicans seeking Obama's job all used the word "tragedy" to describe the shooting, as the president did.

"I can only imagine what these parents are going through, and when I think about this boy, I think about my own kids," Obama said at the White House.

Obama said the parents of Martin, who was shot on Feb. 26 in Sanford, Fla., a suburb of Orlando, have a right to expect "that we're going to get to the bottom of exactly what happened."

## Santorum On Defensive As Race Turns To La.

WEST MONROE, La. (AP) — Facing heightened pressure to revive his presidential bid, Rick Santorum was forced to explain another apparent misstep as he courted Louisiana voters Friday, the eve of a critical contest in a Republican nomination battle that increasingly favors Mitt Romney.

Santorum said he would support the eventual GOP nominee — if it isn't him — despite what he insists are similarities between front-runner Romney and President Barack Obama that make them indistinguishable on some issues. He caused an intraparty uproar earlier in the week after suggesting he'd prefer a second term for Obama over a Romney presidency.

"I've said repeatedly and will continue to say, I'll vote for whoever the Republican nominee is and I will work for him," Santorum said as he walked back his original comments less than 24 hours before Louisiana polls were set to open. "Barack Obama is a disaster, but we can't have someone who agrees with him on some of the biggest issues of the day."

The situation underscored Santorum's challenges ahead of a Louisiana contest he's favored to win. Santorum has had success in the South, having won last week's contests in Alabama and Mississippi. Regardless of the outcome Saturday, however, Romney will have collected more delegates than his opponents combined as the race then turns to more favorable territory in the coming weeks.

Santorum's continued missteps are complicating a candidacy already struggling to overcome major financial and organizational deficiencies. Before losing this week's Illinois primary, Santorum hurt himself by declaring that neither the economy nor the nation's unemployment rate was his top concern.

## Obama Makes Surprise Pick For World Bank

WASHINGTON (AP) — Passing over better-known candidates, President Barack Obama on Friday nominated global health expert and Dartmouth College President Jim Yong Kim to lead the World Bank. It was a surprise pick aimed in part at fending off challenges from developing nations eager to end the U.S. monopoly of the top job at the international institution.

Obama's appointment all but guarantees that Kim, a 52-year-old physician and pioneer in treating HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis in the developing world, will take over at the helm of the World Bank. Though he was born in South Korea, he will extend a tradition of American presidents dating back to the organization's founding in 1944.

The 187-nation World Bank focuses on fighting poverty and promoting development. It is a leading source of development loans for countries seeking financing to build dams, roads and other infrastructure projects.

Several developing nations had sought to break the U.S. leadership streak when current Bank President Robert Zoellick announced he would step down at the end of June. That put Obama in the delicate position of balancing his desire to see emerging economies step forward on the world stage and the pressures of an election year. His support for a non-U.S. candidate could have provoked fresh criticism from Republicans, who frequently question whether Obama believes in the notion of "American exceptionalism."

As Obama announced Kim's nomination from the White House Rose Garden on Friday morning, he tried to make the case that an American with a unique background and broad international experience would be a committed representative of the developing world's interests.

"Jim has truly global experience. He has worked from Asia to Africa to the Americas, from capitals to small villages," Obama said. "His personal story exemplifies the great diversity of our country."

# Army Sergeant Charged In Afghan Massacre

**BY LOLITA C. BALDOR AND DEB RIECHMANN**  
 Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Charges filed Friday against Army Staff Sgt. Robert Bales reflect the horror of the crime: 17 counts of premeditated murder, more than half of them children, during a shooting rampage in southern Afghanistan. But while Afghans are calling for swift and severe punishment, it will likely be months, even years, before the public ever sees Bales in a courtroom.

One only has to look at two recent and similarly high-profile cases to see that the wheels of military justice turn slowly.

It's been nearly 29 months since an Army psychiatrist, Maj. Nidal Hasan, allegedly killed 13 and injured two dozen more at Fort Hood, Texas. His trial is scheduled to begin in June. And it's been 21 months since the military charged intelligence analyst Bradley Manning with leaking hundreds of thousands of pages of classified information. It took nine months before he was deemed competent to stand trial.

The Bales case is likely to be equally complex, involving questions of his mental state and the role that the stresses of war and possible previous head injuries may have played in his alleged actions. Most of the eyewitnesses are the Afghan villagers and survivors who may be brought in for the trial.

The military on Friday charged Bales with 17 counts of murder, six counts of attempted

murder and six counts of assault in the March 11 pre-dawn massacre in two southern Afghanistan villages near his base. The father of two from Lake Tapps, Wash., was officially informed of the 29 charges just before noon at the U.S. military prison at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., where he is confined.

The maximum punishment for a premeditated murder conviction is death, dishonorable discharge from the armed forces, reduction to the lowest enlisted grade and total forfeiture of pay and allowances, according to Col. Gary Kolb, a spokesman for U.S. forces in Afghanistan. The mandatory minimum sentence is life imprisonment with the chance of parole.

The charges offered few details of what happened that night. But the 38-year-old soldier is accused of walking off his base with his 9mm pistol and M-4 rifle, which was outfitted with a grenade launcher, killing four men, four women, two boys and seven girls and burning some of the bodies. The ages of the children were not disclosed.

In the most detailed descriptions of the shootings to date, the charges say Bales shot a young girl in the head, a young boy in the thigh, a man in the neck and a woman in the chest and groin. The documents also say that he "shot at" another girl and boy, but apparently did not hit them.

The attack occurred in the Panjwai district of Kandahar Province, the spiritual birthplace of the Taliban. The dead bodies were

found in Balandi and Alkoza villages — one north and one south of the base.

Members of the Afghan delegation investigating the killings said one Afghan guard working from midnight to 2 a.m. saw a U.S. soldier return to the base around 1:30 a.m. Another Afghan soldier who replaced the first and worked until 4 a.m. said he saw a U.S. soldier leaving the base at 2:30 a.m. It's unknown whether the Afghan guards saw the same U.S. soldier. If the gunman acted alone, information from the Afghan guards would suggest that he returned to base in between the shooting rampages.

It also is not known whether the suspect used grenades, Kolb said. The grenade launcher attachment is added to the standard issue M-4 rifle for some soldiers but not all, he said. Bales was assigned to provide force protection at the base.

The case against him is the worst allegation of killing of civilians by an American in Afghanistan and has severely strained U.S.-Afghan ties at a critical time in the decade-old war.

Not addressed in the charges are suggestions that Bales may have been drinking. On Friday, a senior U.S. defense official said Bales was drinking in the hours before the attack on Afghan villagers, violating a U.S. military order banning alcohol in war zones. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the charges before they were filed.

# Tens Of Thousands Call For Fall Of Syrian Regime

**BEN HUBBARD**  
 Associated Press

BEIRUT — Tens of thousands of Syrians braved tear gas and gunfire to protest across the country Friday, vowing to storm the capital Damascus to oust President Bashar Assad as the European Union ramped up pressure on the regime by imposing sanctions on his wife and other close relatives.

Security forces deployed in many cities to disperse protests, but opposition groups reported fewer protester deaths than in past weeks. Activists said more than 20 people were killed nationwide in army attacks on opposition areas or clashes with armed rebels.

International condemnation and high-level diplomacy have failed to stop the year-old Syria crisis, which the U.N. says has killed more than 8,000 people, many of them civilian protesters.

Friday's sanctions bring to 13 the sets imposed by the EU to try to compel the regime to halt its violent crackdown on dissent. The U.S. and others have also imposed sanctions. Previous measures were aimed at Syrian companies and Assad himself.

Those imposed Friday targeted Asma Assad, Syria's British-born first lady, banning her from traveling to EU countries and freezing any assets she may have there. They also included the president's mother, sister, sister-in-law and eight government ministers.

French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe said sanctions were weakening the regime.

"Their economic situation becomes ever more difficult. Syria has few reserves," he said. "We think its economic situation will become untenable."

While the measures have hurt Syria's economy, they appear to have had little effect on the regime's actions. It has regularly deployed troops, pro-government



DAVID ENDERS/MCT

Syrians in Amman, Jordan, demonstrate outside the Syrian embassy, March 23, 2012.

thugs and snipers to attack anti-regime protests. Human rights groups accuse the regime of shelling civilian areas and torturing and killing detainees in its push to stop the uprising, which it blames on terrorists carrying out a foreign conspiracy.

In Geneva, the U.N. Human Rights Council blasted Syria's crackdown and extended the mandate of a U.N. expert panel tasked with reporting on alleged abuses in the country.

A resolution passed by the 47-member body condemned "widespread, systematic and gross violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms perpetrated" by Syrian authorities, including summary executions, torture and sexual abuse of detainees and children.

Also Friday, UNICEF said at least 500 children have been killed in the conflict, while hundreds more have been injured, detained or abused. The U.N. children's agency said schools have closed and health centers have shut down or become too dangerous

for many families to reach.

Throughout the conflict, China and Russia have protected Syria from censure by the U.N. Security Council, fearing a strongly worded resolution condemning Assad could pave the way for military intervention, as happened in Libya last year.

Russia, however, softened its stance Thursday by calling for Assad to pull his troops out of Syrian cities. The U.N. has been trying to secure a cease-fire so all parties could hold a dialogue on a political solution to end the conflict. So far,

both sides have refused talks.

Regime forces continued to pound opposition areas Friday, and activists reported major shelling and fire with heavy machine-guns in the provinces of Homs in central Syria, Idlib in the north and Daraa.

The London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said at least 23 civilians were killed in government attacks Friday. Government troops and armed rebels clashed in a number of places, with at 13 soldiers and three rebel fighter killed, the group said.

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