

Sports

Twitter spat between footballers' wives Rooney, Vardy grips Britain

'There has been so much information given to them about me and my friends'

LONDON: Coleen Rooney says someone using Rebekah Vardy's Instagram account has leaked stories about her as a Twitter spat between the two footballers' wives gripped Britain yesterday.

Rooney, married to former England international Wayne Rooney, told her 1.3 million Twitter followers that she had spent five months attempting to work out who was sharing stories based on her personal social media posts.

She said she worked out that the stories were coming from the account of reality TV star Vardy, the wife of Leicester City striker and ex-England international Jamie Vardy, following a sting operation.

She wrote on Twitter: "For a few years now someone who I trusted to follow me on my personal Instagram account has been consistently informing The SUN newspaper of my private posts and stories."

"There has been so much information given to them about me, my friends and my family — all without my permission or knowledge."

Rooney, 33, said she had a suspicion of who it might be and blocked everyone apart from an Instagram page belonging to Vardy from seeing her Instagram stories.

She said she had posted a series of false stories, some of which made it into the Sun tabloid.

"I have saved and screenshotted all the original sto-

ries which clearly show just one person has viewed them," she said. "It's ... Rebekah Vardy's account."

Vardy tweeted in response: "If you thought this was happening you could have told me & I could have changed my passwords to see if it stopped."

"Over the years various people have had access to my insta & just this week I found I was following people I didn't know and have never followed myself."

The former star of British TV reality show "I'm A Celebrity ... Get Me Out Of Here!" added: "I'm not being funny but I don't need the money, what would I gain from selling stories on you?"

Vardy, 37, who is pregnant with her fifth child, said she was "so upset" that Rooney had made the accusation, adding: "I'm disgusted that I'm even having to deny this."

"You should have called me the first time this happened." The Sun has reported on Rooney and Vardy's exchange and their article states: "Each of the stories provided to the Sun was put to Coleen's representatives before publication, and on each occasion they declined to comment." The two women were trending on Twitter.

Streaming service Netflix appeared to make a joke about the spat, tweeting: "We're going to have to make a documentary about this, aren't we." — AFP



Coleen Rooney (left) and Rebekah Vardy

Fallen giants AC Milan gamble on Pioli

MILAN: Fallen Italian giants AC Milan yesterday appointed Stefano Pioli as their new coach a day after his predecessor Marco Giampaolo was sacked after just seven games in charge. The 53-year-old former Inter Milan boss arrives on a two-year deal, reported to be worth in the region of two million euros (\$2.2 million) a season.

Giampaolo was fired after just 111 days in the job as the former seven-time European champions slipped to 13th place in Serie A, following a run of four defeats in seven games.

The appointment of Pioli, an experienced coach but one who has never won a trophy in his 16-year managerial career, was a surprise one for the 18-time Serie A champions, who won their last league title in 2011.

"It's a choice that has been weighed up," Milan technical director Paolo Maldini told a press conference in the city. "Being the seventh round it can be seen as a gamble, but we want to be protagonists this season."

"This is why we decided to change with an experienced coach. For a young team we wanted a coach with

strong ideas." Pioli managed city rivals Inter Milan in the 2016-2017 season, but has been without a team since resigning from Fiorentina last April.

He has solid experience coaching top Italian clubs including Bologna, Lazio, Inter and Fiorentina, but has never won any trophies as a coach. The #PioliOut hashtag quickly trended worldwide on Twitter thanks to the angry reaction from Milan fans unhappy at his lack of trophies.

"I'm preparing for this adventure with great enthusiasm," said Pioli. "This is one of the most prestigious clubs in the world. I'm taking over a good team with serious potential and therefore think I can do a good job. "The fans have the right to criticise, but for me this is a further stimulus to make my work even better." Pioli's first game in charge will be against Lecce on October 20 in the San Siro. "Giampaolo is a great coach, but he has different ideas from me," continued Pioli. "I have to get these ideas to the players as soon as possible. Our ambition is to fight for the Champions League."

Pioli becomes the eighth manager to sit on the Milan bench in five years, not counting caretaker coach Mauro Tassotti, who took charge for one match after Massimiliano Allegri was sacked in January 2014.

Allegri was the man who led Milan to their last 'Scudetto' and went on to win five Serie A titles with Juventus. The club have tried everything since from Sinisa Mihajlovic, to former club icons such as Gennaro Gattuso, Clarence Seedorf and Filippo Inzaghi, and

most recently Giampaolo.

But nothing has managed to get a former European powerhouse back on the path to emulate past glories, with their last Champions League campaign in the 2013-2014 season.

The cash-strapped outfit finished fifth last season under Gattuso but surrendered their Europa League berth this season after breaching UEFA's financial fair play rules.

Giampaolo's run of defeats, including a 2-0 derby loss to Inter, leaves the club struggling just three points above the relegation zone. However they are also only four points away from the Champions league places and it is hoped Pioli, a former defender who won the Serie A title as a player with Juventus in 1986, can bring stability to the club that has experienced its share of backroom drama after being sold twice in the last two years. He lead Lazio to the Champions League in 2015 and was praised with how he guided a Fiorentina in turmoil after captain Davide Astori died in his sleep ahead of a match last year.

Italian media mogul and former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi, who oversaw Milan's glory years during his 31-year ownership, sold the club to Chinese businessman Li Yonghong in 2017 with US hedge fund Elliot Management assuming control in July 2018.

Ex-Brazil international Leonardo stepped down as sporting director earlier this year to move to Paris Saint-Germain with former stars Maldini and Zvonimir Boban taking over. — AFP

Messi says tax problems made him want to leave Barcelona

MADRID: Lionel Messi has admitted he wanted to leave Barcelona when he was under investigation from the Spanish tax authorities but insists now he intends to finish his career at the club. In an interview with Catalan radio station RAC1, Messi also said he had expected Neymar to sign for Real Madrid last summer after Barca failed to strike an agreement with Paris Saint-Germain.

Messi and his father Jorge were found guilty of defrauding Spain of 4.1 million euros in taxes between 2007 and 2009, for which they paid close to 10 million euros and Messi was handed a 21-month suspended prison sentence.

Asked on Tuesday night if he had ever wanted to leave Barcelona, Messi said: "In 2013-14, when I started having the tax problems, it was very difficult for me and my family." "My children were young and we had a very bad time. At that time, I had it in mind to leave, not because I wanted to leave Barca but because I wanted to leave Spain. I felt mistreated and I didn't want to be here anymore."

The 32-year-old's current contract expires in 2021 and Messi believes extending his deal "will not be a problem". "Today it is clearer that my idea is to finish here," Messi said. "For how I am at the club, for what I feel, and for the family and the children and how settled we are in this city. I would not like to disrupt that."

"Of course anything can happen but in principle, the idea is to stay here." Messi began playing football aged six for Newell's Old Boys, the Rosario club he supports in Argentina. "I always dreamed of being able to play again for Newell's and to have the experience of playing football in Argentina," he said. "But I have already told them that sometimes you have to think about what is best for your family."

Messi was keen to be reunited with Neymar last summer but Barcelona were unable to agree a fee with PSG. "I honestly thought at one time, especially in this market, that if he did not come here, he would go to Real Madrid because I thought he wanted to leave," Messi said.

"I wanted Ney to come because as a footballer, he is one of the best in the world. He is unpredictable, different and having him in our team would have given us more options."

Barcelona did sign Antoine Griezmann from Atletico Madrid, despite him rejecting the Catalans the year before. Messi denies suggestions of a rift between him and the Frenchman.

"The first year when we wanted to sign Griezmann, I said he was one of the best and that the best are always welcome," Messi said. "I have never had problem with him coming. So it's a lie."

Messi also offered his support to Barcelona coach Ernesto Valverde, who has been under pressure after a bumpy start to the season followed the team's Champions League collapse against Liverpool in May.

"It was not the coach's fault but it was also not my decision for him to stay," Messi said. "The club decided Valverde would continue and for me that was a joy, good for stability and he is a coach we support and love."

"If another coach comes, we will be with him. To achieve success, we all have to be united." Messi scored his first goal of the season in a 4-0 thrashing of Sevilla on Sunday, after two months spoiled by calf and thigh injuries.

"I'm still a bit short but I'm feeling better," Messi said. "My legs hurt against Sevilla but it's what happens when you come back. I'm getting closer." — AFP

England prepared to walk off if they are racially abused: Tammy

LONDON: Tammy Abraham says England are prepared to defy UEFA rules on racism and walk off the pitch if they face abuse during Euro 2020 qualifiers.

Gareth Southgate's team travel to the Czech Republic and Bulgaria for back-to-back matches on Friday and Monday. The second game, in Sofia, will be closely watched as the hosts will be playing in the Vasil Levski National Stadium, partially closed as a sanction following previous incidents of racism.

England's players received similar abuse in their qualifier against Montenegro in Podgorica earlier this year, where they stayed on the pitch and won 5-1. Southgate has said England will follow UEFA's three-step protocol for racial abuse.

The first step is for the referee to be made aware of any racism and halt the game for an announcement to be made. If the abuse continues, the referee will suspend the game for a period of time. The third and final step will see the official abandon the game.

But Abraham, 22, suggested that if England's players believe someone is not comfortable, captain Harry Kane could lead them off the pitch before the three steps are played out if they are not working.

"We've touched base on how to deal with the situation," said the Chelsea forward. "Harry Kane even said that if it happens and we're not happy with it, we speak to the player and if he's not happy, we all come off the pitch together."

"It's a team thing. Don't isolate one person, we're a whole team. If it happens to one of us, it happens to all of us." Defender Trent Alexander-Arnold, 21, believes the protocols will be followed but that in any potentially threatening situation a different course of action may be appropriate.

"We need to be professional athletes," said the Liverpool player. "We have an obligation to follow the protocols, that's what we need to do. If it does get to the extreme, maybe different action might be taken." Ashley Young was subjected to monkey chants in Sofia during an England game in 2011. The Bulgarian Football Union was fined 40,000 euros (£36,000) by UEFA for "discriminatory" chanting and for the lighting and throwing of fireworks.

Abraham suffered racial abuse online earlier this season, targeted by trolls after missing a penalty in the Super Cup shoot-out defeat to Liverpool. — AFP



Novak Djokovic

Djokovic says pressure to stay No 1 'a privilege'

SHANGHAI: Novak Djokovic said yesterday that he was "embracing" the pressure of being world number one and reigning champion at the Shanghai Masters this week. The 32-year-old from Serbia made a fast start to his title defence, easing past young Canadian Denis Shapovalov 6-3, 6-3 with minimum fuss.

Fresh from winning career title 76 in Tokyo, Djokovic will play big-serving American John Isner in the last 16 in China. The 16-time Grand Slam champion said he had no pain from the shoulder injury that forced him out of the US Open last 16 and is "confident that I can perform at my best". Djokovic said that sky-high expectations are "part of what we do". "But it's also a privilege and a sign or kind of an indicator that you're doing something that is important and that you're doing well," he said.

"I think when you feel pressure you're doing well. It's something that is inevitable so you might as well embrace it and accept it." Also in action today will be Roger Federer, who faces Belgium's David Goffin, and third seed Daniil Medvedev. The Russian faces Canadian qualifier Vasek Pospisil.

Two rising stars of men's tennis went toe-to-toe when Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece and Felix Auger-Aliassime clashed. Tsitsipas defeated the 19-year-old 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (7/3) for his first victory over the Canadian stretching all

the way back to their junior days.

The 21-year-old Tsitsipas, who plays Poland's Hubert Hurkacz in the last 16, said that he had always been behind Auger-Aliassime in his physical development — until now.

Standing 6ft 4ins (193cm), the seventh-ranked Greek insists he is still not as strong as some on the ATP Tour. "I think something that probably I'm trying to cover that deficiency that I have is not concentrate too much on my power and my strength and how hard I can hit," he said.

"Maybe play smarter and play more with my mind and not with my physical power." Another of the new generation hoping to usurp the likes of Djokovic and Federer is the 22-year-old Alexander Zverev.

The young German had a bout of dizziness during an incident-packed victory over French underdog Jeremy Chardy, 7-6 (15/13), 7-6 (7/3).

Zverev apologised to a television cameraman after he accidentally hit a ball square into his jaw in winning a point. Zverev was also seen by a doctor in the first set and in another colourful moment he smashed his racket on the floor during the mammoth first-set tie break.

The second-set tie break had a lighter moment — Zverev losing his grip while hitting a shot, his racket flying into the crowd. "It was definitely interesting," smiled Zverev, who plays Russia's Andrey Rublev. — AFP