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Man allegedly tries to punch Rajon Rondo

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT NOVEMBER 20, 2011

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A Haverhill man was arrested after he attempted to punch Boston Celtics point guard Rajon Rondo at a Lowell nightclub early Saturday morning, Lowell police said yesterday.

Eric Valarezo, 31, was arrested for disorderly conduct by officers who responded to a report of a fight at Brian's Ivy Hall at about 1:43 a.m. Saturday, police said.

Rondo and fellow NBA players Josh Smith, a forward for the Atlanta Hawks, and Nate Robinson, an Oklahoma City Thunder guard, were at the club for what the owner, Kevin Hayhurst, called a promotional event that started Friday night and continued into early Saturday.

Hayhurst said that 450 people were at the club on Merrimack Street, filling it to near capacity. The Celtics star appeared on a stage with Smith, who played with Rondo in

high school, and Robinson, a former Boston teammate, Hayhurst said.

As Rondo, 25, and a small entourage cut through the crowd toward the exit moments before the venue closed at 2 a.m., Valarezo allegedly tried to punch the Celtics player, police said.

No one was injured, according to police. Valarezo is expected to be arraigned in Lowell District Court today, authorities said.

The Middlesex District Attorney's Office referred questions yesterday to Lowell police, who declined further comment. A Celtics spokesman declined to comment because, due to the league's ongoing lockout, he said the team has no contact with players.

Reached by phone, Valarezo said he had not recognized Rondo and said that the 6-foot, 1-inch, 171-pound Celtics guard had started the altercation.

"He basically assaulted me by pushing me," Valarezo said. "I pushed him back in defense, and he started swinging at me."

Hayhurst said Rondo and his crew, which included body guards, "didn't seem aggressive at any point during the night."

"I didn't notice them being excessive," as the celebrity group moved from a VIP section through the packed building toward the exit, Hayhurst said by phone yesterday. "But, if [Valarezo] had his back turned and was bumped out of the way, that may have set him off."

He said the club had extra police detail and security because of the NBA players' presence. Valarezo was immediately pinned to the floor by security, escorted outside, and arrested, Hayhurst said.

"It lasted all of about 30 seconds," Hayhurst said.

Valarezo said he had gone to the club to celebrate a friend's birthday and was not aware that the Celtics' star was there.

“Basically, I didn’t even know it was him,” said Valarezo.

Valarezo said he is originally from Methuen, works in the medical field, and “is not really a sports person, which is why I didn’t recognize him.”

Rondo “should have been arrested, but, of course, since he’s a star he got away with it,” Valarezo said.


Hayhurst said Rondo drank only water, and Valarezo did not appear intoxicated.

Rondo “was pretty shy,” said Hayhurst. “He just sat in the corner drinking Fiji water. He wasn’t signing anything or taking any pictures with anyone.”

With fellow starters Kevin Garnett, Ray Allen, and Paul Pierce near the end of their long NBA careers, Rondo is poised to become the face of the Celtics franchise.

In the second of his five seasons, the two-time all-star helped the Celtics win a league-leading 17th championship. In the fall of 2009, Rondo signed a five-year, \$55-million extension to keep him with the Boston through the 2014-2015 season.

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