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Iraq to build on Tikrit, retake other areas

The Associated Press

TIKRIT, Iraq — Iraq declared a “magnificent victory” Wednesday over the Islamic State group in Tikrit, a key step in driving the militants out of their biggest strongholds.

Iraqi Defense Minister Khalid al-Obeidi made the pronouncement, saying security forces have “accomplished their mission” in the month-long offensive to rid Saddam Hussein’s hometown and the broader Salahuddin province of the militant group.

“We have the pleasure, with all our pride, to announce the good news of a magnificent victory,” Obeidi said in a video statement. “Here we come to you, Anbar! Here we come to you, Nineveh, and we say it with full resolution, confidence, and persistence,” naming other provinces under the sway of the extremists.

Extremists from the Islamic State group seized Tikrit last

summer during its advance across northern and western Iraq. The battle for Tikrit is seen as a key step toward eventually driving the militants out of Mosul, Iraq’s second-largest city and the provincial capital of Nineveh.

Iraqi forces, including soldiers, police officers, Shiite militias and Sunni tribes, launched a large-scale operation to recapture Tikrit on March 2. Last week, the United States launched airstrikes on the embattled city at the request of the Iraqi government.

Recapturing Tikrit would be the biggest win so far for Baghdad’s Shiite-led government. The city is about 80 miles north of Baghdad and lies on the road connecting the capital to Mosul. Retaking it will help Iraqi forces have a major supply link for any future operation against Mosul.

Earlier Wednesday, Iraqi security forces fired on snipers and searched homes for

remaining militants. Soldiers fanned out from the charred skeletal remains of the Salahuddin provincial government complex, captured the day before. Militant mortar fire, which had been intense over previous days, fell silent Wednesday, with commanders saying only a few militant snipers remained in the city. They spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss ongoing operations.

The objective, Interior Minister Mohammed Salem al-Ghabban said Wednesday, is now to restore normalcy as quickly as possible.

“After clearing the area from roadside bombs and car bombs, we will reopen police stations to restore normalcy in the city, and we will form committees to supervise the return of people displaced from their homes,” al-Ghabban said. He said the government will help displaced residents return and that a civil defense unit will be combing the city for roadside bombs and

car bombs.

“Daesh is completely defeated,” he added, using an Arabic name for the group.

During a visit to Tikrit, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said that military engineering units still need more time to clear the city from booby traps. He also waved an Iraqi flag in photos posted on his social media accounts.

“God’s willing, there will be a fund to rebuild areas destroyed by Daesh and the war. Tikrit and Salahuddin areas will be covered by this fund,” al-Abadi said.

Aziz Jaber, a political science professor at Baghdad’s Mustansiriyah University, said retaking Tikrit could be seen as the “beginning of the end” for the Islamic State group in Iraq.

“Daesh was very talented in psychological warfare, but not any more after its defeat in Tikrit,” he said. “Now, the morale of the Iraqi forces is high, while that of Daesh is low.”

Study of post-9/11 GIs finds no suicide-war service link

The Seattle Times

SEATTLE — A study of more than 3.9 million men and women who served in the military during the post-9/11 era found that deploying to a war zone did not result in an elevated risk of suicide.

Instead, it found higher rates of suicide among those who served less than four years in the military, or did not leave military service with an honorable discharge.

“There is sometimes an impression that anyone who deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan is at risk of suicide, and the study shows that is not supported by the data,” said Mark Reger, a researcher based at

Joint Base Lewis-McChord, who is co-author of the study published Wednesday online in JAMA Psychiatry.

Suicides have been a major concern in the military during the post-9/11 years, with the rates in the Army and Marine Corps almost doubling during the last decade.

The study launched by the JBLM-based National Center for Telehealth and Technology covered military personnel who served between 2001 and 2007. It tracked suicides while they were in uniform and also was able to identify — through 2009 — how many suicides occurred after they left the military.

The study found that someone who served less than one

year in the military before discharge had more than triple the risk of suicide than someone who served 20 or more years.

It also found that servicemembers who did not receive an honorable discharge had a 21 percent higher risk of suicide than a servicemember who received an honorable discharge.

The study comes with an important caveat: Many servicemembers who deployed did not come under fire.

The researchers lacked the data to determine the numbers of military personnel in the study who were exposed to combat. The study does not try to draw any conclusions about whether military personnel in-

involved in the traumatic events of the battlefield may have higher rates of suicide.

“Unfortunately in our data set we did not have combat-exposure data, so I can’t comment on that,” said Reger, who noted that servicemembers with high rates of combat exposure, combat injuries and who had adjustment problems after deployment all required additional study.

The researchers also noted their results differed from an Army study that looked only at suicides among active-duty Army personnel.

That study did find elevated suicide risks among presently and previously deployed soldiers.

Goodbye, Peleliu

BY JENNIFER HLAD
Stars and Stripes

SAN DIEGO — Nearly 35 years after the USS Peleliu entered the fleet, the crew of the amphibious assault ship disembarked for the last time in a ceremonial decommissioning Tuesday.

The “Iron Nickel” traveled more than a million nautical miles after it was commissioned on May 3, 1980, in Pascagoula, Miss. The last active Tarawa-class ship deployed 17 times and was the platform for 178,051 flight operations.

But the legacy of the ship is “not this mass of steel,” said Capt. Paul Spedero, the last commanding officer. Instead, he said, it lies with the Marines and sailors who fought and died in an amphibious assault and ensuing battle on the coral island of Peleliu during World War II, and the nearly 58,000 Marines and sailors who have served aboard the ship.

Nine Marines were awarded the Medal of Honor for valor during the battle of Peleliu, which was predicted to last four days but instead stretched on for more than two months.

In 2009, a group of Marines who fought on the island of Peleliu visited the ship as part of their 56th and final reunion, said Rear Adm. Marcus A. Hitchcock, who served as the ship’s 18th commanding officer and is now director of fleet/joint training at U.S. Fleet Forces Command.

The Marines walked through the ship’s Hall of Heroes and told the sailors about what it was like to fight in the island’s “furnace-like heat” against the entrenched Japanese troops.

Anthony Indrieri traveled from Sacramento for the ship’s decommissioning. He served aboard the Peleliu in 1989-90 on a six-month deployment to the Western Pacific, just before his unit left for Operation Desert Storm. The ship was steaming toward Australia when it got the call to head for Africa because an attack on an embassy was reportedly imminent.

Indrieri and his fellow Ma-

rines from 3rd Platoon, Delta Company, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment were on helicopters heading to an unknown country when they were called back to the ship, he said.

“The terrorists changed their minds,” when they heard the Marines were coming, he said.

Marc Danilowicz, who served on the ship from October 1995 to March 2000, called the Peleliu “a very significant part of my past.”

The ship played a role in many significant events — including sending the first U.S. troops to Afghanistan in November 2001, and the liberation of East Timor while Danilowicz was serving aboard — but the sailors were what made it great, he said.

Stephen Seim was assigned to the Peleliu as an ensign, before the ship was even commissioned. As one of the original crewmembers, he is known as a “plank holder” and brought his wooden commissioning plaque to the ceremony.

Seim said one of his most vivid memories was rescuing about 60 Vietnamese refugees in 1982. One of the women was very pregnant, and Seim and another sailor had to carry her on board, where she gave birth, he said. During the same deployment, Seim was one of the first U.S. troops to land on the black sands of Iwo Jima since World War II.

Being back on the ship brought a range of memories flooding back, he said.

The event was an emotional one for Bill Cunningham, another plank owner. He reported to the ship in July 1979 for pre-commissioning and left in April 1982 as a chief petty officer. He also designed the ship’s coat of arms and painted a mural of the island of Peleliu inside.

Cunningham retired from the Navy 30 years ago, and said the Peleliu was “the most inspiring assignment of my entire career.” Though the ship is “just cold steel,” the sailors made it something special, he said.

“Each of us left the ship a better man than when we arrived,” Cunningham said. “I couldn’t let her go without saying goodbye.”

Competing claims on state of Iran talks

The Associated Press

LAUSANNE, Switzerland — Negotiations over Iran’s nuclear program resumed here Wednesday but were almost immediately beset by competing claims, just hours after diplomats abandoned a March 31 deadline to reach the outline of a deal and agreed to press on. And as the latest round hit the week mark, three of the six foreign ministers involved left the talks with prospects for agreement remaining uncertain.

Iran’s deputy foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi, told reporters that if the sides make progress on the text of a joint statement, then that could be issued by the

end of the day. But he suggested the statement would contain no specifics.

A senior western official quickly pushed back, saying that nothing about a statement had been decided and that Iran’s negotiating partners would not accept a document that contained no details. The official was not authorized to speak to the negotiations by name.

The U.S. and its partners want to crimp Iranian efforts to improve the performance of centrifuges that enrich uranium.

The foreign ministers of China, France and Russia departed Lausanne overnight.

Navy faulted for impact of training on marine life

The Associated Press

HONOLULU — A federal judge on Tuesday said the National Marine Fisheries Service violated environmental laws when it approved the Navy’s plans for training in waters off Hawaii and Southern California.

The agency failed to support its finding that the training would have a “negligible impact” on marine life, U.S. District Court Judge Susan Oki Mollway wrote in her ruling.

The Navy, she said, also failed to take a hard look at alternatives such as training in different areas or at different times to avoid potentially harming dolphins, whales and other species.

Environmental groups, including the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Conservation Council for Hawaii, filed the lawsuit in federal court in Honolulu.

The Navy’s plans estimate it could inadvertently kill 155 whales and dolphins off Hawaii

and Southern California, mostly from explosives. It estimated it could cause more than 11,000 serious injuries off the East Coast and 2,000 off Hawaii and Southern California.

Mollway said the National Marine Fisheries Service was allowing the Navy to kill certain populations at rates that would affect their ability to survive. For example, it authorized the killing of eight bottlenose dolphins around Hawaii Island each year when this population can only sustain less than one death per year.

U.S. Pacific Fleet spokesman Mark Matsunaga said the Navy was reviewing the order and couldn’t comment on specifics. He said it’s essential for sailors to have realistic training and to have equipment that has been thoroughly tested.

“The Navy has been training and testing in the Hawaii and Southern California ranges for more than 60 years without causing the harm alleged by the plaintiffs in this case,” Matsunaga said in a statement.

Getting it done Royals' Way

The Associated Press

SURPRISE, Ariz. — The first thing Dayton Moore makes clear is that he never set out to change how baseball clubs are built. He simply wanted to win games, something the Kansas City Royals had repeatedly failed to do for nearly three decades.

Never once did Moore think he'd become the next Billy Beane, the Oakland Athletics' general manager whose use of advanced statistics revolutionized the game.

"We were just trying to put ourselves in the best position to win," Moore said.

Like the A's, the Royals are a small-market team operating within very narrow margins. They can't spend big on key free agents. But rather than search for undervalued players by putting a premium on things such as on-base percentage — the "Moneyball" approach of Beane — Moore chose to identify specific players and skillsets for the wide expanses of Kauffman Stadium.

The result was The Royals Way: Invest heavily in speed and defense at the expense of power, and build the game's best bullpen to take pressure off the starting rotation.

"In a market like ours, we may not be able to afford top-of-the-rotation pitchers, or a power bat," Moore explained. "But what helps your starting pitchers? A good bullpen. What makes them better? Defense. So what we tried to do was make sure we have as many quality defenders and speed-type players as possible."

Makes sense, right? Speedy, weak-hitting outfielders come cheaper than

someone who pounds 30 homers. And you can get a bushel of relievers for the price of a starting pitcher.

Yet the approach was initially met with derision. Many fans still could not understand why the frugal Royals never made runs at pricy power bats like Albert Pujols. It hardly quelled their voices when the Royals continued to languish near the bottom of the standings.

But something strange happened last year, when Moore's long-term vision finally matured.

It wound up working.

The Royals grinded out runs one at a time. They stole bases, went first to third on infield hits, scrapped for the lead. Once they got it, they turned it over to Kelvin Herrera, Wade Davis and Greg Holland, a trio of relievers whose 100 mph fastballs were nearly unhittable.

"They're always putting pressure on you," Indians manager Terry Francona said of his club's division rival. "Sometimes you play a team like Detroit and they kind of pummel you. But they're not stealing bases. So it's a different way of contending."

That's exactly what the Royals did, too: They started to contend. And when folks looked at the standings in October, the long-suffering franchise was headed for the playoffs.

By that point, folks around baseball were trying to figure out how the Royals had done it. Then, some of them started trying to replicate it.

The market for high-end relievers exploded this past offseason, the White Sox throwing \$46 million at David Robertson,

the Yankees tossing \$36 million toward Andrew Miller.

A bear market made heavy hitters as pricy as ever, but money lavished on defensive dynamos also started to rise. Gold Glove winner Nick Markakis signed a \$44 million deal with the Braves, and Gold Glove finalist Adam LaRoche inked a two-year, \$25 million deal with the White Sox.

All of those players fit the Royals mold. "As an industry, we're always looking for what is the next competitive advantage," said Thad Levine, the assistant general manager of the Texas Rangers. "I think people feel as if when power abates, is speed the one thing that could be the true differentiation?"

There are dangers in trying to follow The Royals Way, though.

The numbers that Kansas City's bullpen posted last year were historic, and history portends that relievers have the shelf life of fresh fruit.

An offense that churns out runs one at a time may help a team win enough games to make the playoffs, but what happens when that club runs into a shutdown starter? The Royals certainly could have used someone who could change the game with one swing of the bat when they trailed the Giants by a run in Game 7 of the World Series.

"There is a danger in the copycat mentality," said Cubs GM Jed Hoyer. "You see it a lot after a team has a really good post-season run. I mean, the Royals have done it their way and I think they should be commended for it. But we all have to sort of decide where we put our emphasis."

Promising rookies hit big stage

The Associated Press

When it comes to baseball's top prospects, pay close attention to the Windy City, Southern California and a trio of potential Cuban stars.

Check out these rookies in 2015, beginning with a couple of promising young hitters:

■ **3B Kris Bryant, Chicago Cubs:** The No. 2 overall pick in the 2013 draft showed off his impressive power in spring training, but it looks as if he will begin the season at Triple-A Iowa to work on his defense. Of course, the additional time in the minors also could push back his eligibility for free agency — a potential long-term benefit for the Cubs.

The Las Vegas native likely will return to Chicago by the end of April, leaving plenty of time for the talented slugger to make a run at the Cubs' first NL Rookie of the Year award since Geovany Soto in 2008.

■ **OF Joc Pederson, Los Angeles Dodgers:** The 22-year-old Pederson broke into the majors last September, and looks ready for a big season after a strong training camp with the NL West champs. He hit .303 with 33 homers and 30 steals with Triple-A Albuquerque before he joined Los Angeles last year.

■ **OF Rusney Castillo, Boston:** The Cuban slugger made his major league debut last year, batting .333 with two homers in 10 games after signing a \$72.5 million, seven-year contract in August. He was hampered by a left oblique strain for part of the spring, but is expected to be a key contributor this season for the revamped Red Sox.

■ **3B/OF Yasmany Tomas, Arizona:** Forget questions about his position, the 24-year-old Cuban defector brings a powerful bat to a Diamondbacks team hoping to bounce back after losing 98 games a year ago. Tomas hit .375 (6-for-16) with two homers and five RBIs in the 2013 World Baseball Classic.

■ **RHP Raisel Iglesias, Cincinnati:** The converted shortstop pitched mostly in relief before he defected from Cuba in November 2013, but the Reds think he can be a successful starter. The 6-foot-2 right-hander has a good slider, an improving changeup and a fastball that gets into the mid-90s.

■ **LHP Carlos Rodon, Chicago White Sox:** The No. 3 selection in last year's draft struck out 38 in 242/3 innings in the minors last season. The 6-foot-3 lefty has great stuff and could help an improved Chicago club in the bullpen or rotation.

■ **LHP Daniel Norris and RHP Aaron Sanchez, Toronto:** Norris and Sanchez are contending for a spot in the rotation after Marcus Stroman hurt his left knee this spring, and Sanchez also could help in the bullpen.

Norris began last season at Class-A Dunedin and finished the year in Toronto, making five September appearances with the Blue Jays. Sanchez also made his major league debut last year, going 2-2 with three saves and a sparkling 1.09 ERA in 24 games.

Final Four trip pleasant surprise for Izzo

The Associated Press

DETROIT — Michigan State's run to the Final Four came one season later than expected, and that's part of the reason coach Tom Izzo is enjoying it so much.

"Last year we were picked by the president and everyone else, and we didn't get out of the Elite Eight," Izzo said Monday. "It doesn't matter who picks us and who doesn't, I just appreciate the respect our program has gotten. Being where we are this year, I think we're still respected, and that's all that matters to me."

Since taking over the Michigan State program in 1995, Izzo had never gone more than three seasons without a Final Four appearance until his 2014 team fell a game short. The Spartans lost three key players from last year — first-round draft picks Gary Harris and Adreian Payne, as well as point guard Keith Appling — but the holdovers took that disappointment to heart. Now, this largely unheralded group is back on college basketball's biggest stage, the obvious underdog at a Final Four that includes unbeaten Kentucky and two other No. 1 seeds.

"We got here the hard way," Izzo said. "We earned our way here."

Although the Spartans were a No. 4 seed last season, they were a chic pick to win it all after overcoming injury problems and

rolling through the Big Ten Tournament. Even President Barack Obama penciled the Spartans in for the national title, but a loss to seventh-seeded Connecticut in the regional finals ended that pursuit.

The 2014 Spartans were supposed to be one of Izzo's better teams, but even the coach they call "Tournament Tom" endures a postseason setback every now and then. After the loss to UConn, expectations were tempered for this season, and as Michigan State struggled a bit in January and early February, the Spartans looked like a probable NCAA Tournament team, but not much more.

"There came a point in the year where it was just us, just the people in our locker room and our program," guard Travis Trice said. "I'm just more happy for us as a whole. We stuck together."

There were a few signs all along that this team had potential. Michigan State lost tight games to Kansas, Notre Dame and Maryland, an indication that the Spartans could play on the same level as those teams. After a loss at home to Illinois on Feb. 7, the Spartans went on the road and beat Northwestern by 24, and Izzo began to notice some encouraging signs.

"We went on the road to Northwestern. We had Ohio State, at Michigan, at Illinois. We won all four of those games," Izzo said. "We gained a little confidence. We gained

a little toughness during that stretch."

The Spartans won six of their last eight games in the regular season, then reached the Big Ten title game, where they nearly upset Wisconsin.

Michigan State seemed to be headed in the right direction, and after the seventh-seeded Spartans upset second-seeded Virginia in the NCAA Tournament, they became legitimate Final Four contenders.

"Tom is as good as there is. Not just a coach, but he's a great guy," Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski said. "Nothing surprises me that he and his program would do. ... As he develops each team, I don't know what the timeframe of it is until that group understands what the program is about, whether it be offense, defense or just character-wise, but they're going to keep improving."

Now Izzo and Krzyzewski will face each other in Saturday night's national semifinals. It's a rematch of a game Duke won 81-71 back in November, but that's part of a regular season that now seems like ancient history for the Spartans.

"Probably back around the beginning or early in February is when I said, 'This team has a chance to make a run.' Did I think it would be this deep a run? No, I can't say I did," Izzo said. "But I'm very proud. That's what makes me prouder of them. They even surprised me a little bit."



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Ovechkin nets 50 for 6th time

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Alex Ovechkin smiled that gap-toothed grin of his while standing for a commemorative photo in the locker room, holding the puck he put in the net a couple of hours earlier for his NHL-leading 50th goal.

"A good picture," the player known as Alex the Great proclaimed.

It's a pose he is getting used to.

Ovechkin netted No. 50 in a season for the sixth time, tying a team record in the process with his 472nd career goal, and added an assist Tuesday night to help the Washington Capitals push toward a playoff berth by beating the Carolina Hurricanes 4-2.

Only five other players reached the half-century mark at least six times: Wayne Gretzky and Mike Bossy had nine, and Mario Lemieux, Marcel Dionne and Guy Lafleur had six.

Quite a group.

"Every year is harder and harder, but it's a huge (accomplishment) being with the names up there," Ovechkin said. "It's always nice. Every year, you don't know what to expect from yourself and how you're going to play."

The three-time league MVP gave Washington a 2-0 lead at 11:12 of the first period, taking a pass from another Russian, Evgeny Kuznetsov, and sending a shot from just inside the left circle past goalie Cam Ward.

Ovechkin dropped his left knee to the ice and pumped his right glove, then thrust both arms overhead. Many fans responded with chants of "M-V-P! M-V-P!" and then rose to give him a standing ovation when the goal was announced. Sitting on the bench, Ovechkin acknowledged the support with a wave.

"It's a lot of fun to have him as a teammate," said Brooks Laich, who scored the tiebreaking goal after Carolina had made it 2-0.

Ovechkin's career goal total matches former player Peter Bondra's with the Capitals. Ovechkin is playing in his 10th season for Washington, and Tuesday's game was his 755th, more than 200 fewer than Bondra's 961 with the franchise.

"Put it in his wheelhouse," said Capitals goalie Braden Holtby, who made 23 saves,

"and there's a good chance it's going in."

On Tuesday, after Eric Staal and Nathan Gerbe scored for Carolina, Washington went back in front on goals 82 seconds apart in the second period by Laich and Joel Ward. The last goal came on Ovechkin's 419th career assist, moving him past Michal Pivonka for the second-most by a Capitals player, behind only current teammate Nicklas Backstrom's 422.

Washington began the day seventh in the Eastern Conference, closing in on a playoff berth, and now enters a difficult stretch to end the regular season. A road trip begins Thursday at Montreal, followed by visits to Ottawa and Detroit. The Capitals then finish by hosting Boston and the Rangers.

Canucks 5, Predators 4 (SO): Nick Bonino and Radim Vrbata scored in the shootout, and Vancouver avoided being swept by host Nashville.

The Canucks padded their lead to four points over Calgary to stay in second place in the Pacific Division with their second win in two nights. They did it by killing off a five-minute major penalty that carried into overtime.

Eddie Lack stopped all four Nashville shots in overtime, then turned away attempts by Mike Santorelli and Filip Forsberg in the shootout. Mike Fisher, Cody Franson, Taylor Beck and Viktor Stalberg scored for Nashville, which lost its second straight at home.

Maple Leafs 3, Lightning 1: Nazem Kadri had a goal and assist, and host Toronto played the role of spoiler in a win over playoff-bound Tampa Bay.

One day after the Lightning secured a playoff spot, they fell behind 2-0 after a sluggish spell midway through the first period.

Kadri's goal at 8:53 marked the first time the Maple Leafs (29-42-6) had the lead in a game in 541:08 of action.

David Booth and Morgan Rielly also scored for Toronto, which got a fine 40-save performance from James Reimer in winning its second straight.

The Lightning, with 101 points, are one behind Montreal for first place in the Atlantic Division.

Bruins 3, Panthers 2: Milan

Lucic scored the tiebreaking goal with 1:09 left as Boston rallied to beat visiting Florida.

Tuukka Rask had 22 saves for the Bruins, who moved six points ahead of the Panthers.

Brandon Pirri and Brad Boyes scored in the second period to give Florida a 2-1 lead. Roberto Luongo made 26 saves.

Rangers 3, Jets 2: Chris Kreider scored with 3:46 left in the third period, and Henrik Lundqvist and the New York Rangers rallied to beat host Winnipeg.

Lundqvist, playing for the second time since missing 25 games with a neck injury, stopped 32 shots and earned his first win in his return.

The playoff-bound Rangers (48-21-7) also got goals from Mats Zuccarello and Derick Brassard, snapped a two-game skid, and moved one point ahead of Montreal atop the Eastern Conference.

Jim Slater and Lee Stempniak scored for Winnipeg (39-26-12). Pavelec made 21 saves in the loss.

Senators 2, Red Wings 1 (SO): Mark Stone scored the final goal in the shootout, and Ottawa beat host Detroit.

Mika Zibanejad and Kyle Turris also had shootout goals for the Senators.

Clarke MacArthur scored in the third period, and Andrew Hammond, who missed the previous two games because of a lower-body injury, returned and made 16 saves.

Petr Mrazek stopped 33 shots for Detroit, which got a regulation and shootout goal from Gustav Nyquist. Tomas Tatar also scored in the shootout.

Blue Jackets 3, Devils 2 (OT): Jack Johnson's backhander 56 seconds into overtime helped Columbus top visiting New Jersey and extend its winning streak to seven.

It was the Devils' sixth straight loss (0-5-1).

Brandon Dubinsky scored on a penalty shot, Nick Foligno had a power-play goal, and Sergei Bobrovsky made 24 saves. Ryan Johansen had two assists, giving him at least one in seven straight games — one off the franchise mark.

Warriors hold off Clippers

The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Stephen Curry scored 27 points, Klay Thompson added 25 and the Golden State Warriors edged the Los Angeles Clippers 110-106 Tuesday night for their 10th consecutive victory.

The Clippers blew a 17-point lead and had their seven-game winning streak snapped. Blake Griffin scored 40 points, Chris Paul added 27 and J.J. Redick 14.

Paul's layup drew the Clippers to 106-104 with 12 seconds left, but he was called for a backcourt violation while taking an in-bounds pass from DeAndre Jordan with 9 seconds left.

Thompson and Curry combined on four straight free throws to close out the win for the Pacific Division champions.

David Lee added 17 points for the Warriors, who had lost four in a row at Staples Center.

Neither team led by more than three points for much of the fourth quarter.

The Warriors were ahead 103-100 when Jordan got fouled. He made the first and caught a break with a lane violation on the second. Jordan took advantage and hit that one, too, leaving the Clippers trailing by one.

Then the Clippers got unlucky. Matt Barnes was called for a foul on Andre Iguodala, who had already put up a three-pointer before Barnes got to him in front of the Clippers' bench. Iguodala made all three free throws, extending the Warriors' lead to 106-102.

Redick missed a 3-pointer and Paul missed a 3 and another jumper before his layup got the Clippers within two with 12 seconds to go.

Thompson and Curry combined to score 19 straight points early in the third, with each of them hitting 3-pointers, to pull the Warriors into a 67-all tie. A minute later, Curry's 3-pointer gave the Warriors their first lead, 72-71.

Spurs 95, Heat 81: Kawhi Leonard scored 22 points and Tony Parker added 16 in his 1,000th NBA game, leading the San Antonio to the road win.

Tim Duncan had 12 points and 11 rebounds for San Antonio, which went 12-3 in March — the league's second-best record during the month behind only Golden State.

San Antonio stayed No. 6 in the West, and could clinch a playoff berth Wednesday in Orlando.

Nets 111, Pacers 106: Brook Lopez had 24 points and 11 rebounds, and host Brooklyn reclaimed sole possession of eighth place in the Eastern Conference with its season-high fourth straight victory.

The Nets moved back ahead of Boston and dealt a blow to the Pacers, who fell 1½ games behind Brooklyn. They will visit the Celtics on Wednesday.

Pistons 105, Hawks 95: Andre Drummond had 22 points and 13 rebounds, powering Detroit to the home victory.

Anthony Tolliver had 13 points and 10 rebounds for the Pistons, who have won five of six.

The Hawks, who have clinched the Eastern Conference's top seed for the playoffs, have dropped two of three.

Stewart, Loyd top picks for All-America

The Associated Press

Breanna Stewart is among the best players in women's basketball, and she never takes it for granted.

Connecticut's star junior earned All-America honors from The Associated Press for the second straight season Tuesday. She was a unanimous choice for the second consecutive year.

"It means a lot because it means each season you've gotten better and been productive on the court," Stewart said.

Notre Dame's Jewell Loyd was also on all 35 ballots selected by the national media panel that votes in the weekly Top 25. It's the eighth straight season with at least one unanimous choice. Voting was done before the NCAA Tournament.

The two juniors are joined on the first team by South Carolina's Tiffany Mitchell, Baylor's Nina Davis and Minnesota's Amanda Zahui B.

"We've grown up with each other, whether it's been AAU or McDonalds or USA, we've seen each other and we have that sense of familiarity with each other," Stewart said. "Even now, when we play against each other, I think we have a huge

sense of respect for one another."

This is only the second time since the AP started honoring All-Americans in 1996 there were no seniors on the team.

Loyd is the latest in a line of Notre Dame standouts.

"It's great to be listed alongside those former Irish greats," said Loyd, who earned the same honor as former teammates Skylar Diggins and Kayla McBride. "Pretty much for me, it was watching Sky and learning from her and watching Natalie Achonwa and learning from her. Seeing how hard they work helped make me better."

The Irish's star guard averaged 20.1 points this season.

Davis gave Baylor a first-team All-America player for the fifth straight season, joining former Lady Bears Brittney Griner and Odyssey Sims. The sophomore forward averaged 20.9 points and 8.2 rebounds this season.

While UConn, Notre Dame and Baylor have dominated the All-America teams the past few seasons, Mitchell became the first South Carolina player ever to earn that accolade. The junior guard averaged 14.3 points to help South Carolina

win the SEC regular season and conference tournament titles.

No player had more of a meteoric rise this season than Zahui B. The 6-foot-5 sophomore center was fourth in the nation in rebounding and helped guide Minnesota to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2009. She had one monster week in February when she combined for 66 points and 56 rebounds in two victories.

The native of Sweden was startled to learn she earned All-America honors.

"It's top five? Oh, I didn't know that. That's awesome," she said. "I'm kind of like speechless. That's crazy."

UConn teammates Kaleena Mosqueda-Lewis and Moriah Jefferson were on the second team along with Elizabeth Williams of Duke, Brittany Boyd of California and Ohio State freshman Kelsey Mitchell.

The third team features Lexie Brown of Maryland, Samantha Logic of Iowa, Jillian Alleyne of Oregon, A'ja Wilson of South Carolina, Ruth Hamblin of Oregon State and Reshanda Gray of California.

Stewart, Loyd and Tiffany Mitchell were on the preseason team.