

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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US war games in former Soviet backyard

The Associated Press

AMARI AIR BASE, Estonia — Russia is so close that the F-16 fighter pilots can see it on the horizon as they swoop down over a training range in Estonia in the biggest ever show of U.S. air power in the Baltic countries.

The simulated bombs release smoke on impact, but the M-61 cannon fires live ammunition, rattling the aircraft with a deafening tremor and shattering targets on the ground.

The four-week drill is part of a string of nonstop exercises by U.S. land, sea and air forces in Europe — from Estonia in the north to Bulgaria in the south — scaled up since last year to reassure nervous NATO allies after Russia's military intervention in Ukraine. U.S. and Russian forces are now essentially back in a Cold War-style standoff, flexing their muscles along NATO's eastern flank.

The saber-rattling raises the specter that either side could

misinterpret a move by the other, triggering a conflict between two powers with major nuclear arsenals despite a sharp reduction from the Cold War era.

"A dangerous game of military brinkmanship is now being played in Europe," said Ian Kearns, director of the European Leadership Network, a London-based think-tank. "If one commander or one pilot makes a mistake or a bad decision in this situation, we may have casualties and a high-stakes cycle of escalation that is difficult to stop."

With memories of five decades of Soviet occupation still fresh, many in the Baltic countries find the presence of U.S. forces a comfort rather than a risk.

In recent months, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have seen hundreds of U.S. armored vehicles, tanks and helicopters arrive on their soil. With a combined population of a little more than 6 million, tiny armies and no combat aircraft or vehicles, the

last time tanks rumbled through their streets was about 20 years ago, when remnants of the Soviet army pulled out of the region.

The commander of Estonia's tiny air force, Col. Jaak Tarien, described the roar of American F-16s taking off from Amari — a former Soviet air base — as "the sound of freedom."

Normally based in Aviano, Italy, 14 fighter jets and about 300 personnel from the 510th Fighter Squadron are training together with the Estonians — but also the Swedish and Finnish air forces. Meanwhile, Spain's air force is in charge of NATO's rotating air patrols over the Baltic countries.

In Moscow the U.S. Air Force drills just 60 miles from the Russian border are seen in a different light.

"It takes F-16 fighters just a few minutes to reach St. Petersburg," Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashovich said, referring to the major Russian port city on the Baltic Sea.

He expressed concern that the ongoing exercise could herald plans to "permanently deploy strike aircraft capable of carrying nuclear weapons at the Russian border."

Moscow also says the U.S. decision to deploy armored vehicles in Eastern Europe violates an earlier agreement between Russia and NATO.

American officials say their troop deployments are on a rotational basis.

The Pentagon has said that some 3,000 U.S. troops will be conducting training exercises in Eastern Europe this year. That's a small number compared to the hundreds of thousands of U.S. troops that have been withdrawn from Europe since the days when the Iron Curtain divided the continent. But the fact that they are carrying out exercises in what used to be Moscow's backyard makes it all the more sensitive; the Kremlin sees NATO's eastward expansion as a top security threat.

Bergdahl desertion charge focused on hazardous duty element

BY NANCY MONTGOMERY

Stars and Stripes

Whether Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl planned to return to his combat outpost is irrelevant, according to the desertion charge the Army has brought against him.

Whether he left to report misconduct to the nearest four-star general, as a letter from his lawyer seems to indicate, also probably doesn't matter from a legal point of view, according to military justice experts.

Bergdahl, who spent five years in captivity in Afghanistan after disappearing from his post in June 2009, is charged under Article 85 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice with desertion with "the intent to shirk important service and

avoid hazardous duty." It carries a potential penalty of as many as five years in prison, dishonorable discharge and forfeiture of all benefits.

Winning a conviction would require a prosecutor to prove that the duty Bergdahl missed was in fact hazardous or important, and that he intended to miss it. On the face of it, experts said, it looks like the government has a pretty good case.

The charge sheet — excerpts of which are posted on the National Institute of Military Justice's CAAFLOG website — specifies that Bergdahl quit his post to avoid combat operations, guard duty and combat patrol duties in Afghanistan. Those three things would appear to be "hazardous duty and important

service," as defined by military courts.

Hazardous duty is defined in military law books as involving danger, risk or peril. Important service is defined as that which is more significant than the ordinary, everyday duty.

Hazardous duty can be difficult to prove because not everyone in a combat zone performs it. Almost any duties performed in combat zones count as important service, the courts have found.

According to a letter released last month by Bergdahl's lawyer, Eugene Fidell, a command investigation into the soldier's disappearance "... concludes that his specific intent was to bring what he thought were disturbing circumstances to the attention of

the nearest general officer."

Fidell declined to comment on the charges against Bergdahl. But in the letter he wrote to the commander in charge of the case, he discussed the idea of "constructive condonation."

That concept, sometimes used in desertion cases, is that if a wrong appears to be forgiven or forgotten — by reinstating a deserter to duty — it is condoned and may be dismissed.

Fidell's letter also addressed the unique situation in Bergdahl's case.

If Bergdahl were seized by the Taliban shortly after he left the post, he would not have been voluntarily absent.

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Panel to rule on former Green Beret

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — A former Green Beret officer who was stripped of one of the military's top awards for heroism by the Army secretary will soon face a panel of officers that can throw him out of the service, according to the officer's lawyer and Army officials.

Army Maj. Mathew L. Golsteyn will face an administrative hearing known as a board of inquiry the week of May 18, according to a memorandum sent March 26 by the panel's top officer, Col. Stuart Goldsmith.

It is believed the board will review evidence against Golsteyn in the 2010 death of a Taliban bomb maker that the

Army Criminal Investigation Command already has reviewed. That probe closed last year without Golsteyn being charged with any crime, according to officials familiar with the case.

Golsteyn's lawyer, Phil Stackhouse, confirmed the tentative hearing date and said his client is concerned about being separated from the Army under other-than-honorable circumstances because it would eliminate medical benefits that most veterans receive. An Army medical board is evaluating a medical retirement for Golsteyn based on an operation he had on his heart while serving, spinal damage, a traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic

stress, Stackhouse said.

A spokesman for U.S. Army Special Operations Command, Lt. Col. Mark Lastoria, said the Army began moving to separate Golsteyn from the service in February. The board of inquiry will be convened by Army Special Forces Command at Fort Bragg, N.C., and will allow Golsteyn to make a case for why he should remain on active duty, Lastoria said.

Golsteyn's case garnered widespread attention after he received several other forms of punishment following the launch of an Army investigation. Among them, the Army threw him out of the Special Forces, reassigned him as a conventional infantry officer

and took away his Special Forces tab, a qualification that goes to any soldier who completes Special Forces training.

Golsteyn also was denied a major valor award for heroism during the iconic Battle of Marja in Afghanistan on Feb. 20, 2010. He later received the Silver Star for heroism that day and was eventually approved for an upgrade to the Distinguished Service Cross. But Army Secretary John McHugh took back the awards, deciding Golsteyn deserved neither because of his actions in the alleged bomb maker incident, which came later on the same 2010 deployment.

Tsarnaev's life in jury's hands

The Associated Press

BOSTON — Now that a jury has convicted Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev on all charges, even more is at stake in the next phase of the trial. The same 12 people must decide whether the 21-year-old lives or dies.

Tsarnaev was found guilty Wednesday of 30 counts against him, including conspiracy and deadly use of a weapon of mass destruction. Seventeen of those charges are punishable by death. The jury must agree unanimously for Tsarnaev to receive a death sentence; otherwise, the penalty will be life behind bars.

The verdict was considered practically a foregone conclusion since Tsarnaev's lawyer admitted he participated in the bombings. The former college student was found responsible for the deaths of three people who died in the bombings as well as the killing of a Massachusetts Institute of Technology police officer who was gunned down days later as Tsarnaev and his now-dead brother, Tamerlan, attempted to flee. In addition to the people who were killed, more than 260

others were injured when twin pressure-cooker bombs packed with shrapnel exploded near the marathon's finish line on April 15, 2013.

The defense lawyers, who barely cross-examined the prosecution's witnesses during the first part of the trial, are expected to become much more aggressive during the penalty phase. The defense gave a preview of its case during the trial when it insisted that Tsarnaev, then 19, was strongly influenced by his radicalized older brother, who was said to have masterminded the attack.

Tsarnaev's lawyers are expected to continue that theme, but also to explore the brothers' relationship more deeply and perhaps bring in evidence about Tsarnaev's life in Russia and Kyrgyzstan, where the family lived before moving to the U.S. about a decade ago.

During the trial, prosecutors portrayed Tsarnaev and his brother — ethnic Chechens — as full partners in a plan to punish the U.S. for its wars in Muslim countries. Tamerlan Tsarnaev, 26, died when he was shot by police and run over by his brother during a getaway attempt days after the bombing.

French TV network hacked

The Associated Press

PARIS — Hackers claiming allegiance to the Islamic State group seized control of a global French television network, simultaneously blacking out 11 channels and taking over the network's website and social media accounts. The attack appeared to be an unprecedented step in the extremist group's information warfare tactics.

The hackers briefly cut transmission of 11 channels belonging to TV5 Monde and took over its websites and social media

accounts starting Wednesday night. The channel's director, Yves Bigot, said the attack continued into Thursday. He told RTL radio that the network has restored its signal but can broadcast only recorded programs.

The Islamic extremist group has claimed complex hackings before, but experts and a French official said the ability to black out a global television network represented a new level of sophistication for the group. The Paris prosecutor's office said Thursday it has opened a terrorism investigation.

Dozens of bodies found in Iraq

McClatchy Foreign Staff

IRBIL, Iraq — Iraqi forensic teams uncovered the bodies Tuesday of at least 40 victims of last year's massacre near Tikrit of government soldiers captured by the Islamic State group in the early days of its onslaught across northern and central Iraq.

Those graves are only the beginning. More than 1,000 Shiite Muslims are thought to have been killed after they were captured last year; the bodies

of many now can be unearthed from the unmarked graves where they were dumped.

The recapture of Tikrit last week after a bloody monthlong campaign also has revealed new abuses that add to Iraq's nightmare — by the mostly Shiite Muslim security forces and their Shiite militia allies, even by Sunni Muslim allies of the government, against Sunni residents they accuse of backing the Islamic State. All the bodies found Tuesday had been bound and shot in the head.

Oladipo, Magic get by Bulls

The Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — The Orlando Magic spoiled Derrick Rose's return from his latest knee injury.

Victor Oladipo had 23 points and scored on a layup with 1.5 seconds left to give the Magic a 105-103 victory over the Chicago Bulls on Wednesday night.

Rose started and played for the first time in more than a month since undergoing surgery on his right knee. But working on a minutes restriction, the point guard was 3 of 9 from the field and finished with nine points in 19 minutes.

"I felt all right," Rose said. "I think it was about right. It'll get better the more I play, but I'm getting better every week. It'll take some time, but I'll get there."

The Bulls had a final chance with 1.5 seconds remaining, but an inbounds pass by Mike Dunleavy to Pau Gasol at the rim sailed out of bounds.

Nik Vucevic added 22 points in the Magic's third straight win.

"There's no playoff but we're trying to treat every game like a playoff game," Oladipo said. "There's teams that we're playing that are playoff seeds, but we're trying to get better too."

Jimmy Butler had 19 points for Chicago. Gasol, Taj Gibson and Nikola Mirotic each added 15.

Rose was in his first action since Feb. 23 — a span of 20 games. He underwent a minor operation on his right knee on Feb. 27 — the latest in a string of knee issues for the former league MVP.

A torn meniscus in his right knee sidelined Rose most of last season. He also tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee in the 2012 playoff opener.

The plan was to ease Rose back into action by playing just 20 minutes on Wednesday. Bulls coach Tom Thibodeau stuck pretty close to that, with Rose logging 19:24 in total.

He tried to make the most of it, and came out firing early on, connecting on two of his first four field goals. Rose played just shy of 13 minutes in the first half, scoring on a pair of jumpers, including a three-pointer, along with an assist

and two turnovers.

But he went cold after that, missing his next six shots.

"The shots I put up, I thought they were good shots before I shot it. I'm more concerned with us losing more than anything," Rose said.

He said the hardest part was watching from the bench late in the game.

"Very hard. At the same time, it's all about patience. I'm going to have my turn," Rose said. "... The only thing I can do is just sit back and watch and learn."

The Antonio Spurs are surging to close the regular season, and the Houston Rockets couldn't slow them down.

Tony Parker scored 27 points in the Spurs' 110-98 win Wednesday night, their ninth straight victory.

Parker had 13 points in the opening quarter, shaking the Spurs out of a lethargic start and catapulting them to their 19th victory in 23 games.

Cavaliers 104, Bucks 99: At Milwaukee, Kyrie Irving scored 27 points and Cleveland clinched the Central Division title and the No. 2 seed in the Eastern Conference.

LeBron James scored 21 points with nine rebounds and eight assists for the Cavs, including 10 points in the fourth quarter. Kevin Love added 16 points and 11 rebounds.

Wizards 119, 76ers 90: Bradley Beal scored 21 points and visiting Washington shot a franchise-record 65.3 percent from the field in a blowout victory.

The Wizards rested All-Star guard John Wall, ending his consecutive games streak at 208.

Trying to earn home-court advantage in the first round of the playoffs for the first time since 1979, Washington remained a game behind fourth-place Toronto in the Eastern Conference.

Raptors 92, Hornets 74: DeMar DeRozan scored 18 points and visiting Toronto beat Charlotte for the first time in seven games.

Celtics 113, Pistons 103: Isaiah Thomas had a season-high 34 points as visiting Boston picked up a key victory and eliminated Detroit from playoff contention.

The victory moved Boston into a tie for seventh with Brooklyn in the Eastern Conference.

Hawks 114, Nets 111: At New York, Al Horford made the go-ahead basket on a dunk with 19 seconds remaining, and Atlanta completed a season sweep.

Playing without injured All-Star Paul Millsap and further short-handed after Pero Antic and Thabo Sefolosha were arrested early Wednesday and didn't play, the Hawks recovered after blowing a 12-point, fourth-quarter lead.

Grizzlies 110, Pelicans 74: Zach Randolph had 15 points, 13 rebounds and six assists for host Memphis, which had lost four of its past six to drop to the third seed in the West.

Anthony Davis scored 12 points for New Orleans, which dropped back into a tie with Oklahoma City for the Western Conference's final playoff spot.

Pacers 102, Knicks 86: At New York, Indiana stayed close to the final Eastern Conference playoff spot.

George Hill led the Pacers (35-43) with 20 points. The win tied the Pacers with the Miami Heat, one game off the final playoff spot behind the Boston Celtics and Brooklyn Nets.

Nuggets 119, Lakers 101: At Denver, Kenneth Faried scored a season-high 29 points and had 11 rebounds, while Danilo Gallinari added 27 points in the matchup of teams headed for the lottery for the second straight year.

Mavericks 107, Suns 104: Dirk Nowitzki scored 19 points, including the go-ahead basket and a key three-pointer in the fourth quarter, and host Dallas eliminated Phoenix from playoff contention.

Trail Blazers 116, Timberwolves 91: LaMarcus Aldridge had 24 points and 13 rebounds before sitting out the fourth quarter. Robin Lopez added 18 points for host Portland, which had already captured the Northwest Division title but continues to battle for home-court advantage in the playoffs.

Jazz 103, Kings 91: Derrick Favors scored 18 points, grabbed 11 rebounds and blocked three shots in a matchup of non-playoff teams. Utah has won five of six.

Stars shut out Ducks

The Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Although the Dallas Stars' season ends this weekend, Jamie Benn and his high-scoring teammates are still playing some of their best hockey.

Unless the Pacific Division champion Anaheim Ducks rediscover their best game soon, their own season might not last much longer.

Patrick Eaves scored two goals and Jordie Benn added his first goal in three months, leading the Stars to a 4-0 victory over the playoff-bound Ducks on Wednesday night.

Jamie Benn had three assists to pull even with Sidney Crosby and John Tavares atop the NHL scoring race for the Stars, who will miss the postseason despite winning 13 of their past 18 games.

"You look at the last month, we've played some pretty good hockey," said Jamie Benn, who assisted on a goal by his brother for the first time in their NHL careers. "That's what's frustrating, is we know we're a good team when we play the right way. We can beat most teams in the league."

Jamie Benn's third three-point performance in the past four games gave him 19 points in the past 11 games overall, surging into the race for his first scoring title. Benn, Crosby and Tavares all have 83 points apiece.

Capitals 3, Bruins 0: Braden Holtby made 27 saves while shutting out visiting Boston for the third time this season. Marcus Johansson had a goal and an assist.

Holtby earned his 41st win of the season to match the franchise record set by Olie Kolzig in 1999-00.

His nine shutouts this season equal the franchise record set by Jim Carey in 1995-96 and also tie Montreal's Carey Price and Pittsburgh's Marc-Andre Fleury for the league lead this season.

Blue Jackets 5, Maple Leafs 0: Scott Hartnell had a goal and an assist and Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 35 shots for his second shutout of the season to lead host Columbus over Toronto.

Source: Steelers RB Bell to be suspended for 3 games

The Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Pittsburgh Steelers running back Le'Veon Bell is facing a three-game suspension stemming from his arrest on DUI and marijuana charges last August.

A person with direct knowledge of the suspension told The Associated Press that Bell is expected to appeal the suspension. The person spoke on the condition of anonymity because the disciplinary action had not been announced by the league. The suspension was first reported by ESPN.

Bell was arrested last August following a traffic stop along with then-teammate LeGarrette Blount. The 23-year-old All-Pro ended up pleading no contest and was sentenced to 15 months of probation and entered into a diversion program.

Blount, now a running back with New England, received a one-game suspension from the league last week.

Bell and Blount were arrested Aug. 20 after a motorcycle officer in Ross Township, a suburb just north of Pittsburgh, smelled marijuana coming from a vehicle Bell was driving hours before a team flight to a preseason game in Philadelphia.

Blount was released from the Steelers after complaining about insufficient playing time and walking off the field early in a loss to Tennessee in November. He signed with the Patriots days later and won a Super Bowl ring in February. As part of Bell's plea deal he agreed to have a drug and alcohol evaluation, follow any recommended treatment and spend 12 hours one weekend at a safety school for those charged with drunken driving.

Bell flourished in his second season with the Steelers in 2014. His 2,115 yards from scrimmage were a team record. His 83 receptions were the most ever by a Pittsburgh running back and his versatility keyed the team's run to an AFC North title.

The Steelers signed free agent DeAngelo Williams to a

two-year contract in March as a backup.

Pacers' Copeland stable

INDIANAPOLIS — Indiana Pacers forward Chris Copeland is apologizing for making a "bad choice" and promised to work toward a full recovery after being stabbed outside a New York nightclub early Wednesday.

The team provided an update Thursday, saying Copeland is in stable condition following surgery on his abdomen and left elbow. The Pacers say there is no timetable for Copeland to be released.

On Thursday, Copeland thanked teammates, the organization and Pacers fans for their support while acknowledging he should not have been out that late the night before a game.

Copeland's girlfriend and another woman were also stabbed. A 22-year-old suspect was in custody.



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Masters has steep learning curve

The Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — Tiger Woods was the exception. Ben Crenshaw was closer to the rule.

Woods joined up with Crenshaw to play the back nine Wednesday on the final day of practice for a Masters that is shaping up as a mystery in many ways. They are Masters champions with multiple green jackets. What separates them is how soon they got them.

Crenshaw had to suffer a little before he could celebrate his first major. He was a runner-up four times in the majors, including a playoff loss to David Graham at the PGA Championship, before he broke through in 1984 at Augusta National. He won another one in 1995.

Woods wasted no time. He won the first major he played as a pro by setting 20 records in his 1997 Masters victory, and that was only the start. He already had eight majors before he recorded his first runner-up finish. He had four green jackets before he turned 30.

More players have taken the Crenshaw route.

Tom Watson. Nick Price. Phil Mickelson. Adam Scott. The group even includes Jack Nicklaus, who was a 20-year-old amateur when he finished second behind Arnold Palmer in the 1960 U.S. Open. Nicklaus played that day with Ben Hogan, who also

had a chance to win until he hit into the water on the 17th hole at Cherry Hills.

Also on that list is Rory McIlroy, who returns to the scene of his greatest lesson in a major.

He was a 21-year-old with a four-shot lead at the Masters in 2011, ready to be crowned the next big thing in golf, when he shot 80 in the final round. He handled the collapse with remarkable poise, said he would learn from his mistakes. And then he posted scoring records at Congressional two months later in the U.S. Open.

"A lot of that win has to do with what happened at Augusta," McIlroy said.

The Masters is even more meaningful now. It's the only major keeping him from the career Grand Slam, and McIlroy will be the clear favorite when the Masters begins Thursday.

"Everything I've done, all the work I've done gearing up for this week has been good," said McIlroy. "I'm just ready for the gun to go off on Thursday."

The expectations are higher than ever for McIlroy, and lower than ever for Woods, who is competing for the first time since Feb. 5. That's when he walked off the course at Torrey Pines to work on a game that had become almost unrecognizably bad.

Woods has shown much improvement in three days of practice, including the

nine holes he played with Crenshaw and Jordan Spieth.

McIlroy and Woods, even at different ends of the spectrum, have dominated the talk so much this week that a large group of contenders have largely been ignored.

Bubba Watson is the defending champion and going for his third green jacket in four years. Adam Scott is back to the long putter he used to win in 2013. Spieth and Jimmy Walker might be the hottest players on the PGA Tour — Walker is the only player with two wins this season, Spieth has won, finished second and lost in a playoff his last three starts.

Padraig Harrington is another major champion who lost before he could win. "The best preparation for winning is contending," Harrington said.

The Irishman made bogey on the final hole at the 2002 British Open that cost him a spot in the playoff at Muirfield. He finished with three straight bogeys at Winged Foot in 2006 and finished two shots behind in the U.S. Open. A year later, he won the first of his three majors, going back-to-back at the end of 2008.

"You do need to be in that situation a couple of times to be comfortable," Harrington said. "That's not true for everyone. But for most players, you have to lose a few before you can win a few."

NCAA: Refs should take their time

The Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Dan Gavitt would like college basketball referees to take more time to make the right calls, especially with a national championship at stake.

Less than 48 hours after a crucial call helped Duke hold on for a 68-63 victory over Wisconsin on Monday night in the title game, the NCAA's vice president of men's basketball told The Associated Press that the referees could have been "more patient" at the replay monitor.

A magnified shot that aired during CBS' live telecast appeared to show a Duke player touched the ball last when Badgers guard Bronson Koenig missed a layup with 1:54 to play and Duke leading 63-58. But Gavitt said the officials never got a chance to see that replay because they had already decided to uphold the original decision that the ball went off Wisconsin.

"All I'm saying is that I think there's a chance that if there had been a longer review, especially on the blown up one, the magnified version, there's a chance there would have been enough evidence to overturn the call," Gavitt said Wednesday. "But it's still a judgment call."

Gavitt said he spoke with Badgers coach Bo Ryan immediately after the game and again Wednesday to give him a heads-up about what he planned to say publicly about the call. Gavitt did not characterize the conversation as an apology, and said Ryan was more upset about how the game was called — rather than the one call that has been talked about all week. What went wrong?

John Adams, the retiring head of college basketball referees, told SiriusXM College Radio on Tuesday that the three-man officiating crew and the standby official did not have access to the same views as the television audience. So when Adams realized the call looked wrong, he considered making a dash to the scorer's table to bring the officials back.

Gavitt said Adams "misspoke" and that the referees did have access to all TV replays.

Adams declined an interview request. Kim Jackson, a spokesman for DVSPORT, the NCAA's replay partner through 2019, acknowledged the referees did get access to all of CBS' replays, just not in time to make the most definitive angle available.

"At that point, they had already looked at eight or nine different angles and didn't see that [magnified] one in time to alert them in time to come back to the table," Jackson said, explaining how the scorer's table was in contact with the television truck. "Typically, what is done if they want to bring them back is they just blow the horn and have them come back over."

Instead, nothing was done and the game continued as Duke went on to win its fifth national title, beating the Badgers 68-63.

And though it wasn't only the questionable call during the three-week NCAA Tournament, it could have the most lasting impact.

Jackson said DVSPORT and the NCAA have already had conversations about how to improve the process and what could be done if a definitive angle comes in late, but they have not yet come up with concrete solutions.

"We have to find the right balance. I think with the number of camera angles, we should take a little longer," Gavitt said. "I don't think the goal should be to be perfect because I think you're always going to have human nature and human judgment be a part of that. But we'd like to get it right as much as we can."

Gonzalez smashes 3 more HRs in win

The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Adrian Gonzalez insists he's no home run hitter, even if his current power surge suggests otherwise.

It's simply about making good contact with the ball for the 32-year-old first baseman, who is dogged in his hitting preparation.

It's paying off, with three more home runs Wednesday night that made Gonzalez the first player in major league history with five in the season's first three games. He helped the Los Angeles Dodgers beat the San Diego Padres 7-4 to win their opening series 2-1.

"Something like that is always cool to be able to accomplish," Gonzalez said.

Fittingly, Gonzalez received his Silver Slugger award from last season before the game. Then he went out and had a four-hit game to go with consecutive three-hit games on Monday and Tuesday, becoming the first National League player to do so since Orlando Cepeda of San Francisco had three straight three-hit games in 1963.

"He wasn't bad today, huh?" said Dodgers manager Don Mattingly, a renowned hitter for the Yankees during his playing days. "When you get hot you're just feeling good. You want to ride that streak as long as you can as far as hitting the ball hard."

Gonzalez homered in four consecutive at-bats dating to Tuesday before his RBI single in the sixth. His five homers in the first three games made major league history, according to information provided to the Dodgers by Elias Sports Bureau.

"He's about as locked in as he can be," starter Brandon McCarthy said. "That's a nightmare for a pitcher to face. He's older and knows exactly his routine. There's so much discipline in his at-bats. It's very hard to fool him."

The Dodgers rallied from a 2-0 deficit in the first to help McCarthy (1-0) earn his first win as one of eight new players on the team this season. The right-hander allowed nine hits and four runs, struck

out nine and walked one. Joel Peralta pitched the ninth to earn his first NL save.

Gonzalez homered in the first and he led off the third with another homer, extending the Dodgers' lead to 5-2. He led off the fifth with his third homer — all off Andrew Cashner — and took a curtain call from the dugout steps.

Gonzalez received a standing ovation when he came to the plate in the sixth. The Padres' infield convened on the mound for a conference before Frank Garces gave up an RBI single to Gonzalez, making it 7-4.

Gonzalez became the third player in franchise history with homers in his first three games, joining Jimmy Wynn in 1974 and Carl Furillo in 1955.

Angels 5, Mariners 3: Albert Pujols hit his 521st home run to move into 18th place on baseball's career list and Los Angeles Angels held on for a win over host Seattle.

Pujols' home run, a two-run shot off Hisashi Iwakuma (0-1) in the first inning, tied him with Hall of Famers Ted Williams, Willie McCovey and Frank Thomas.

Cubs 2, Cardinals 0: Jake Arrieta allowed three hits over seven innings and Starlin Castro had a go-ahead RBI single in a two-run seventh, leading host Chicago over St. Louis for its first win this season.

Tigers 11, Twins 0: Anibal Sanchez helped Detroit blank visiting Minnesota for the second straight game, Jose Iglesias had four hits and Alex Avila scored four runs.

Ian Kinsler drove in four runs for Detroit, which had beaten Minnesota 4-0 on Opening Day.

Braves 2, Marlins 0: A.J. Pierzynski hit a two-run homer and five pitchers combined on a six-hitter to help visiting Atlanta complete a three-game sweep.

Phillies 4, Red Sox 2: Jeff Francoeur hit a three-run homer, and Aaron Harang (1-0) took a one-hitter into the seventh inning for host Philadelphia.

Making his Red Sox debut after signing an \$82.5 million, four-year contract through 2019, Rick Porcello (0-1) allowed three runs and six hits in six innings.

Yankees 4, Blue Jays 3: Chase Headley hit a tiebreaking single that deflected off the wrist of reliever Brett Cecil as host New York rallied for three runs in the eighth inning.

Nationals 2, Mets 1: Jordan Zimmermann didn't quite pick up where he left off in 2014, when he threw a no-hitter to close the regular season, but he only allowed one run in six innings as host Washington held off New York.

Rays 2, Orioles 0: Jake Odorizzi (1-0) allowed two hits and struck out seven in 6 2/3 innings, and host Tampa Bay coaxed four consecutive walks with two outs to score the go-ahead run.

Indians 2, Astros 0: Carlos Carrasco struck out 10 while pitching three-hit ball into the seventh inning, Carlos Santana and Mike Aviles each homered and visiting Cleveland got a win over Houston.

Royals 7, White Sox 5: Lorenzo Cain hit a go-ahead two-run homer in the eighth inning for his third hit and host Kansas City beat Chicago.

Rockies 5, Brewers 4 (10): Pinch-hitter Wilin Rosario homered in the 10th inning after being scratched from the starting lineup, leading Colorado to a win over host Milwaukee.

Athletics 10, Rangers 0: Scott Kazmir struck out 10 and was backed by a couple of rookies getting their first big league hits, and Oakland beat visiting Texas.

Giants 5, Diamondbacks 2: Chris Heston pitched six effective innings in a combined five-hitter for his first big league win, Casey McGehee hit a two-run homer and San Francisco beat host Arizona.

Reds 5, Pirates 4 (11): Joey Votto singled home the winning run in the 11th inning, sending host Cincinnati to a victory over Pittsburgh in a four-hour game that started after a long rain delay.