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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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General removed over A-10 'treason' comment

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Air Force general who told airmen that speaking to Congress about plans to retire the A-10 Thunderbolt amounts to treason has left his command position and been reprimanded, the Air Combat Command said Friday.

The service's inspector general found that the comments by Maj. Gen. James Post, then the ACC vice commander, had a "chilling effect" and caused airmen to feel constrained about their right to speak to lawmakers about important issues, according to the command.

Post was issued a letter of reprimand and is moving from his position following the statements Jan. 10 to about 300 airmen at a Weapons and Tactics Review Board meeting at Nel-

lis Air Force Base in Nevada. The board was discussing the controversial retirement of the A-10, which has sparked a pushback from Congress as well as infantry troops and pilots who believe it has unique capabilities on the battlefield.

"It was sincerely never my intention to discourage anyone's access to their elected officials," Post said in a released statement. "I now understand how my poor choice of words may have led a few attendees to draw this conclusion and I offer my humble apology for causing any undue strain on the command and its mission."

Post was asked a question about the A-10 and discussed the tight budget leading to the Air Force decision to retire the aircraft. The general talked about the importance of loyalty to the decisions by senior leadership and used the word

"treason" to describe airmen who discuss dissenting opinions with lawmakers, the ACC said.

The IG found that Post had been "attempting to prevent" some of the airmen from contacting their representatives on Capitol Hill, according to the command.

"General Post understands the impact of his actions and has expressed his sincere regret to me, a regret he extends to all airmen," Gen. Hawk Carlisle, commander of Air Combat Command, said in the release.

In February, the service unveiled new plans to retire about 300 of the close air support aircraft over the coming years, saying the move would save \$4.2 billion by 2019. The Air Force was hit in 2013 with sequestration budget caps and now faces austere funding as lawmakers debate ways to

reduce federal spending and debt.

Some in Congress, including Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., and Sen. Kelly Ayotte, R-N.H., have criticized the move to retire the A-10 as short-sighted and they mounted an effort beginning last year to forbid the divestment with legislation.

Ayotte had also demanded answers from Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Welsh following reports of the treason comment, and on Friday she applauded the "thorough" investigation by the Air Force.

"I hope this unfortunate incident will eliminate any doubt regarding the legal right of a servicemember to lawfully communicate with Congress about the A-10 or any other issue of concern," she said in an email statement to Stars and Stripes.

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Marine awarded Navy Cross for Afghan attack

BY JENNIFER HLAD
Stars and Stripes

CAMP PENDLETON, Calif. — A small team of special operations Marines was on a rooftop in Helmand province, Afghanistan, in July 2012 when everything went wrong.

The opening shots of an enemy attack paralyzed the team leader from the chest down and severely injured another Marine.

The team was suddenly surrounded by a force seven or eight times its size.

The Marines were outmanned, outgunned, trapped on a rooftop and in desperate need of a medical evacuation helicopter.

It was the heaviest fire that Gunnery Sgt. Brian Jacklin had seen in 10 years of heavy combat experience.

But he remained calm, organizing a counterattack and calling for a helicopter.

On Thursday, Jacklin was awarded the Navy Cross for his heroism, which retired Marine Capt. Derek Herrera said is the reason he is alive today.

Jacklin, 32, said that he was honored and

overwhelmed by the medal, but that the Marines "really had no choice" but to fight back.

When a friend is injured, Jacklin said, Marines do everything they can to save his life.

"We don't retreat. We stand our ground," he said.

Once Jacklin had secured a helicopter for the wounded Marines, he said the team had to breach a wall and run across a field under intense fire to reach the landing zone.

He asked whether everyone was OK with the plan, and there wasn't a second of hesitation, he said.

At the landing zone, the Marines used their bodies to shield their wounded teammates.

Once the team was relieved by a SEAL team, Jacklin and Sgt. David Harris voluntarily stayed behind to continue the fight.

Harris, Gunnery Sgt. William Simpson IV, Staff Sgt. Christopher Buckminster, Staff Sgt. Hafeez Bussein and Sgt. William

Hall, all members of the same team, each received a Bronze Star with V on Thursday for their actions during the battle.

Maj. Gen. Joseph Osterman, commander of Marine Special Operations Command, said the team epitomizes what Marines are all about.

"They do this for the Marines on their left and right flank," he said, and they are "willing to sacrifice anything and everything" for those Marines.

Herrera, the team leader who was paralyzed by a bullet in the opening volley of the attack, said these Marines are his inspiration.

"Physically, I would not be here today" without their actions.

Herrera said Jacklin had been as effective in combat on hundreds of other occasions.

"It's great to see him recognized, but he should have hundreds of Navy Crosses in my mind," he said.

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Twisters rip through Midwest

The Associated Press

FAIRDALE, Ill. — Crews searched for missing residents Friday morning after at least one tornado brought chaos to a tiny northern Illinois town, killing one person, injuring roughly a dozen more and sweeping homes off their foundations, as a large storm system rumbled across much of the country.

One woman was killed and about 11 others were taken to hospitals after at least one twister hit Fairdale around 7 p.m. Thursday. Crews combed through each structure twice and were gearing up for a third search with equipment and by hand Friday morning.

Police and fire officials said at a Friday morning news conference that they weren't sure how many people were still unaccounted for in the com-

munity of roughly 150 people.

"We're hoping our search will be fruitless, in the sense that we won't find anybody," Sycamore Fire Chief Peter Polarek said.

The deceased was identified Friday as Geraldine M. Schultz, 67. Authorities said those hospitalized did not have life-threatening injuries.

About 15 to 20 homes were destroyed in Fairdale, according to DeKalb County Sheriff Roger A. Scott. Matthew Knott, division chief for the Rockford Fire Department, told The Associated Press that just about every building in the town about 80 miles northwest of Chicago "sustained damage of some sort."

All homes were evacuated as a safety precaution and power was out across the area. The Red Cross and Salvation Army established a shelter at a local high school.

Resident Al Zammuto, 60, a machinist, said he and other residents received cellphone alerts at 6:45 p.m., but he dismissed it as previous warnings hadn't amounted to anything.

Then his windows exploded.

National Weather Service meteorologist Matt Friedlein said at least two tornadoes swept through six north-central Illinois counties, and that damage survey teams would visit the area.

After raking Illinois, Thursday's storm and cold front headed northeast, dumping snow in Michigan's Upper Peninsula and sweeping across the Ohio Valley overnight, Friedlein said. The system was headed into the Appalachian region Friday morning with the potential for severe thunderstorms but "not anywhere near the threat" that it packed in the Midwest, he said.

Victims of Fort Hood receive Purple Hearts

BY JON HARPER

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Nearly six years after they were attacked by one of their own, the victims of the 2009 Fort Hood shooting have received the Purple Hearts that the Army previously deemed were not owed to them.

At a Friday ceremony at Fort Hood, Texas, base commander Lt. Gen. Sean MacFarland presented the medals to those who were wounded and the families of those who were killed when Army Maj. Nidal Hasan went on a shooting rampage at the installation on Nov. 5, 2009.

"It is our sincere hope that today we will in some small way help to heal the wounds that you have suffered," said MacFarland, the commander of Army III Corps, which is based at Fort Hood.

Thirteen people were killed and 31 were wounded during the attack before Hasan was subdued. Of those killed, 12 were soldiers and one was a civilian contractor.

MacFarland noted that the carnage could have been much worse had it not been for the bravery of those who responded to the incident.

In the wake of the attack, the Army said the Fort Hood casualties were not eligible for the Purple Heart or its civilian equivalent, the Defense of Freedom Medal, because they were not killed or wounded in combat or in an attack by a foreign terrorist organization.

Families of the victims lobbied Congress to change the wording of the law to make their loved ones eligible for the Purple Heart.

Gap remains in SC dash-cam video

The Associated Press

NORTH CHARLESTON, S.C. — Questions persist about the fatal shooting of a black South Carolina motorist after the release of video taken from the car of the white police officer charged in the death.

The dashboard-camera footage released by state police on Thursday showed North Charleston Officer Michael Thomas Slager pulling over Walter Scott for a broken brake light last weekend.

The video captures the moments leading up to a shooting that has sparked outrage as the latest example of a white police officer killing an unarmed black man. The shooting itself was captured by an eyewitness on his

iPhone and provided the impetus for the officer to be charged with murder and to be fired. That's a striking difference from the recent cases in Ferguson, Mo., and New York City.

Saturday's traffic stop opens routinely as Scott is stopped in a used Mercedes-Benz he had bought days earlier, footage from the patrol car showed. The officer is shown walking toward the driver's window, requesting Scott's license and registration. Slager then returns to his cruiser. On the dash-cam video, Slager never touches his gun during the stop.

The video also shows Scott beginning to get out of the car, his right hand raised above his head. He then quickly gets back

into the car and closes the door. Minutes after Slager goes back to his patrol car, Scott jumps from his car and runs. Slager chases him.

What's missing is what happens from the time the two men run out of the frame of dashboard video to the time picked up in a bystander's cellphone video. The cellphone footage starts with Scott getting to his feet and running away, then Slager firing eight shots at the man's back.

Scott was almost \$7,500 behind in child support and had been in jail three times over that issue. His family has said that he might have run because he was behind on payments again and didn't want to go back to jail.

FBI: Man plotted to bomb Fort Riley

KANSAS CITY, Kan. — A 20-year-old man has been charged with planning a suicide bomb attack against the Fort Riley

military base in Kansas, in an alleged plot to support the Islamic State group, federal prosecutors said Friday.

John T. Booker, of Topeka, was arrested Friday morning while trying to arm what he thought

was a 1,000-pound bomb inside a van near the base, according to court documents. Prosecutors say he met with an undercover FBI agent in October and expressed desire to engage in violent jihad. Booker is charged

with attempting to use a weapon of mass destruction, attempting to damage property by means of an explosive, and attempting to provide material support to the terrorist group.

From The Associated Press

Spieth cards 64 in Masters

The Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — A year ago, at this very place, Jordan Spieth provided a tantalizing glimpse of what the future might hold.

Only 20 and playing in his first Masters, Spieth was two shots ahead in the final round, looking all but certain to become the youngest champion in Augusta National history.

Even when he faded down the stretch, settling for the runner-up spot behind Bubba Watson, greatness seemed assured for this mature-beyond-his-years Texan.

Now, Spieth wants to finish the job.

"I'm a lot more confident in the way I can handle certain situations, and the patience level I have," he said. "I'm just going to try to take the same mental attitude into the next couple of days."

Spieth flirted with the major championship scoring record on Thursday, making eight birdies on the first 14 holes, several of them little more than tap-ins. A bogey at the 15th knocked him back a bit, but a 20-foot birdie on the final hole gave him an 8-under 64 and a three-shot lead heading to the second round.

It's not over, of course. Major champions Ernie Els and Justin Rose are right in the mix after shooting 67s. Jason Day, a perennial contender at Augusta, also had a 67 after ripping off five straight birdies on the back side. Sergio Garcia, still chasing that first major title, posted a 68.

But even so early in the game, Els knows what everyone is up against with Spieth at the top of the board.

"He's special," the Big Easy said.

"Nothing stands out, because he does everything well. He's going to be tough to beat."

Here are some things to watch for this weekend at the Masters:

Grand slam Rory: Rory McIlroy has some work to do if he's going to become the sixth player to win the modern version of golf's Grand Slam. After opening with a 71, he was seven strokes back.

McIlroy is not used to winning majors from this spot. He led wire-to-wire at both the 2011 U.S. Open and 2014 British Open. He was one shot behind after the opening round during his victories at the PGA Championship in 2012 and '14.

Tiger tales: Tiger Woods certainly improved his game during a two-month hiatus from the PGA Tour, but his immediate focus is on making it to the weekend. He was tied for 41st after shooting 73.

Woods has never missed the Masters cut as a professional.

While it's not unusual for the four-time champion to start slowly at Augusta National — he's broken 70 in the first round only once — this is not the player who once dominated the sport.

In all likelihood, Woods will need a few more tournaments before he's a serious contender. On the bright side, he did look completely healthy — especially on a couple of ferocious swings to get out of trouble — and his short game has improved greatly since early February, when he had trouble pulling off simple chips.

Defending champ: Bubba Watson, winner of the green jacket two of the last three years and trying to become only the fourth player to defend a Masters title, will need to do a better job dealing with

the sweltering Georgia heat and lumbering pace of play.

Watson closed his round with two bad tee shots, forcing him to chip-in for par at the 17th and leading to a bogey at the 18th.

"I was just tired," said Watson, who settled for a 71. "I was not committed, not focused."

Defying Father Time: Tom Watson has a chance to become the oldest player to make the Masters cut after shooting 71, the first time since 2010 that he's broken par in the tournament.

"It's fun to be able to at least be in red figures at Augusta National," the 65-year-old Watson said. "At my age, it's a minor miracle."

The oldest player to make the Masters cut was Tommy Aaron, who was 63 when he played on the weekend in 2000.

Watson can't hit it nearly as far as he once did, but he sure knows his way around the place.

"I've played the golf course enough times to know where I'm supposed to hit it and where I'm not supposed to hit it," he said.

Crenshaw's finale: Ben Crenshaw will play the Masters for the 44th and final time after shooting an ugly 91, by far the worst round of his Augusta career.

The 63-year-old Crenshaw knew he didn't have the game to compete, which was obvious from his scorecard: four bogeys, five double bogeys, a triple bogey and a quadruple bogey.

"I just played awful," said Crenshaw, who won the tournament in 1984 and 1995. "I'm ready to get it over with."

Detroit remains unbeaten

The Associated Press

DETROIT — The Detroit Tigers finally gave up a run Thursday.

They haven't done much else wrong.

Shane Greene allowed one run — the first the Tigers had given up this season — in eight innings as Detroit remained undefeated with a 7-1 victory over the Minnesota Twins.

During the game, the Tigers (3-0) set a modern-day American League record by extending their season-opening shut-out streak to 24 innings. According to STATS, the previous longest streak by an American League team was 22 innings by the 1947 Chicago White Sox.

The Twins finally scored for the first time this season with one out in the seventh. Joe Mauer drew a walk off Greene, then came home when Kennys Vargas hit a single that was misplayed for an error by left fielder Yoenis Cespedes.

"The guys were joking around that at least we had one," Minnesota manager Paul Molitor said. "We were down 22-0 for the season at that point, and you have to start somewhere."

In a game delayed 3 hours and 36 minutes by rain, Greene (1-0) allowed the lone run on four hits and a walk, striking out five. The Tigers still have not allowed an earned run this season.

Indians 5, Astros 1: Despite Jed Lowrie breaking up a combined no-hit bid by Cleveland with a one-out home run in the ninth, the visiting Indians held on to beat Houston.

Blue Jays 6, Yankees 3: Alex Rodriguez hit his first home run since serving a year-long drug suspension, but Toronto beat host New York for eccentric rookie Daniel Norris' first win in the majors.

Giants 1, Padres 0 (12): Pinch-hitter Justin Maxwell had an RBI single with two outs in the 12th inning and San Francisco spoiled new-look San Diego's home opener.

Royals 4, White Sox 1: Edinson Volquez dazzled for eight innings in his debut with his new team, Lorenzo Cain made a pair of spectacular catches after driving in a run, and Kansas City beat visiting Chicago to finish a season-opening sweep.

Rangers 10, Athletics 1: Shin-Soo Choo hit a three-run homer, Mitch Moreland added a two-run blast and visiting Texas' dormant bats broke out in a big way to spoil Kendall Graveman's Oakland debut.

Reds 3, Pirates 2: Joey Votto added to his resurgent series with his first homer since May 10, and Gregory Polanco's ninth-inning error sent host Cincinnati past Pittsburgh for a season-opening sweep.

Red Sox 6, Phillies 2: Xander Bogaerts had three hits and three RBIs to back Justin Masterson in visiting Boston's victory over Philadelphia.

Mets 6, Nationals 3: Matt Harvey was dynamic in his return from Tommy John surgery, outpitching Stephen Strasburg with six scoreless innings, regularly reaching 97 mph and striking out nine to lead visiting New York past Washington.

Flames make playoffs, keep Kings out

The Associated Press

CALGARY, Alberta — Jiri Hudler scored twice and the Calgary Flames clinched an NHL playoff berth for the first time in six years with a 3-1 win over Los Angeles on Thursday night that eliminated the defending Stanley Cup champion Kings from postseason contention.

Johnny Gaudreau also scored for the Flames and Jonas Hiller stopped 33 shots for the win.

Jonathan Quick had 22 saves in the loss.

The Flames will face the Vancouver Canucks in the first round of the playoffs. Calgary concludes its regular season Saturday at Winnipeg.

Los Angeles won two of the last three Stanley Cups, but struggled this season to keep pace in the Pacific Division.

Panthers 4, Bruins 2: Roberto Luongo earned his 401st career win and Jaromir Jagr got his 1,800th career point, helping host Florida damage Boston's playoff hopes.

The Bruins trail Ottawa by two points and Pittsburgh by one for the eighth and final spot in the Eastern Conference playoffs.

Blues 2, Blackhawks 1: Paul Stastny

scored the winner, Dmitrij Jaskin broke a 16-game scoreless string, and Jake Allen made 21 saves as host St. Louis won the Central Division.

The Blues clinched home-ice advantage for the first round of the Stanley Cup playoffs with their second win over Chicago in five days and a loss by Nashville.

Avalanche 1, Jets 0 (SO): Visiting Winnipeg clinched its first playoff spot in eight seasons despite the shootout loss to Colorado.

Ryan O'Reilly and Matt Duchene scored in the shootout, and Reto Berra stopped both Winnipeg shots.

Wild 4, Predators 2: Jason Pominville scored with 2:03 remaining in regulation for visiting Minnesota.

Jason Zucker scored twice and Marco Scandella had the other goal for the Wild.

Lightning 4, Devils 3 (OT): Tyler Johnson scored his second goal, an overtime power play effort that lifted host Tampa Bay over New Jersey.

Johnson scored from along the goal line 1:22 into the extra session.

Canadiens 4, Red Wings 3 (OT): Lars Eller scored 1:21 into overtime to lift host Montreal, giving Carey Price a team record with his 43rd win of the season.

Andrei Markov, Jeff Petry and Tomas

Plekanec also scored for Montreal (49-22-10), which played its final home game.

Senators 3, Rangers 0: Clarke MacArthur and Kyle Turris scored in a 1:04 span late in the second period and visiting Ottawa continued its dazzling playoff push behind goaltender Andrew Hammond.

Ottawa has 97 points in the wild five-team race for the final four playoff spots in the Eastern Conference, and will make the postseason by winning in Philadelphia on Saturday.

Hurricanes 3, Flyers 1: Brent Bellemore and Ryan Murphy each scored a goal to lead visiting Carolina past Philadelphia.

Jordan Staal added an empty-netter for the Hurricanes, who snapped a five-game road losing streak while taking their fourth victory in five games against Philadelphia this season.

Canucks 5, Coyotes 0: Yannick Weber scored twice and Eddie Lack made 28 saves for his second shutout of the season to lead host Vancouver past Arizona.

Sharks 3, Oilers 1: Bryan Lerg scored in his NHL debut to lead visiting San Jose past Edmonton in a game between two teams out of the playoff picture.



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Steelers' Polamalu announces retirement

PITTSBURGH — His trademark locks bouncing off the top of his No. 43 jersey, Troy Polamalu spent more than a decade flying across football fields as the heady but humble backbone of a defense that led the Pittsburgh Steelers.

Now, his spectacular career belongs to the ages.

The eight-time Pro Bowler and 2010 NFL Defensive Player of the Year is retiring after 12 seasons, saying it's time for the next phase of his life.

"Troy is a shining example of a football man in the way he loved the game, the way he respected the game and the way he played the game," Steelers coach Mike Tomlin said in a statement. "It's a shining example of the window into who he is. He is a legendary Steeler and a legendary man."

Taken with the 16th overall pick in the 2003 NFL Draft out of USC, Polamalu's frenetic style and preternatural instincts allowed him to thrive in Hall of Fame defensive coordinator Dick LeBeau's 3-4 defense. At his peak, Polamalu was arguably the most disruptive player in the league.

Record 7 Wildcats to enter NBA draft

LEXINGTON, Ky. — Kentucky has a lot of spots to fill now that a record seven players have announced they will enter the NBA draft.

In a news conference Thursday, 7-footers Willie Cauley-Stein, twin guards Andrew and Aaron Harrison and freshman forwards Karl-Anthony Towns and Trey Lyles all said they will turn pro.

Also entering are 7-0 reserve center Dakari Johnson and backup shooting guard Devin Booker, completing an exodus by the Wildcats' top seven scorers.

The 6-11 Towns could be the first player chosen overall on June 25 and Cauley-Stein and Lyles could soon follow with both projected as possible lottery selections. Booker is also a potential first-rounder, with the rest projected to go in the second.

Also:

■ Duke says freshman Jahlil Okafor will enter the NBA draft.

Coach Mike Krzyzewski made the announcement Thursday, calling it a "great decision."

Okafor led Duke (35-4) to its fifth national championship, a 68-63 victory over Wisconsin in Indianapolis on Monday night.

The move had been expected all season. The 6-foot-11 Okafor, one of the nation's top recruits, was both a preseason and postseason AP All-America selection.

He averaged 17.3 points and 8.5 rebounds and shot 66 percent. He's the first freshman in Atlantic Coast Conference history to be named league player of the year.

Okafor says his freshman year "has been an amazing experience, to say the least."

He's the sixth one-and-done player at Duke and the fourth in five years. ■ Wisconsin Badgers junior forward Sam Dekker says he will skip his final season of eligibility and enter the NBA draft.

In a letter released Friday by the school, Dekker said he is excited for the next chapter of his life.

Dekker averaged 13.9 points and 5.5 rebounds per game in the 2014-15 season and helped the Badgers to a school-record 36 wins, Big Ten regular season and tournament championships, and Monday's national championship game against Duke. He reached double-figure scoring in 27 of the final 31 games of the season.

Decker is from Sheboygan, Wis., and appeared in 113 games and 81 starts in his career with the Badgers.

Curry, Warriors edge Blazers

The Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Stephen Curry never talks about his case for NBA MVP unless he's asked. Instead, he prefers to let his play speak for itself.

Note to Curry: The message is coming through loud and clear.

Curry eclipsed his own NBA record for most three-pointers in a season, scoring 45 points to rally the Golden State Warriors to a 116-105 victory over the Portland Trail Blazers on Thursday night.

"I finally played a fourth quarter," he joked, indirectly referring to how many lopsided wins have limited his playing time. "So I wanted to get out there and make some plays."

Curry entered the game four shy of his mark of 272 three-pointers, which he set two years ago in the season finale at Portland. He hit six before halftime and eight overall, teaming with fellow Splash Brothers star Klay Thompson to bring the Warriors back from 13 points down.

Curry finished 17-for-23 shooting, including 8-for-13 from three-point range, which had Warriors co-owner Joe Lacob salivating over the statistics following coach Steve Kerr's postgame news conference.

"Unbelievable," Lacob said.

Curry also had 10 assists, and Thompson scored 26 points to help Golden State avoid its first three-game losing streak this season.

Curry became the first Warriors player with at least 45 points and 10 assists in a game since Latrell Sprewell in 1997.

"He played like he wants to be MVP," Portland's LaMarcus Aldridge said.

And indeed he does.

"He never says anything about it," Kerr said of Curry's candidacy, "but you better believe he wants it."

The Warriors (64-15), who had already secured home-court advantage throughout the playoffs because of a tiebreaker over East-leading Atlanta, clinched the NBA's best record.

Aldridge had 27 points and six rebounds, and Damian Lillard added 20 points and eight assists for the Blazers, who had already locked up the Northwest Division. However, that doesn't guarantee they'll get home court in the first round — that's based on record — and Portland (51-28) fell two games behind the Los Angeles Clippers (53-26) in its chase for that, mostly because it couldn't corral Curry.

"We tried to mix up our coverages a little bit because he came out making shots from everywhere," Lillard said. "It pretty much just didn't matter. He made shots with a hand in his face, off balance, deep, everything. He just had it going." On one play in the fourth quarter, Curry lost Lillard on the perimeter with a nifty behind-the-back dribble late. He threw up a 3 and ran down court as if he knew it would go in — and it did.

Curry added another jumper and converted a reverse layup between a pair of Portland scores to put the Warriors up 102-97 with more than 3 minutes to play.

But Lillard and Aldridge kept bringing the Blazers back with an inside-out, two-man game that gave Golden State fits. Portland moved within a point before Golden State's All-Star duo put away the game.

Curry made three free throws,

Thompson broke free for a layup and Curry delivered the dagger — crossing over Aldridge in the corner and hitting a step-back shot from 18 feet that gave Golden State a 111-103 lead with 1:11 left.

"He's our MVP," Thompson said. "He should be for the league."

AFFLALO INJURED: Blazers shooting guard Arron Afflalo left in the fourth quarter with a right arm injury after trying to post-up Curry. The team said he will undergo further medical evaluation on Friday. The Blazers are already missing starting shooting guard Wesley Matthews, who is out for the season after rupturing his left Achilles tendon last month.

MORE MILESTONES: In a season filled with records, the Warriors matched a few more. They tied the 1966-67 Philadelphia 76ers for the biggest improvement for a 50-win team. Each team won 13 more games than the previous year. In addition, the Warriors improved to 36-2 at Oracle Arena this season, tying the franchise record for home wins set by the defending champion Warriors in 1975-76.

TIP-INS

Trail Blazers: Aldridge had his 50th game with at least 20 points this season. ... Portland lost all three games against the Warriors this season.

Warriors: Reserve guard Leandro Barbosa sat out with a sore Achilles. ... Golden State has won 15 consecutive home games.

UP NEXT

Trail Blazers: Host Utah on Saturday.
Warriors: Host Minnesota on Saturday.

Bulls win, put Miami on brink

The Associated Press

MIAMI — Up by 19 at halftime, the Miami Heat were rolling.

By game's end, they were reeling. And their playoff hopes are now, at best, ailing.

Miami's trying season is now on the brink, after Chicago not only pulled off a staggering comeback but made it look easy.

Pau Gasol had 16 points and 15 rebounds, Aaron Brooks and Taj Gibson each added 14 points and the Bulls beat the Heat 89-78 on Thursday night — dealing Miami's postseason chances a major blow.

"Once we started getting into them, getting rebounds, containing them to one shot, things turned around," Gasol said.

Oh, they turned around, and in a hurry. Miami led 51-32 at the half, winning the second quarter 33-12 after Chicago's worst-shooting opening 24 minutes of the season.

"It was embarrassing," Bulls center Joakim Noah said.

So was the second half — albeit for the other team. Chicago outscored the Heat 57-27 after intermission, scoring 39 of the first 47 points in the second half. Miami's huge lead was gone in less than 10 minutes, as the Heat missed their first 12 shots of the third quarter and the freefall never ceased.

"We're all frustrated," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. "We're all embarrassed when you're in those situations and you can't stop an avalanche like that."

Mike Dunleavy and Derrick Rose each had 12 for Chicago, which moved back into the No. 3 spot in the Eastern Conference standings and won despite Jimmy Butler being held out with a calf injury.

Hassan Whiteside had 19 points and 16 rebounds for the Heat. Dwyane Wade scored nine points, shooting just 4-for-20. Goran Dragic had 15 points for Miami and Michael Beasley scored 13.

The Bulls scored the first 11 points of the second half, then went on a 24-3 run over another 7-minute stretch bridging the third and fourth quarters.

By then, the game was gone. So, perhaps, is the season. Miami remained in the No. 10 spot in the Eastern Conference race with three games left, but now almost certainly needs to win out and get plenty of help to get back to the postseason.

"You just keep coming back until they tell you your season is over," Wade said. "This team has been through a lot. ... A loss, a bad 24 minutes, that's not going to deter us from coming back and doing our job."

Miami can get to 38 wins. Boston and Brooklyn, the current holders of the No. 7 and No. 8 spots, have 36.

"Still in it," Wade said.

The comeback was such that Rose's second game of his latest comeback tour almost seemed irrelevant.

Rose made three field goals in the entirety of Wednesday's game at Orlando; he matched that in a 68-second span of the first quarter Thursday, with a step-back, followed by a dunk and a pullup jumper.

Those were about the extent of his highlights on Thursday, as he finished 5-for-15 from the field in just over 20 minutes.

Then again, the Bulls didn't seem to need him.

"He's still finding his rhythm," Bulls coach Tom Thibodeau said. "It's not going to happen overnight."

DOUBLE PAU: Gasol got his league-best 51st double-double of the season, extending his career high in that department. At 34, he's on pace to become the NBA's oldest leader in double-doubles since Patrick Ewing did so (also at 34) in the 1996-97 season.

1 AND 2 REUNITED: Forever linked by the 2008 draft when they went No. 1 and No. 2, Thursday marked the 10th time — but first in more than four years — that Rose and Beasley appeared in the same game. The last was March 30, 2011.

TIP-INS

Bulls: Gasol took 11 shots in the first quarter, the sixth time this season he's reached double digits in that category in the opening 12 minutes. ... Rose has faced Miami 21 times, and made more than half his shots in any of those games only twice.

Heat: It was the second-largest blown lead for the Heat this season, topped only by the 23-pointer against Philadelphia on Dec. 23. ... Dragic appeared in his 500th regular-season game. ... Wade sought out Rose for a hug just before tip-off.

UP NEXT

Bulls: Host Philadelphia on Saturday.
Heat: Host Toronto on Saturday.