

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## Islamic State claims Afghan attack

*The Associated Press*

FAIZABAD, Afghanistan — A motorcycle-riding suicide bomber attacked a bank branch Saturday in eastern Afghanistan, killing at least 35 people in a deadly attack the country's president said was claimed by the Islamic State group.

The attack marks a major escalation in the country's fight against an affiliate of the extremist group that now holds a third of Iraq and Syria in its self-declared caliphate. It also comes as Afghan security forces fight against the Taliban after U.S. and NATO forces ended their combat mission in the country at the start of the year, yet another challenge for the war-ravaged nation.

The attack in Jalalabad, capital of eastern Nangarhar province, targeted a crowd of soldiers and civilians gathered outside the bank to receive their monthly salaries. The blast killed at least 35 people and wounded 125, said Ahmad Zia Abdulzai, a spokesman for the provincial governor.

Hours after the attack, President Ashraf Ghani blamed the Islamic State group for the bombing.

"In the horrific incident in Nangarhar, who took responsibility? The Taliban didn't claim responsibility. Daesh claimed responsibility for it," Ghani said, using an Arabic acronym for the group.

The Taliban denied it carried out the attack and another one elsewhere in the province that killed one civilian and wounded two. "We condemn/deny involvement in both," Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid tweeted.

Ghani warned before that the Islamic State group was starting to establish a presence in Afghanistan. He used his visit to the United States last month to reiterate his concerns that the extremist group was making inroads into Afghanistan.

"If we don't stand on the same line united, these people are going to destroy us," he told 600 people gathered at the provincial government headquarters in Faizabad, the capital of north-eastern Badakhshan province.

He called on the Taliban to join with the Kabul government, and said that any Taliban who switched allegiance to Islamic State group would earn the wrath of Afghanistan's religious leaders.

Ghani also blamed a recent attack on an army outpost — in which 18 soldiers were killed, eight of them by beheading — on "international terrorists." The Taliban aren't known to carry out beheadings.

The United Nations' Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Ivan Simonovic, on a visit to Afghanistan, called the attack a "war crime."

"The use of suicide bombs and other devices in such an indiscriminate way by insurgent groups clearly constitutes a war crime, and those responsible for organizing or perpetrating such attacks must be brought to justice," he said in a statement.

Disenchanted extremists from the Taliban and other organizations, impressed by the Islamic State group's territorial gains and slick online propaganda, have begun raising its black flag in extremist-dominated areas of both Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan.

Analysts and officials say the number of Islamic State supporters in the Afghan-Pakistan region remains small, and that the group faces resistance from militants with strong tribal links. Taliban fighters and Islamic State supporters have

even battled each other. However, the rise of even a small Islamic State affiliate could further destabilize the region and complicate U.S. and NATO efforts to end the 13-year Afghan War.

Taliban militants in Afghanistan and Pakistan owe their allegiance to Mullah Omar, a cleric who has led the Taliban since the 1990s but has not been seen or heard in public for years. Officials fear that an Islamic State push into the region could bring an infusion of guns and money, sparking brutal competition among local militants disenchanted with Mullah Omar's silence and eager to prove themselves with escalating atrocities.

In recent days, Ismail Khan, long a dominant figure in Afghanistan's western province of Herat, told The Associated Press that the numbers of Islamic State supporters are growing because of divisions in Ghani's government.

Afghanistan's senior Shiite leader, Mohammad Mohaqiq, told the AP this month that Islamic State loyalists in southern Zabul province were behind the abduction of 31 ethnic Hazara Shiites in late February.

## Official: Troops enter Iraq's biggest oil refinery

*The Associated Press*

BAGHDAD — Iraqi ground forces secured the perimeter around the country's biggest oil refinery on Saturday and entered the vast complex amid heavy clashes with Islamic State militants, said a senior Iraqi military official.

Abdel-Wahab al-Saadi, the top military commander in Iraq's Salahuddin province, said ground forces entered

the Beiji oil refinery Saturday, days after a number of Islamic State militants carried out a large-scale attack and briefly took over a small part of the complex.

"It is another victory achieved by Iraqi security forces that are growing confident in the war against the terrorists," al-Saadi told The Associated Press in a telephone interview.

The refinery has remained

under government control, but the militants had been surrounding the entire complex preventing access by Iraqi forces.

A day earlier, Iraqi soldiers, backed by U.S.-led coalition airstrikes and Shiite and Sunni militias dubbed the Popular Mobilization Forces, gained control of the towns of al-Malha and al-Mazraah, located 1.9 miles south of the Beiji

refinery.

Iraqi forces recaptured Tikrit, capital of Salahuddin, on April 1 and have been gradually pushing their offensive north to secure the rest of the province.

Militants from the Islamic State group seized Nineveh province and much of Salahuddin and Anbar provinces last summer during their advance across northern and western Iraq.

## Soldiers accused of military gear theft

*The (Colorado Springs, Colo.) Gazette*

Two Fort Carson soldiers and a third who was discharged last year have been arrested and accused of stealing military equipment that a fourth man, a civilian, is suspected of selling on eBay.

A criminal complaint alleging three of the men stole Fort Carson property — including two iRobots worth a combined \$374,000 and dozens of pieces of body armor and other equipment — was filed Thursday in U.S. District Court in Denver.

Staff Sgt. Benjamin Cardwell and Sgt. Johnny Herrera, unit supply specialists, according to the complaint, and former soldier Todd Crow were arrested Wednesday after admitting to conspiring with Daniel Francis, a civilian who is suspected of acting as a middleman to sell the stolen military goods, according to the complaint.

All four men are in custody pending a bail hearing on Tuesday morning.

The complaint details the items reputed to have been stolen, as well as how agents conducted their investigation:

Between Jan. 23 and Jan. 26, one or more people broke into a secure area at Fort Carson, cutting a fence, damaging locks and breaking into a secured cage, the complaint says. A laser range finder, two miniature thermal monoculars and 19 Peltor electronic headsets with accessories were stolen.

During a second theft that occurred between mid-January and mid-February, 30 sets of body armor and 51 axes were stolen.

Items matching the colors, makes and models of items stolen were found on Francis' eBay page, which is visible on eBay's website but no longer displays items for sale.

## Agency questions F-35's high cost

*Dayton (Ohio) Daily News*

The Pentagon's most expensive weapons program ever — the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter — should undergo an affordability assessment, according to the Government Accountability Office.

Michael J. Sullivan, GAO director of acquisition and sourcing management, said in written testimony to Congress that engine reliability in the F-35 program was "extremely poor" and could require "more time and resources than originally planned."

The F-35 within the past year has experienced an engine failure and computer software issues. In a report last week, the federal watchdog agency questioned the affordability of the fifth-generation jet.

The Pentagon continues testing of the stealthy plane and plans a ramp-up in production as the F-35 competes for funding with new weapon systems, such as a nuclear ballistic missile submarine, a long-range

strike bomber and an aerial refueling tanker.

F-35 costs of \$12.4 billion per year would consume 25 percent of the Pentagon's major acquisition budget in each of the next five years, the GAO said.

"There's no political appetite to cancel the (F-35) program ... but we're definitely going to have to buy fewer of them," said Mandy Smithberger, director of the Straus Military Reform Project at the Project on Government Oversight. "The GAO findings of how unaffordable this program is are pretty chilling, particularly as the (defense) department is taking on a number of very expensive programs this year."

F-35 manufacturer Lockheed Martin and engine-maker Pratt & Whitney disagreed with the GAO's latest findings, and a top government official said that while the report was factually correct, program officials did not agree with all of the report's conclusions. Program officials noted costs have declined, and the weapons pro-

gram is on track under a schedule set four years ago.

"I understand why these oversight people are cautious, but it does appear to be getting better," said Richard Aboulafia, an aviation analyst with the Virginia-based Teal Group. "The costs have been shrinking, which is the first time that has been happening in many years, which is positive news."

The \$391 billion program would purchase 2,457 aircraft during the next two decades to replace aging planes with three different variants for the Air Force, the Navy and the Marine Corps.

Eight other nations have invested in the jet.

In development since 2001, the GAO found that with two years and 40 percent of the most complex testing to go, "more technical problems are likely."

The Air Force, which plans to buy 1,763 of the single-engine jets, has set initial operating capability for 2016.

## 'Military Mistress' still on move after stop

*The Associated Press*

MOBILE, Ala. — Alabama authorities say they are reviewing why a sheriff's deputy released a woman who's wanted in three states and dubbed the "Military Mistress" for her multiple suspected encounters with servicemembers and their bank accounts.

The Mobile County Sheriff's Office confirmed that a deputy recently stopped Bobbi Ann Finley and her husband near Inter-

state 10. The woman is wanted on check-fraud charges in three states but wasn't arrested.

Lori Myles, a spokeswoman for the Mobile sheriff's office, said Thursday it wasn't clear exactly when the woman was stopped, but Oregon authorities said they found out what had happened on Tuesday morning. The Oregon authorities said the couple were in a stolen car at the time of the stop.

The woman's whereabouts

were unknown Friday.

Finley got the "Military Mistress" nickname in 2010 when she was suspected of moving from one military base to the next and marrying servicemembers to gain access to their bank accounts.

In all, authorities say she married 14 men. Finley, 39, and her husband are now wanted on bad-check charges in Colorado, Oklahoma and Oregon.

## 5 teens in Australia held in terrorism plot

SYDNEY — Five Australian teenagers were arrested Saturday on suspicion of plotting an Islamic State group-inspired terrorist attack at a Veterans'

Day ceremony that included targeting police officers, officials said.

The suspects included two 18-year-olds who are suspected to have been preparing an attack at the ANZAC Day ceremony in Melbourne later this month, Australian Federal Police Act-

ing Deputy Commissioner Neil Gaughan told reporters.

Another 18-year-old was arrested on weapons charges, and two other men, ages 18 and 19, were in custody and assisting police. All the arrests took place in Melbourne.

From The Associated Press



# LeBron aiming for third title

The Associated Press

CLEVELAND — For LeBron James, his homecoming season with the Cavaliers went up, down and sometimes sideways, like three seasons rolled into one.

The fourth is about to begin. The only one that matters.

James has his sights set on another NBA title, and if he can capture it over the next two months, he'll not only crown his brilliant career but end Cleveland's title drought dating to 1964.

The pursuit begins Sunday when the Cavs open the Eastern Conference playoffs at home against Boston, a familiar opponent — and a fitting one — for James, who has played the Celtics 25 times in the postseason. James' first stint in Cleveland ended with a loss to the Celtics in the second round, and as he stomped off the floor in Boston's TD Garden after Game 6, he memorably yanked off his Cavaliers jersey, a final act before his exit to Miami.

"They beat us that series and it stuck with me a lot," James said Friday. "I'm looking forward to this series coming up."

Five years later, James is a two-time champion. He's more mature and still the game's best all-around player. James has come full circle.

His first regular season back in Cleveland was an 82-game thrill ride from the start.

The Cavs entered the year with humon-

gous expectations as the arrivals last summer of James and Kevin Love, teamed with All-Star guard Kyrie Irving, gave Cleveland a "Big 3" to rival any trio in the league. But things didn't go as planned as James fought nagging back and knee injuries and the Cavs staggered to a 19-20 start, raising eyebrows and bringing scrutiny on first-year coach David Blatt.

But bolstered by the additions of J.R. Smith, Timofey Mozgov and J.R. Smith in trades, the Cavs went 34-9 after Jan. 15 and secured the East's No. 2 seed.

Not the assumed journey, but James, who took two weeks off in January to heal physically and mentally, is pleased where it brought the Cavs.

"It's been like three different seasons for us," James said. "We had that when-I-first-came-back season to when we started the season as a totally different team than when I first came back. The Kevin Love trade, that began another season. And then we had another trade in January. That's like three different seasons."

"So, for everything that we've went through as far as personnel changes, I think it's been a pretty good regular season. I wouldn't say great. I'm not satisfied. I'm never satisfied."

James' drive and desire define him, and now that the playoffs are here, the 30-year-old transforms into a different player: more focused, more committed, more urgent. When April arrives, James flips an internal switch he won't turn off until his season ends — whenever that happens.

Is he different person, too?

"Ask my teammates come Sunday," he said with a slight smile.

Postseason LeBron James is indeed a sight to behold.

In 158 career playoff games, he's averaged 28 points, 8.4 rebounds and 6.4 assists. He's had memorable performances, including the 48-point masterpiece in 2007 against Detroit, scoring Cleveland's last 25 points and 29 of the final 30.

This is his time of year.

"Mentally and emotionally he'll lead the way," Blatt said. "But this all can't be on LeBron. This is a team and a team effort and everyone here has to do his part. The good news is he's a guy that's done it, been there and led teams to the ultimate."

There were growing pains as James learned to play alongside Love and Irving, both playoff first-timers. It may have taken longer than expected, but the stars have seemingly aligned though there remains uncertainty about the future for Love, who can opt out of his contract this summer.

For now, they're united to make a run at a title.

Blatt, who seemed disconnected with James during stretches of the season, can't wait to see what No. 23 looks like in playoff mode.

"We will probably see another level because that's what he does," Blatt said. "It's why he's the superstar that he is and why he's the champion that he is."

# Clippers, Spurs are undaunted by matchup

The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — When the NBA finalized its playoff schedule this week, one pairing looked out of place.

The Los Angeles Clippers against the San Antonio Spurs? Players on both teams couldn't help thinking that this matchup belongs in a conference final, not the first round.

Once the surprise wore off, this brutal way to start the playoffs sank in for two veteran teams.

"It's just another year in the West," Clippers guard Chris Paul said.

Indeed, the Western Conference's superiority has led to four difficult matchups, but none more daunting than the 55-win defending champions as a No. 6 seed against a 56-win opponent thirsting for its first major postseason success.

One of these popular powers will be out of the postseason by the first weekend in May, which should only add fuel to the annual chorus of calls for the NBA to address the inequities in its playoff system.

"It was crazy this year in the West," Spurs guard Tony Parker said. "The conference is so good, and it's crazy to win 11 games in a row and you finish sixth and you play the other hottest team. ... We'll have to welcome it. It's going to be a great challenge to start on the road."

Game 1 is Sunday night in Los Angeles.

Los Angeles and San Antonio finished with two of the NBA's top six regular-season records, and they both steamrolled into the playoffs. The Clippers won 14 of their final 15 games, while the Spurs had won 11 straight before losing their season finale.

"I'm pretty sure they're wondering, 'How did we end up with the 6 seed in the first round?'" Clippers center DeAndre Jordan said. "But the West is so tough. Everybody was winning."

The Spurs had the chance to avoid this matchup Wednesday night in New Orleans, but they lost to the Pelicans. San Antonio tumbled four spots from a potential No. 2 seed, forcing it to start the playoffs on the road.

"It was disappointing, but that disappointment was gone in a second," Tim Duncan said. "There are a ton of games throughout the year we should have won, that would have put us in a better situation, but we didn't. So, we are where we are, and we're facing who we're facing. We're prepared for them."

Both teams had shaken off any disappointment about their draw by the time they went to work in practice this week. The Clippers uniformly treated the matchup as a positive development, allowing them to face the Spurs before the playoff grind has worn them down.

"The West is hard. There's no passes," Clippers coach Doc Rivers said. "You just have to fight your way through it. We're starting with the world champs, and we'll find out if that's good or bad."

# Perilous path to finals in West

The Associated Press

Tony Parker thought he'd seen it all in the Western Conference.

He should've known better.

The Spurs rolled into the final game of the regular season winners of 11 straight games to announce themselves as serious contenders again. One loss at New Orleans sent San Antonio from second to sixth place, costing the defending NBA champions homecourt advantage in the first two rounds.

"It's been a crazy season, crazy West," Parker said.

The margin for error will be just as slim when the playoffs start Saturday. The conference is so loaded with talent that it's hard to call any matchup a major upset.

Top-seeded Golden State might be the exception. The Warriors won a franchise-record 67 games behind MVP candidate Stephen Curry and the league's top-ranked defense. Their reward?

A best-of-seven series against budding star Anthony Davis and a pesky Pelicans (45-37) team that would've comfortably finished sixth in the Eastern Conference. Too bad for them they play out West, where there are no nights off.

"You couldn't take and sit guys out for a week or any period of time because it was so competitive," Grizzlies coach Dave Joerger said. "It's an arms race every

week."

For the second straight year, seven teams won 50 games in the West: Golden State (67-15), Houston (56-26), the Los Angeles Clippers (56-26), Portland (51-31), Memphis (55-27), San Antonio (55-27) and Dallas (50-32). Adding to the rugged landscape, scoring champion Russell Westbrook and Oklahoma City (45-37) got left out of the postseason because New Orleans won the head-to-head tiebreaker over them.

So, with all the clutter and competition, the question now is whether the team that advances to the NBA Finals will be better or beaten up because of the perilous path to get there.

"I have no idea," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. "If it's up to me, I hope we sweep everybody."

Some things to watch in the Western Conference playoffs:

**Survive and advance:** Houston, Portland and Memphis might stand as good a chance as anybody to win the conference if they're at full strength. Right now, they're not. And they may not be all post-season. How each team deals with replacing key players could determine how difficult the West will really be.

**Clippers-Spurs:** Speaking of surviving, the Clippers-Spurs series is the kind of marquee matchup that usually comes in late May, not mid-April. San Antonio is trying to win back-to-back titles and six over-

all, while Los Angeles is hoping to break its trend of early-round exits and get to the Western Conference finals. No doubt the winner of this series will be favored to do just that.

**Rookie coach:** Kerr already has won more games than any first-year coach in NBA history. But's he never coached in the playoffs. Kerr is counting on his experience as a player, when he won three titles alongside Michael Jordan in Chicago and two more under Gregg Popovich in San Antonio, and veteran assistants Alvin Gentry and Ron Adams to prepare him for the pressure-packed moments on Golden State's sideline.

**Helping Harden:** James Harden carried the injury-ravaged Rockets all season, making a strong case for MVP. Dwight Howard is healthy again, but he has hardly been playing like the All-Star center who won Defensive Player of the Year three straight seasons from 2009-11 in Orlando. If Howard can get anywhere close to his level of old, there's no telling how far Houston could go.

**Don't forget Dallas:** For a 50-win team with an attention-grabbing owner, nobody seems to be talking about Dallas. The Mavericks pushed the Spurs to seven games in last season's opening round — San Antonio lost only four other games the rest of the playoffs — and are always dangerous with Dirk Nowitzki's streaky stroke.



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# A-Rod's homers lift Yankees

The Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — The New York Yankees used Alex Rodriguez's big game to get a win on the road, and that was the most important part for the slugger.

Rodriguez inched closer to Willie Mays with two more home runs, and the Yankees beat the Tampa Bay Rays 5-4 on Friday night.

"We needed this one badly," Rodriguez said after New York's fourth victory in 10 games this season.

Rodriguez hit a solo shot in the second, driving an 0-1 pitch from Nathan Karns an estimated 471 feet to center.

He connected again in the sixth, belting a two-run drive to left against Ernesto Frieri for homer No. 658 — just two shy of Mays for fourth place on baseball's career list.

"I am," Rodriguez said when asked if he is surprised by his start. "Hopefully it keeps going."

Rodriguez, who missed last season because of a drug suspension, also had a tiebreaking RBI single on a 3-2 pitch in the eighth against Kevin Jepsen (0-1). Brett Gardner, who came in to run for Carlos Beltran after his leadoff single, stole second before Rodriguez singled to center with two out.

Rays manager Kevin Cash said there was no consideration given about intentionally walking Rodriguez, who is batting .344 with four homers and 11 RBIs.

"With Kevin Jepsen on the mound, we'll pitch to anyone in baseball," Cash said.

It was Rodriguez's first multihomer game since May 23, 2012, and No. 61 for his career. He also moved past former teammate Derek Jeter for ninth place on

the runs scored list with 1,925.

"Without Alex we're going to lose that ballgame," Yankees manager Joe Girardi said. "Just a great night for Alex."

After Dellin Betances (2-0) threw a scoreless inning, Andrew Miller got the final four outs for his third save.

Allan Dykstra and Logan Forsythe hit consecutive homers in the fourth to give Tampa Bay a 4-2 lead. Dykstra had been 1-for-15 this season before hitting a three-run drive off Adam Warren for his first major league homer.

Stephen Drew put the Yankees up 2-0 in the fourth with his 100th career homer.

Karns allowed two runs and two hits in five innings. He struck out seven and walked four.

Warren gave up four runs and six hits over four innings.

Rays third baseman Evan Longoria went 1-for-3 and walked once while serving as the designated hitter. He left Thursday night's game at Toronto in the eighth inning with a bruised left hip after getting hit by a pitch.

**Dodgers 7, Rockies 3:** Clayton Kershaw struck out 12 batters in six innings on his way to his first win, helping host Los Angeles beat Colorado.

**Royals 6, Athletics 4:** Paulo Orlando hit a tiebreaking RBI triple in his team's two-run eighth inning as host Kansas City beat Oakland.

**Angels 6, Astros 3:** Los Angeles star Mike Trout homered twice during his team's victory over host Houston to become the youngest player in history with 100 home runs and 100 stolen bases.

**Padres 5, Cubs 4:** Top prospect Kris Bryant went 0-for-4 with three strikeouts in his first game with host Chicago as

Wil Myers hit a three-run homer for San Diego.

**Diamondbacks 9, Giants 0:** Josh Collmenter pitched a four-hitter and had a career-high three hits as visiting Arizona sent San Francisco to its eighth straight loss.

**Red Sox 3, Orioles 2:** Xander Bogaerts blooped a winning single with one out in the ninth inning, sending host Boston to the victory over Baltimore.

**Mets 4, Marlins 1:** Bartolo Colon hit a tying sacrifice fly for his second RBI in two starts as well as pitching host New York to its sixth straight win.

**Rangers 3, Mariners 1:** Yovani Gallardo pitched six scoreless innings for visiting Texas, and Robinson Chirinos homered.

**Pirates 6, Brewers 3:** Vance Worley worked six effective innings as host Pittsburgh broke out of a lengthy slump.

**Cardinals 6, Reds 1:** Michael Wacha pitched seven strong innings for host St. Louis, and Yadier Molina had a bases-clearing double.

**Braves 8, Blue Jays 7:** Pinch-hitter Jonny Gomes belted a tiebreaking homer in the eighth inning for visiting Atlanta, and Freddie Freeman added a two-run shot.

**Twins 3, Indians 2 (11):** Trevor Plouffe led off the 11th inning with a soaring home run for host Minnesota.

**Tigers 2, White Sox 1:** Jose Iglesias hit a game-ending RBI single as host Detroit improved its major league-best record to 9-1.

**Nationals 7, Phillies 2:** Max Scherzer pitched eight strong innings to get his first win with host Washington, and Bryce Harper hit a three-run homer.

# Kenseth to start from pole

The Associated Press

BRISTOL, Tenn. — Matt Kenseth will try for his first win since 2013 when he starts from the pole at Bristol Motor Speedway.

Kenseth led a strong showing from Joe Gibbs Racing on Friday when he turned a lap at 128.632 mph to grab the top starting spot.

But he wasn't sure how his pole run would help him Sunday. Kenseth is winless in 51 races since New Hampshire in September 2013, but came close last month at California until a late debris caution ruined his day.

"Finishing up front is the most important part," Kenseth said after qualifying. "The guy who's on the pole always says it's a big deal for Sunday. Qualifying and racing is different, I think everywhere. Certainly getting one lap here is a lot different than being good for 500 laps."

It was Kenseth's first pole of the season and 13th of his career.

Brad Keselowski qualified second at 128.442 in a Team Penske Ford.

He was followed by Carl Edwards as JGR drivers took two of the top three spots, and three of the top five when Denny Hamlin qualified behind Kevin Harvick. David Ragan, the interim driver for injured Kyle Busch in the fourth JGR Toyota, qualified 11th.

Edwards said he knew the JGR cars were good because his balance was off "and we still ran really well."

"We have a very fast car and it's going to be a fun race."

Kenseth has won the August race at Bristol three times in his career, but has never won on the .533-mile concrete bullring in the spring.

Joey Logano qualified sixth to put both Penske cars in the first three rows.

Kurt Busch was seventh to join Stewart-Haas Racing teammate Harvick as the highest-qualifying Chevrolets. He was followed by Kasey Kahne, the highest qualifying Hendrick Motorsports driver.

Paul Menard from Richard Childress Racing and Jamie McMurray from Chip Ganassi Racing rounded out the top 10.

**IndyCar:** Dale Coyne Racing replaced Carlos Huertas on the opening day of the Long Beach Grand Prix with a driver who will be making his IndyCar Series debut in Long Beach, Calif.

No reason was given for the change to Rocky Moran Jr., a 35-year-old driver who last raced in 2011 in the American Le Mans Series. His last open wheel race was the Indy Lights race at Indianapolis Motor Speedway in 2005.

Despite the lack of experience in an Indy car, Moran was nearly 1.5 seconds faster in Friday's practice than Coyne teammate Francesco Dracone.

Moran, a multiple race winner in Toyota Atlantic, is the son of Rocky Moran, who made 24 starts in Indy cars from 1981 through 1994 and raced in three Indianapolis 500s.

Dracone, who has been the slowest driver in the first two races of the season, was fined \$10,000 for hitting a crew member on pit road last weekend at New Orleans. Crew member Todd Phillips flipped when he was struck by the left rear corner of the car. The contact caused a cut on his right leg and a bruised right foot.

Coyne told The Indianapolis Star that a stream of water from the morning's heavy rain was to blame for the spin, and not Dracone's talent or experience level.

# Backstrom, Caps even series with Isles

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — So what if the Washington Capitals' goalie was a last-minute rookie replacement, making his second NHL appearance all season?

So what if Alex Ovechkin's club had played nearly 5½ periods without ever holding a lead, and was facing a two-goal hole that was getting close to putting Washington in a two-game series deficit against the New York Islanders?

So what if those Islanders seemed to block every shot at one end, then turn every odd-man rush into a goal at the other?

Sometimes a group that will try new things when the going gets tough, the Capitals were determined to stay the course this time. Nicklas Backstrom delivered a goal and two assists, and Ovechkin scored once, leading the Capitals and fill-in goalie Philipp Grubauer to a 4-3 comeback victory over the Islanders on Friday night that evened the first-round playoff series at 1-all.

"Just because it doesn't work right away, doesn't mean it's not working. You've just got to keep doing the same things and the right things — and I thought we did," Washington coach Barry Trotz said. "You could see it turning."

Ovechkin's take? "When we play our game, (when) we stay in their zone, everything can happen," he said.

After Washington's two stars — Ovechkin led the NHL in goals, Backstrom was No. 1 in assists — both scored to erase a 3-1 deficit, Jason Chimera netted the go-ahead goal with 12½ minutes left.

"Stuck with the gameplan," said Chimera, who had only seven goals in the

regular season. "We wanted to stick with it, no matter what happened."

Chimera, who was whistled for penalties at the 20-minute mark of the second and third periods in the Capitals' 4-1 Game 1 loss Wednesday, sent a wrister past Jaroslav Halak to give the hosts their first lead of the series. Chimera's initial shot was blocked, but the puck came right back to him, and he didn't miss on the second chance.

"We got a little less aggressive," Islanders captain John Tavares said. "You know, not moving our feet as much."

The series shifts to New York for Game 3 on Sunday, and Game 4 on Tuesday. The Islanders are playing their last season at Nassau Coliseum, their home since 1972, before moving to Brooklyn.

"We're going to come with some pretty serious intensity in Nassau, so it'll be up to them to match us," said Cal Clutterbuck, who scored New York's first goal on its second shot.

Ryan Strome and Kyle Okposo also helped give the Islanders leads of 2-0 and 3-1 by putting the puck past Grubauer, a 23-year-old German called up from the minors Friday to replace ill starter Braden Holtby.

**Canadiens 3, Senators 2 (OT):** Alex Galchenyuk scored on a spin-around shot 3:40 into overtime, leading host Montreal past Ottawa for a 2-0 lead in their first-round playoff series.

Max Pacioretty, back from a concussion that sidelined him in Game 1, and P.K. Subban scored in regulation for the Canadiens, while David Desharnais picked up an assist on each.

Clarke MacArthur and Patrick Wiercioch scored for the Senators, and Mark Stone

added two assists.

Carey Price stopped 29 shots for Montreal, while Ottawa's Andrew Hammond made 38 saves.

Game 3 is Sunday in Ottawa.

**Predators 6, Blackhawks 2:** Craig Smith scored the first two playoff goals of his career and added an assist, as host Nashville beat Chicago to tie the Western Conference opening-round playoff series at a game apiece.

The Predators won for the first time since clinching a postseason berth on March 28. Pekka Rinne made 24 saves for the win and even had an assist.

Filip Forsberg had a goal and an assist, and Colin Wilson, Roman Josi and Mike Santorelli each scored a goal. Nashville lost captain Shea Weber to a lower-body injury nearly midway through the second period.

Patrick Sharp and Patrick Kane scored for Chicago, which hosts Game 3 on Sunday.

**Canucks 4, Flames 1:** Eddie Lack made 22 saves as host Vancouver defeated Calgary to even the first-round playoff series at a game apiece.

Daniel Sedin, Chris Higgins, Ronalds Kenins and Radim Vrbata — into an empty net — scored for the Canucks, who snapped a seven-game losing streak at home in the playoffs dating to the 2011 Stanley Cup finals.

Kris Russell scored late in the third period for the Flames to end Lack's shutout bid.

The physical game was capped by a full-scale brawl late in the third with fights erupting all over the ice deep in the Vancouver zone after a whistle.

Calgary hosts Game 3 on Sunday.