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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Marines experimenting with supply ships

BY STEVEN BEARDSLEY

Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — For Marine pilot Capt. Dave Haines, everything about a recent landing exercise in the Persian Gulf was routine, even if the ship and crew weren't.

Only after Haines touched his tilt-rotor Osprey to the landing deck and climbed out was he reminded that the USS Ponce, a former amphibious ship now used as a platform for counter-mine and special operations, was run by civilian mariners.

"I'll put it this way, you'd have never known ... until you get the green light, get out and see guys with beards and long hair," Haines said.

Clean-shaven Marines like Haines can expect to work alongside civilians more often in the years ahead if the Corps gets its way.

Faced with a limited number of amphibious ships and a growing emphasis on crisis-response missions in places like Africa and the Pacific, the Marines are looking toward the Navy's civilian-operated supply fleet to fill some of the gap.

The fleet includes vessels originally designed to move Marine weapons and vehicles, such as oil tankers modified into floating docks, cargo ships adapted to berth troops and a thin-skinned aluminum catamaran that can be used to launch special operations forces or humanitarian missions.

In a pinch, the Ponce could serve as a "lily pad," or jump-

ing-off point, for Haines' crisis-response battalion in Kuwait should amphibious ships be unavailable, Corps officials say.

"What we've realized is there are a lot of capabilities that are hiding in plain sight," said Jim Strock, director of the Corps' Seabasing Integration division, which heads the effort.

It's not a natural embrace for Marine leaders. They insist amphibious warships — the large, armored vessels capable of pouring thousands of troops and equipment onto shore — are preferable in the long run to unarmored civilian ships, yet they need immediate options for smaller units stationed across the globe.

The Marines have created battalion task forces in Spain, Kuwait and Australia in recent years to train with nearby forces and to be prepared for crisis response. All have integrated air and artillery, but each lacks dedicated ships. Tighter budgets and other shipbuilding priorities mean new additions will be slow to arrive, putting a pinch on the current fleet when need arises.

"The force structure, the number of amphibious ships, is not enough to do what the Marines want to do — warfight — and not enough to satisfy the combatant commanders in peacetime," said Bryan Clark, a naval analyst with the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments.

Although the Navy has long considered using supply ships for limited operations, only in

recent years have the Marines experimented with the possibilities. They focused on large cargo ships assigned to their pre-positioning fleet, like the 50,000-ton Large, Medium-Speed Roll-On/Roll-Off and a 42,000-ton dry cargo mover called the T-AKE.

When the Marines landed an Osprey on an LMSR in 2011, Strock saw the possibilities. Connecting ships by Osprey, which serves as airlift for small Marine units, meant opening new options at sea to smaller task forces that don't need the heft of an amphibious ship.

"We never imagined in our wildest dreams operating a V-22 off a supply ship," he said. "But we did. The rest was history."

The years since have seen further experiments, and several purpose-built ships have opened other possibilities.

An Afloat Forward Staging Base, or AFSB, adds a helicopter deck and built-in berthing to the mobile landing platform, a ship originally designed to swap gear between vessels at sea. Most closely resembling the Ponce in function, the AFSB will be able to bring Marines on or off via Osprey and Landing Craft, Air Cushioned vessels, making them ideal for small task forces or units.

The first of two AFSBs is under construction and expected to be operational by 2016, when it may replace the Ponce. Some Marine plans have suggested using an AFSB as a hub for anti-piracy missions off West Africa.

The Marines also have explored the Joint High Speed Vessel, or JHSV, an aluminum catamaran designed to quickly move several hundred people and their gear in noncombat environments.

In an exercise last year, Marine Special Operations commandos launched missions from aboard a JHSV. Other concepts include humanitarian missions or movements of Marine teams designed to reinforce American diplomatic buildings overseas.

Experiments with the supply ships will continue for several more years as the Marines explore the possibilities, Strock said. Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Joseph Dunford already has called for planning on how task forces in Spain and Australia could employ the ships.

Questions remain, including how Marines will work alongside civilian mariners, who are part of the Navy's Military Sealift Command.

The ships also don't solve the problem of amphibious assault, some naval analysts say, even if they help ease the burden on the current fleet.

"I think the Marines are very happy with the direction the [mobile-landing platform] is going," said Bryan McGrath, a naval consultant with the FerryBridge Group. "And I think they would tell you, and with iron-clad justification, that they are not amphibs."

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20th anniversary of Okla. bombing marked

OKLAHOMA CITY — Several hundred people gathered at the former site of the Oklahoma City federal building to commemorate the 20th anniversary

of the terrorist bombing there that killed 168 people and injured many others.

Survivors of the April 19, 1995, attack and relatives of some of the dead were among those attending Sunday's memorial service.

The service was set to begin at 9:02 a.m., which was when the bomb detonated, with a 168-second moment of silence followed by a reading of the names of those killed. Former President Bill Clinton and Oklahoma Gov. Mary Fallin were expected

to speak at the gathering.

Timothy McVeigh, an Army veteran with strong anti-government views, was executed for carrying out the bombing. His accomplice, Terry Nichols, is serving life in prison.

From The Associated Press

US military spending in Europe increasing

BY STEVEN BEARDSLEY
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — From Army rotations to bunkered weapons, American military spending in Europe has risen in the past year in an effort to reassure allies nervous over Russian actions in Ukraine.

More is coming in the months ahead. U.S. commanders in Europe continue to draw from roughly \$1 billion in contingency funding approved by Congress in December, much of it earmarked for projects still in their earliest stages, including airfield improvements and funding for forces in the Baltics and Ukraine. The military is requesting almost \$800 million for the coming fiscal year, and officials say funding will be needed in years ahead to ensure the success of current projects.

"I think everyone's aware that, especially with infrastructure, some of this will have a tail that goes beyond (fiscal year) 2016," one defense official said.

That official, provided by U.S. European Command and authorized to speak only on background, spoke with Stars and Stripes as the military prepares to update Congress on recent spending under the \$985 million European Reassurance Initiative. Funded through overseas contingency operating funds, the ERI is meant to rope off money for exercises,

patrols and infrastructure improvements by moving them outside the military's base budget, which is subject to budget caps passed by Congress four years ago.

Much of the funding is dedicated to the most visible parts of U.S. operations on the continent. The rotation of an Army heavy-armored brigade eats up about a quarter of the total, while ERI also funds fighter jet patrols over the Baltic states and increased Navy deployments to the Black Sea.

The Air Force decision to keep a squadron of F-15C fighter jets in Lakenheath, England, a line item not included in original planning for the fund, represents another significant chunk, at about \$110 million.

Congress designated \$175 million of current funding specifically to provide equipment to forces in the Baltics and Ukraine. Another \$175 million of the fund is earmarked as military construction in the Baltics and Central and Eastern Europe, with more likely to be set aside during the coming fiscal year beginning in October.

Timelines and funding restrictions remain a challenge, the official said. The military developed ERI as a two-year funding mechanism; Congress chose instead to fund one year at a time.

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Afghan leaders stand firm in wake of attack

BY JAD SLEIMAN
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Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Afghan leaders and security officials on Sunday expressed their resolve against a new possible enemy after the first major attack in Afghanistan claimed by the Islamic State group.

A motorcyclist carried out a suicide bombing at a busy section of the eastern capital of Jalalabad during the morning rush hour Saturday, killing 35 people and injuring more than 100. Government workers collecting their pay at a bank were apparently targeted, with children among the casualties.

Interior Ministry spokesman Sediq Sediqqi was reluctant to

confirm the Islamic State's culpability Sunday, pointing to an ongoing investigation.

"The Afghan security forces are working day and night to prevent these kinds of attacks," he said. "Every 24 hours, we are making new arrests," he said.

He dismissed the idea that Afghanistan faces the same threat as Iraq now that the U.S. has drawn down its troops from the country, leaving behind only a residual force.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani blamed the group during a televised address Saturday, giving credence to the Islamic State claim.

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Video: Militants kill Christians in Libya

CAIRO — Islamic State militants in Libya shot and beheaded groups of captive Ethiopian Christians, a video purportedly from the extremists showed Sunday. The attack widens the circle of nations affected by the group's atrocities while showing its growth beyond a self-declared "caliphate" in Syria and Iraq.

The 29-minute video mirrored a film released in February

showing militants beheading 21 captured Egyptian Christians on a Libyan beach, which immediately drew Egyptian airstrikes on the group's suspected positions in Libya.

The video, released via militant social media accounts and websites, could not be independently verified by The Associated Press. However, it corresponded to other videos released by the Islamic State group and bore the symbol of its al-Furqan media arm.

From The Associated Press

Injured former Marine to make 2nd Everest attempt

The Associated Press

KATHMANDU, Nepal — A former U.S. Marine who lost his right leg and several fingers in an explosion in Afghanistan will make a second attempt to scale Mount Everest to inspire others like him, a year after an avalanche that killed 16 Sherpa guides stopped him at the base camp.

Former Staff Sgt. Charlie

Linville, 29, from Boise, Idaho, will use a specially designed metal foot outfitted with a climbing boot and another one with crampons in his quest to conquer the 29,035-foot summit next month.

"My message is, 'Anything is possible.' It is just not me being an amputee, but anyone sitting on the couch around the world that has problems — you can overcome life, it is just how

determined you are," Linville said in Kathmandu on Friday on his way to Tibet in neighboring China, from where he will set out on Everest.

He was an explosives expert serving in Afghanistan in 2011, when he went to investigate an explosion that wounded his colleague. He was hit by another explosive device and was seriously wounded, and two years later, had his right leg ampu-

tated below the knee.

He retired from service and has been climbing since with The Heroes Project, a non-profit organization that helps wounded veterans.

Everest would be the highest and toughest mountain that he has attempted to climb. His quest last year was thwarted April when an avalanche swept down. At the time, Linville was at the base camp at 17,595 feet.

Boston looks forward two years after blasts

The Associated Press

BOSTON — It's been decades since you could run in the Boston Marathon without qualifying, before limits on the field size made entering — almost as much as finishing — something to aspire to.

The course has changed a dozen times or more. Women were officially welcomed in 1972, wheelchairs three years later, and prize money was introduced in 1986, ushering in a professional era that rejuvenated the event and fortified its status as the world's most prestigious road race.

But nothing in more than a century has done more to shape how the Boston Marathon is perceived and how it will look in the future than the twin explosions at the finish line in 2013.

And when the field of 30,000 leaves Hopkinton on Monday for the 119th race, the effect of those bombs will be seen not just in the ever-watchful security but in the way the runners and their supporters have responded to the unprecedented attack.

"I don't think it's ever going to be just a race again," said Desiree Linden, who returns this year in search of the American victory she missed by 2 seconds in 2011. "There's so much history here: some of it is good, some of it is bad. When you run Boston, that's always going to be a part of it."

Over the more than a century since the first Boston Marathon in 1897 until Lelisa Desisa won in 2013, the event transformed from a footrace among friends into one of the world's premier athletic contests.

But not until the bombings that killed three people and wounded 260 did the marathon become a touchstone for the resiliency of a city and its signature sporting event.

Last year's race became the centerpiece of the city's recovery, and the calls to take back the finish line were answered when Meb Keflezighi became the first American man to win since 1983.

"The marathon gods blessed Meb with that run. It was electric," said Shalane Flanagan, who finished seventh last year and hopes to break a 30-year drought in the women's race. "Last year was extremely special, just being an American.

It's a run I'll never, ever forget."

A daughter of marathon runners, Flanagan grew up in suburban Marblehead with a reverence for the Boston race. Just to run it was life-changing, she said; to win it would be an honor.

"Yeah, it was a race. But at the same time it was beyond a race, because of what was on the line," Keflezighi said this week as he prepared to defend his ca-thartic 2014 title.

"We can't get those people back; it can never be forgotten. It can never be normal, because everyone's going to think about that moment. But we do what we can," said the two-time Olympic silver medalist who had written on last year's race bib the names of those killed.

Reminders of the April 15 bombings are still easy to find two years later.

Earlier this month, a federal court jury convicted Dzhokhar Tsarnaev of all 30 counts in the bombings and the manhunt, in which an MIT police officer was killed. Jurors will soon decide whether he should be sentenced to life in prison or to death.

Mayor Marty Walsh declared a day of remembrance and community called "One Boston Day." On race day, already the state holiday of Patriots' Day, the Boston Red Sox will wear special uniforms with the city's name on their chest.

Security along the route has been increased. More miles of fencing between the runners and the fans. More officers on bicycle. Runners will again pack their belongings in see-through bags. Spectators will be screened before entering the finish-line bleachers.

Consistent through the race's history, before the bombs and after, are themes like patriotism and resilience. Of overcoming pain and injury. Of amateurs running for charity, or just to make it to the end.

"The bombing is part of the Boston Marathon history now," four-time winner Bill Rodgers said. "But I think the public got to see what the Boston Marathon really stands for, and how the Boston area came together.

"The healing is occurring; that's what everyone wants. They want it to be a wonderful celebration, just like it has always been. And I think that's what's happening."

Logano cruises at Bristol

The Associated Press

BRISTOL, Tenn. — Joey Logano led flag-to-flag Saturday to win the Xfinity Series race at Bristol Motor Speedway.

Erik Jones started from the pole but was passed by Logano before he completed the first lap. Logano led all 300 laps in cruising to his second Xfinity Series victory of the season.

"I've never led every single lap in a race before," Logano said. "Gosh, this is fun. This is amazing. You're just waiting for something to go wrong."

In three starts in NASCAR's second-tier series, Logano has driven his Ford to two wins and a second-place finish for Team Penske.

Daniel Suarez, a rookie for Joe Gibbs Racing, finished a career-best second. He needed a big save of his Toyota about halfway through the race, eventually moved into second, but never had a challenge for Logano.

Chris Buescher was third in a Ford for Roush Fenway Racing and moved into a tie with Ty Dillon for the series points lead.

Tempers flare as A's shut out Royals

The Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Josh Reddick rounded the bases after his three-run homer, celebrated in Oakland's dugout for just a moment, and then climbed to the top step and waited.

He knew exactly what was coming next.

Royals pitcher Yordano Ventura promptly plunked A's third baseman Brett Lawrie with what appeared to be a retaliatory pitch for an incident the previous night, and Reddick and the rest of his teammates spilled onto the field in what could have turned into an ugly melee.

Cooler heads prevailed. So did the A's, who went on to beat Kansas City 5-0 Saturday night.

"We knew it was coming," Reddick said of the pitch that got Ventura ejected in the fourth inning. "It's bush league. There's no need for it."

Stephen Vogt and former Royals designated hitter Billy Butler also drove in a run for Oakland during the five-run fourth inning, and Jesse Hahn (1-1) scattered three hits and a walk over 5 1-3 innings before leaving with a blister on the middle finger of his pitching hand.

Jesse Chavez then picked him up with 3 2-3 innings for the save, completing the fifth shutout by Oakland in its first 12 games. The A's have outscored their opponents 47-1 in six victories.

"Never get tired of shutouts," Oakland manager Bob Melvin said.

Tempers were still hot from the series opener Friday night, when Lawrie slid hard and late into second base and wiped out Alcides Escobar. The Royals shortstop sprained his left knee in the collision, and said before Saturday night's game he thought the slide was dirty.

Ventura waited until he was pounded in the fourth before exacting revenge.

After serving up Reddick's homer to right field, the hard-throwing youngster plunked Lawrie in the left elbow. Plate umpire Jim Joyce immediately tossed Ventura from the game, and the rest of the umpire crew moved quickly to prevent a more heated confrontation between the teams.

Lawrie calmly walked to first base and waited for the furor to die down.

"I didn't want to have any problems," said Lawrie, who apologized to Escobar in a text that apparently was not well received. "You can't control what happens on the other side."

When asked whether Ventura expected to be suspended, fellow pitcher Jeremy Guthrie — serving as a translator — replied: "I don't think we need to answer that."

Cubs 7, Padres 6 (11): On his second day with the Cubs, Kris Bryant played like the top prospect Chicago was expecting.

Bryant got a standing ovation for his first major league hit and reached base five times for host Chicago.

A day after Bryant went 0-for-4 with three strikeouts in his big league debut,

he was 2-for-3 with a pair of singles and three walks.

"You're always looking for good at-bats and being a good decision-maker. He was that today," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said.

Phillies 5, Nationals 3: Odubel Herrera had three hits and scored twice, Aaron Harang pitched six innings and Philadelphia ended a six-game losing streak, beating host Washington.

Cardinals 5, Reds 2: Carlos Martinez pitched six strong innings and Jason Heyward hit his first home run, leading host St. Louis over Cincinnati for its fourth straight win.

White Sox 12, Tigers 3: Jose Abreu hit a grand slam, Adam LaRoche added a three-run homer and four RBIs for visiting Chicago.

Chicago, which set a season high for runs, scored 11 runs in the third and fourth innings combined and collected a season-high 17 hits for the game.

Indians 4, Twins 2: Danny Salazar matched his career high with 10 strikeouts while pitching into the seventh inning of his season debut, leading visiting Cleveland.

Blue Jays 6, Braves 5 (10): Josh Donaldson hit his third home run in two days, a leadoff shot in the 10th inning that lifted host Toronto.

Yankees 9, Rays 0: Masahiro Tanaka (2-1) allowed two hits over seven innings, struck out eight and walked none in his best start this season for visiting New York.

Mets 5, Marlins 4: Jacob deGrom (2-1) struck out eight in seven shutout innings, Travis d'Arnaud and Wilmer Flores homered and host New York won its seventh straight, the Mets' longest since an eight-game run in June 2010.

Pirates 6, Brewers 2: Starling Marte homered for the second game in a row and drove in a career-high five runs. Visiting Milwaukee lost its fourth straight game and is off to their worst start since also going 2-9 in 2002.

Astros 4, Angels 0: Dallas Keuchel (2-0) allowed two hits in six innings and combined with three relievers on a three-hitter for host Houston.

Dodgers 6, Rockies 3: Zack Greinke (2-0) won his 14th straight decision against a National League West division rival, allowing three runs and five hits in 6 2/3 innings for host Los Angeles. He is 20-1 with a 1.95 ERA in 30 starts against NL West teams since signing with the Dodgers in December 2012.

Giants 4, Diamondbacks 1: Chris Heston (2-1) gave up five hits in 7 2/3 innings, Brandon Crawford hit a two-run homer and the World Series champions stopped an eight-game losing streak on the night players received their championship rings.

Mariners 3, Rangers 1: Felix Hernandez (2-0) struck out 12 in seven innings to reach double digits for the 34th time in his career. He allowed one run and two hits for host Seattle.



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Blues get even with Wild

The Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — There was no containing Vladimir Tarasenko this time around.

Held to an assist without a shot in a deflating Game 1 loss, Tarasenko responded with his first career playoff hat trick, and the St. Louis Blues beat the Minnesota Wild 4-1 on Saturday to even their first-round series at a game apiece.

"You need to forget whatever it was. Bad game, good game, doesn't matter," Tarasenko said.

"You need to make a next step. If you think about your success, you'll stop playing."

Tarasenko scored two goals in the first period and an empty-netter with 17 seconds remaining in an impressive performance more in line with his play in the regular season. The dynamic winger ran his playoff total to seven goals in nine games.

"We need him to rise up," coach Ken Hitchcock said. "For us to have success, our best players have to be significant, and that was a big step today."

"We needed more of that and we got it." Patrik Berglund stole the puck from Jordan Schroeder at center ice and beat Devan Dubnyk for a two-goal cushion with 1:58 to go, sending the Central Division champions to Minnesota with the momentum for Game 3 on Monday night. It was Berglund's fifth career playoff goal.

The Wild trimmed St. Louis' lead to 2-1 when Marco Scandella scored on a slap shot that broke his stick and snuck past Jake Allen at 1:46 of the third. Allen survived another few close calls before the final flurry.

Minnesota had won 13 of its last 14 road games, including a 12-game streak that ended in the regular-season finale in St.

Louis after it had clinched a wild card and several regulars were rested.

Defenseman Kevin Shattenkirk assisted on both of Tarasenko's goals in the first period, giving him four points in the series.

The Blues made several slick passes to set up Tarasenko's deflection of a shot from the point by Alexander Steen at 13:18.

Tarasenko scored on the Blues' next shot on a power play late in the first. Dubnyk strayed just enough from guarding the post and the Blues' top scorer snuck one in off the goalie's pad from a severe angle at 18:01.

Thomas Vanek and Charlie Coyle assisted on Scandella's fourth career playoff goal, with all three earning their first point of the series.

Ducks 2, Jets 1: Jakob Silfverberg scored the tiebreaking goal with 21 seconds to play as host Anaheim rallied from another third-period deficit for a victory over Winnipeg, taking a 2-0 lead in its first-round NHL playoff series.

Patrick Maroon scored the tying power-play goal midway through the third period and Frederik Andersen made 28 saves for the top-seeded Ducks, who came back from a final-period deficit for the second straight game and the 14th time this season.

Silfverberg sealed it moments before overtime, taking a puck off the boards and wheeling into the faceoff circle for a shot past Ondrej Pavelec, who stopped 37 shots in an outstanding performance.

Monday's Game 3 will be the first NHL postseason game in Winnipeg since 1996.

Rangers 4, Penguins 3: Sidney Crosby scored twice and Pittsburgh evened its first-round playoff series with host New York.

The Rangers won Game 1 by making Crosby virtually invisible and keeping Evgeni Malkin out of the danger zone. On Saturday, the Penguins forced turnovers in the decisive second period, shut down the Rangers' power play and generally controlled the pace to get even.

Marc-Andre Fleury finished with 23 saves for the Penguins, while Henrik Lundqvist had 18.

Brandon Sutter and Chris Kunitz also scored for Pittsburgh, and Derek Stepan, Derick Brassard and Rick Nash (with 5.1 seconds to go) had goals for New York.

Lightning 5, Red Wings 1: Tampa Bay's Ben Bishop stopped 24 shots for his first NHL playoff victory, a win over visiting Detroit that evened their opening-round Eastern Conference series at one game apiece.

Tyler Johnson had two goals for the Lightning, who dropped Game 1 while outplaying the Red Wings for most of a 3-2 loss. Alex Killorn and Andrej Sustr scored in the second period before Johnson's breakaway goal finished a three-goal flurry that put Tampa Bay up 4-0.

Bishop lost his bid for a shutout when Detroit's Tomas Tatar scored at 5:49 of the third period.

The Red Wings return home for Game 3 on Tuesday night feeling fortunate the series is tied. They did not play particularly well in either of the two games in Tampa Bay, but escaped with the opener thanks to an outstanding playoff debut by young goalie Petr Mrazek.

The 23-year-old Mrazek was pulled Saturday after Tampa Bay's three-goal second period, replaced by the struggling, but much more experienced Jimmy Howard, who gave up Tampa Bay's final goal to Valtteri Filppula on a power play in the closing minutes.

Rose nets 23 as Bulls top Bucks

The Associated Press

CHICAGO — Derrick Rose had 23 points and seven assists in his first postseason game in three years, Jimmy Butler scored 25 points, and the Chicago Bulls opened the playoffs with a 103-91 victory over the Milwaukee Bucks on Saturday night.

Rose was at his fearless best, driving hard to the rim in the early going, and mixed in three three-pointers in the second half.

The Bulls believe they are poised to make a run now that they finally have Rose playing in the postseason. The last time they had him for the duration of the playoffs in 2011, he led them to the Eastern Conference finals.

The Bulls won despite committing 19 turnovers. They outrebounded Milwaukee 52-41, with Pau Gasol grabbing 13 and Joakim Noah and rookie Nikola Mirotic 11 apiece. Chicago hosts Game 2 on Monday.

Khris Middleton scored 18 points and Zaza Pachulia had 15, but Michael Carter Williams finishing with nine on 4 of 13 shooting as the sixth-seeded Bucks came up short after jumping from 15 wins to 41 this season.

Warriors 106, Pelicans 99: Stephen Curry scored 34 points and Golden State went up big before holding off visiting New Orleans in their playoff opener.

Klay Thompson added 21 points, and Draymond Green and Andrew Bogut dominated down low as the Warriors looked every bit like the NBA's top seed — at least for three quarters. They smothered Anthony Davis and the Pelicans with the league's best defense, thrilling a gold shirt-wearing sellout crowd of 19,596.

The Warriors led by 15 after the first quarter, 18 at the half and 25 late in the third. The Pelicans pulled within four in the final minute behind Davis, who scored 20 of his 35 points in the fourth quarter, to make the contest seem closer than it really was.

Wizards 93, Raptors 86 (OT): Paul Pierce scored five of his 20 points in overtime, Nene had 12 points and 13 rebounds, and Washington beat host Toronto in Game 1 of their first-round series.

Pierce hit a three-pointer, his fourth of the game, to begin the extra session, further tormenting a Raptors team he eliminated with Brooklyn in last year's playoffs, then derided this week by saying, "I don't feel they have the 'It' that makes you worried," in an interview with ESPN.

Bradley Beal scored 16, while John Wall and Kevin Seraphin each had 10 for the Wizards.

Amir Johnson scored 18 points and DeMar DeRozan had 15 for the Raptors, who have yet to win the opening game of a first-round series in seven postseason appearances.

Rockets 118, Mavericks 108: James Harden had 24 points and Corey Brewer scored 13 of his 15 points in the fourth quarter to lead Houston past visiting Dallas in Game 1 of the Western Conference series.

Brewer made three three-pointers in about 3 minutes in the fourth to keep the Mavericks at bay. He added another three points when he made a layup and a free throw to give Houston a 109-95 lead with 3 minutes left.

Dirk Nowitzki had 24 points for the Mavericks. They are in the playoffs for the 14th time in the last 15 seasons.

Oilers win top pick; Sabres denied again

The Associated Press

The Edmonton Oilers won the Connor McDavid sweepstakes.

The Oilers bucked the odds Saturday night in Toronto by winning the NHL draft lottery for the No. 1 pick.

The former World Hockey Association franchise, which introduced Wayne Gretzky to the NHL in 1979, is in position to draft the Erie Otters center described as a once-in-a-generation talent.

"I can't tell you how exciting it is for us to win this lottery," Oilers general manager Craig MacTavish said during a telephone conference call. "Any team would be just over the moon about winning the lottery. We're the same. It's a game-changer."

The Oilers had an 11.5 percent chance of winning based on their 28th-place finish this season. At 20 percent, the Buffalo Sabres had the best odds to win, followed by Arizona at 13.5 percent.

The Sabres will pick second and the chance to land a highly touted consolation prize in Boston University freshman center Jack Eichel. Arizona will pick third. This marked the second straight year Buffalo lost the lottery, after Florida won last year.

The Oilers will pick first for the fourth time in six years.

McDavid was first and Eichel second in the final rankings of North American skaters issued by the NHL's Central Scouting bureau 10 days ago.

Oilers assistant general manager Bill Scott declined several chances to guar-

antee Edmonton would select McDavid at the NHL draft in Sunrise, Fla., on June 26. He explained he wants the player and his family to have the chance to enjoy the draft process and hear his name called.

"It's an amazing organization and a true honor to be going there," said McDavid said, who noted he was nervous while NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly was revealing the draft order. "When they were pulling up the cards, I think that was as fast as my heart's ever beaten. It was sure exciting."

This marked the second straight year Buffalo lost the lottery, after Florida won last year.

The Oilers will pick for the fourth time in six years. They drafted Taylor Hall in 2010, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins in 2011 and Nail Yakupov in 2012.

Despite all that top-end talent, the Oilers missed the playoffs for a ninth straight season, a drought that dates to 2006, when they lost in the Stanley Cup finals to Carolina.

"It's been some pretty lean times over the last number of years," MacTavish said. "But this is going to go a long way of ending those."

The Oilers have the go-ahead to build a new arena which is scheduled to open in downtown Edmonton for the start of the 2016-17 season.

At 6 feet and 195 pounds, McDavid is regarded as a more talented and creative play-maker than Eichel, who brings a more physical element to his game with a 6-2, 200-pound frame.

Central Scouting director Dan Marr called

McDavid "a craftsman with the puck."

"His hockey sense with his vision, his anticipation, his sense of timing and the ability to do those things at top-end speed: You're looking at the best skilled player in the draft."

McDavid had 44 goals and 120 points in just 47 games with Erie this season. He still finished third in the Ontario Hockey League scoring race despite missing a few weeks with a hand injury, and another few weeks to help Canada win the world junior tournament in January. He has added 11 goals and 23 points in nine playoff games — including a five-goal outing April 10.

Overall, McDavid has 285 points (97 goals, 188 assists) in 166 career games with Erie.

Eichel showed no signs of youth playing against older players during his freshman season at Boston University. He led the nation with 71 points (26 goals, 45 assists) in becoming college hockey's second freshman to win the Hobey Baker award on April 10.

The only other freshman to do it was former NHL star forward Paul Kariya in 1993 with Maine.

Eichel intends to wait until after the draft to determine whether he'll return to school or make the jump to the NHL.

"It's my dream to play in the NHL, but I don't think there's a rush to go anywhere," he said.

As for the potential of playing in Buffalo: "Nothing's set in stone right now. But obviously, it would be really nice to play there. There's so much tradition there."