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Iranian navy seizes foreign cargo ship

BY JON HARPER

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Iranian patrol boats in the Strait of Hormuz on Tuesday fired on a cargo ship flying the flag of a U.S.-protected island nation and seized control of the vessel, the Pentagon said.

The Marshall Islands-flagged MV Maersk Tigris was transiting through the waterway when Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps vessels approached the ship and ordered the master to move deeper into Iranian territory. When the master refused, the Iranian boats fired warn-

ing shots across the ship's bow, forcing the master to comply with their demands, according to Pentagon spokesman Col. Steve Warren.

Iranian sailors subsequently boarded the vessel. The Maersk Tigris remains under Iranian control in Iranian waters, Warren said.

There have been no reported injuries to the crew of the Maersk Tigris and no Americans are on board, according to the Pentagon. Warren said the ship had more than 30 crewmembers but he was unable to provide their nationalities.

The U.S. Navy Central Com-

mand dispatched the destroyer USS Farragut and reconnaissance aircraft to the area after the master sent a distress call.

Although the Maersk Tigris was in Iranian waters, it was sailing through an internationally recognized shipping lane in the Strait of Hormuz and thus enjoyed the right of "innocent passage," Warren told reporters.

"Ships are, assuming that they abide by all the rules of the sea, are according to international standards authorized to pass through the strait," he said. "This is a very heavily traveled shipping lane."

Warren said it was "inappropriate" for the Iranians to have fired on the ship.

The Marshall Islands is an independent sovereign nation in the Pacific, but the U.S. is solely responsible for its defense. The U.S. seized control of the Marshall Islands from the Japanese during World War II.

Warren said the Pentagon was "looking into" what responsibilities the U.S. holds under agreements with the Marshall Islands but "we do have certain obligations with the Marshall Islands and we are working though that right now."

National Guard deploys to Baltimore

The Associated Press

BALTIMORE — National Guardsmen fanned out across the city, police with riot shields blocked streets, and firefighters doused smoldering blazes Tuesday after looting and arson erupted following the funeral of a black man who died in police custody.

It was the first time the National Guard was called out to quell unrest in Baltimore since 1968, when some of the same neighborhoods burned after the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

The rioting started in West Baltimore on Monday afternoon — within a mile of where Freddie Gray, 25, was arrested and placed into a police van earlier this month — and by midnight had spread to East Baltimore and neighborhoods close to downtown and near the baseball stadium.

At least 15 officers were hurt, including six who were hospitalized. There were 144 vehicle fires, 15 structure fires and nearly 200 arrests.

The streets were calm Tuesday morning. Residents came out to sweep up the broken glass and other debris. Firefighters sprayed the burned-out shell of a large building. The city was under a 10 p.m.-to-5 a.m. curfew beginning Tuesday, and all Baltimore public schools were closed.

"We're not going to leave the city unprotected," Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan vowed during a visit in the morning to a West Baltimore intersection that on Monday was littered with burning cars, a smashed police vehicle and broken glass.

Gray's death under still-mysterious circumstances has become the latest flashpoint in the nation's debate over the police use of force against black men.

The rioting was the worst such violence in the U.S. since the turbulent protests that broke out over the death of Michael Brown, the unarmed black 18-year-old who was shot by a white police officer in Ferguson, Mo., last summer.

"I understand anger, but

what we're seeing isn't anger," Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake lamented. "It's disruption of a community. The same community they say they care about, they're destroying. You can't have it both ways."

State and local authorities found themselves responding to questions about whether their initial response had been adequate.

Rawlings-Blake waited hours to ask the governor to declare a state of emergency, and the governor hinted she should have come to him earlier.

The rioters set police cars and buildings on fire, looted a mall and liquor stores and hurled rocks, bottles and bricks at police in riot gear. Police responded occasionally with pepper spray or cleared the streets by moving in tight formation, shoulder to shoulder.

Maryland National Guard spokesman Lt. Charles Kohler said that about 2,000 members would be deployed through the day and that the force could build to 5,000.

Marine commander relieved of duties

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The commander of Marine Corps Base Hawaii was relieved of his command Monday because of a "loss of trust and confidence in his ability to lead."

Col. Eric Schaefer was relieved of his duties by Marine Corps Installations Pacific commander Maj. Gen. Charles Hudson, according to a statement released Tuesday. No further details were available.

Schaefer graduated from San Diego State University in 1991, according to his Marine Corps biography. A pilot by trade, he has logged more than 2,000 military flight hours and is a Bronze Star recipient. He participated in combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and held numerous command positions before taking over in Hawaii in August.

Schaefer has been replaced by Col. Christopher Snyder, MC-IPAC's deputy commander, who will serve as interim commanding officer until a permanent replacement can be named, the statement said.

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Top court weighs gay marriage

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Pivotal Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy asked skeptical questions of both sides Tuesday as the U.S. high court heard historic arguments over the right of gay and lesbian couples to marry.

Kennedy, whose vote on the nine-member panel could decide the issue, said marriage has been understood as one man and one woman for “millennia-plus time.” He said same-sex marriage has been debated in earnest for only about 10 years, and he wondered aloud whether scholars and the public need more time.

“It’s very difficult for the court to say ‘We know better,’” Kennedy told Mary Bonauto, a lawyer representing same-sex

couples.

Yet Kennedy also pressed attorney John Bursch, representing the states that ban same-sex marriage, to explain how granting gay couples a right to marry would harm traditional marriages. Bursch argued that removing child-rearing as the central rationale for marriage would weaken parents’ commitment to staying married for their children’s sake if their own ties were frayed.

The arguments offered the first public indication of where the justices stand in the dispute over whether states can continue defining marriage as the union of a man and a woman, or whether the U.S. Constitution gives gay and lesbian couples the right to marry.

It was barely a decade ago that the first state allowed gay

and lesbian couples to marry. That was Massachusetts, in 2004. As recently as last October, barely a third of the states permitted it. Now, same-sex couples can marry in 36 states and Washington, D.C.

Justice Samuel Alito suggested that basing marriage on lasting bonds and emotional commitment — instead of providing stable homes for children — might open the right to marry to siblings who live together or close friends who are not romantically or sexually involved. However, Justices Stephen Breyer and Sonia Sotomayor both said marriage was a fundamental right and a state would need a truly compelling reason to deny it to a class of people.

A decision is expected in late June.

Navy relieves commander of Lake Erie

By JENNIFER HLAD

Stars and Stripes

SAN DIEGO — The Navy has relieved the commander of a guided-missile cruiser after an investigation into a poor command climate on the ship.

Capt. John Banigan was relieved of his duties as commanding officer of the USS Lake Erie on Monday by Rear Adm. Dee Mewbourne, according to the Navy.

The decision was based on the findings of the investigation and a “loss of confidence in his ability to command,” the Navy said in a written news release. Navy officials said they could not offer any details about the ship’s command climate because the investigation is not yet complete.

Banigan served as the executive officer on the Lake Erie from 2011 to May 2013, when he assumed command. He has been temporarily assigned to the staff of the commander of Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet.

Capt. Douglas Kunzman will temporarily take over command of the Lake Erie. Kunzman is deputy commander of Destroyer Squadron 9, based in Everett, Wash.

The Lake Erie, a Ticonderoga-class cruiser, was homeported at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, but moved to San Diego in August 2014.

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Verifying Afghan troop payments difficult

By JAD SLEIMAN

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Poor attendance and personnel records, a cumbersome and error-prone payroll data system and lack of oversight mean the U.S. government cannot verify how billions of dollars allotted to pay the salaries of Afghan forces are being spent, a U.S. watchdog agency said in a report released Wednesday.

The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Recon-

struction also found that poor record-keeping prevents the Afghan military from accurately determining troop strength, a number crucial for planning operations and determining the need for uniforms, ammunition and food.

Since 2009, the U.S. has provided more than \$2.3 billion to pay Afghan National Army, or ANA, and air force salaries, the report said. Because of the problems in the personnel and payroll processes and lack of verification, it is not clear

whether that money is being spent appropriately.

“This means that some payments may be diverted to the wrong individuals and that deserving ANA personnel may not be receiving the correct amounts they are owed,” SIGAR said.

SIGAR recommended that U.S. Forces Afghanistan, in conjunction with the coalition and the Defense Ministry, implement additional controls on the daily attendance process at the unit level.

Arrival ceremony held in DC for Japan’s prime minister

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama welcomed Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe with full pomp and ceremony on a bright, dewy Tuesday morning at the White House, calling the state visit a “celebration of the ties of friendship” and praising the alliance the two nations have built over time.

Military honors and a gun salute greeted the Japanese leader in a South lawn arrival ceremony. Trade and security issues topped the agenda for his meeting with Obama.

The day was to be capped by a State Dinner with about 300 guests.

“Prime Minister Abe is leading Japan to a new role in the

world stage,” Obama said.

Abe, speaking in Japanese, said he and Obama have been working to strengthen the U.S.-Japan alliance since they met two years ago.

“Now our bilateral relationship is more robust than ever,” he said.

The two leaders will huddle in the Oval Office and also hold a

joint news conference.

The visit aims to highlight the reconciliation between two nations once at war and to point the way toward expanded economic ties. Both countries are working toward a 12-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement that would further open vast Asian and Pacific rim markets to U.S. exports.

Caps top Islanders in Game 7

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Unburdened by the catastrophes of past Game 7s littering the Washington Capitals' playoff history, rookie Evgeny Kuznetsov delivered a breathtaking, series-clinching goal that got Alex Ovechkin's seal of approval.

"Pretty sick," Ovechkin declared. Sure was.

Skating around every opponent on the ice as he swooped across from the right boards, past the slot and waited, waited, waited for the right moment to lift a rising shot over sprawling goalie Jaroslav Halak, Kuznetsov scored the go-ahead goal with 7:18 remaining, and Braden Holtby needed to make only 10 saves Monday night, leading the Capitals to a 2-1 victory that eliminated the New York Islanders in the first round.

"If you've never played hockey," Kuznetsov said, "you'll never feel this."

Joel Ward gave Washington a 1-0 lead late in the second period, and Frans Nielsen pulled New York even early in the third.

The Capitals now face the Presidents' Trophy-winning New York Rangers, who eliminated Washington from the 2012 and 2013 playoffs — in Game 7 each time.

That's part of a long history of post-season failures for the Capitals, including never advancing beyond the second round since Ovechkin arrived and began earning MVP trophies and leading the NHL in goals year after year.

This was the eighth time in 10 playoff series involving Ovechkin that went to a Game 7, and his team was only 2-5 in such contests until Monday.

Until Kuznetsov — a 22-year-old center taken with the No. 26 pick in 2010, six years after Ovechkin went No. 1 overall — came through, adding to the two goals

and assist he had in Game 3.

"That's the best I've seen us play," Holtby said. "Start to finish, that's the game we've been trying to groom all year."

The Islanders' loss ends their playing days at Nassau Coliseum, which opened in 1972. The team is moving to Brooklyn next season.

"We wanted to get back home," coach Jack Capuano said.

You have to go back 22 years to find a playoff series won by the Islanders, and that victory in 1993 came against — guess who? — the Capitals. Since then, New York has lost seven consecutive first-round series.

"It's just hard to believe it's really over," said Islanders captain John Tavares, who had two goals and four assists in the series. "It was intense. It was physical. It was draining."

Halak pointed to Washington's 26-11 edge in shots, saying: "We needed to shoot a little more. Obviously you're not going to score if you don't shoot."

Only three teams have produced fewer shots in a playoff game since 1990, according to STATS.

This was the first Game 7 of this year's NHL playoffs, fittingly. Through the first six games, each team scored 14 goals. Each won on the road. Each won in overtime. During the regular season, both finished with 101 standings points.

But Monday was the Capitals' turn to thrive.

"By Game 5," coach Barry Trotz said, "I thought they were down a little bit."

Kuznetsov thought the Islanders looked tired during his highlight-reel goal.

They did seem to move in slow motion as he swooped across the ice to put his team back in front.

"For him, it's just another day. There's

no previous history for him, so he could just go into it raw and just have a good time," Ward said. "That's the good thing about young guys."

There was one last bit of tension, when Capitals defenseman John Carlson was whistled for roughing with just under three minutes remaining. But the Capitals killed it off, making the Islanders 0 for 14 on power plays in the series.

Perhaps fueled by a combination of relief and elation, the crowd grew louder and louder as the final seconds ticked away.

"We were hungry, we wanted to get after it, and I think people doubted us a little bit," Ward said. "So we wanted to prove something to ourselves and to our fans."

Lightning 5, Red Wings 2: Tyler Johnson scored two goals in his latest stellar performance, and the visiting Lightning forced a Game 7 in their first-round playoff series.

Johnson and Jason Garrison scored in the first period, and Johnson added another goal in the second to give the Lightning a 3-0 lead. Tomas Tatar scored twice for Detroit, but Alex Killorn answered with an unassisted goal with 5:09 remaining, and Cedric Paquette added an empty-netter.

Ben Bishop made 22 saves for the Lightning, who led the NHL in goals during the season but had been struggling to score on the Red Wings and goalie Petr Mrazek in this series. Mrazek made a sensational save on Brian Boyle in the second period, but Tampa Bay had already taken a 2-0 lead by that point.

Johnson is tied with Vladimir Tarasenko of St. Louis for the league lead with six playoff goals.

Nets top Hawks to tie series

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Deron Williams finally delivered the game that's expected of him, and he wasn't going to let the Nets lose it.

And after he finished carrying them into a 2-2 tie with the Eastern Conference's No. 1 seed, the guy who had been being beaten up physically on the court and by fans and media off it knew how important his performance was.

"We really needed to get this one to stay in the series," he said, "and so it was definitely one of my better games this year for sure and probably as a Net."

Williams rebounded from two dismal games by tying a playoff career high with 35 points, and Brooklyn pulled out a 120-115 overtime victory over the Atlanta Hawks on Monday night in Game 4.

The Nets, just 38-44 in the regular season, moved two victories from becoming the sixth No. 8 seed to beat a No. 1 — only the fourth since the first round became best-of-seven.

Bojan Bogdanovic made the go-ahead three-pointer with 1:25 left in overtime but the Nets never would have gotten there without Williams, whose 16 points in the fourth quarter were two fewer than he had total in the first three games of the series.

Brook Lopez had 26 points and 10 rebounds for the Nets.

Jeff Teague had 20 points and 11 assists, and DeMarre Carroll added 20 points and nine rebounds for the Hawks, who host Game 5 on Wednesday.

Bucks 94, Bulls 88: Michael Carter-Williams had 22 points and nine assists, Khriston Middleton scored 21 points, and Milwaukee avoided elimination again with a victory over host Chicago.

With a 3-2 lead, the Bulls will try to close it out again Thursday at Milwaukee. No team has ever rallied from a 3-0 deficit to win an NBA postseason series.

The Bucks regrouped after a nine-point lead dwindled to three, and they hung on again after a seven-point lead shrunk to four with just over a minute remaining.

Carter-Williams hit 10 of 15 shots, Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 11 points and reserve O.J. Mayo added 10 for the Bucks.

Trail Blazers 99, Grizzlies 92: Damian Lillard had 32 points and host Portland avoided elimination from the playoffs.

Memphis led by as many as 10 points in the fourth quarter, but Portland rallied to deny the Grizzlies their first playoff sweep.

LaMarcus Aldridge had 18 points and 12 rebounds for Portland.

Game 5 is Wednesday in Memphis.

Memphis was playing without point guard Mike Conley, who was inadvertently elbowed in the face in the third quarter of Game 3 and underwent surgery on Monday morning. His status for the rest of the playoffs is uncertain.

New Match Play format means more golf

The Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Rory McIlroy arrived at Harding Park on Monday knowing he will be at the Match Play Championship at least through Friday.

So will the rest of the 64-man field.

In a format change to avoid the single elimination that often sent the stars home early, the Cadillac Match Play Championship features 16 groups of four players, with the best record from each group advancing to the weekend.

And there was one other twist — the groups were decided by a lottery.

Golf balls gave way to pingpong balls that were plucked out of a bowl to determine which players went into each of the 16 groups. The balls had numbers corresponding to the seeds (based on the world ranking), with Nos. 1-16 serving as the top guy in each group and the other players broken down into sections of Nos. 17 to 32, Nos. 33 to 48, and Nos. 49 to 64.

Had it been a straight draw, top-seeded Rory McIlroy would have been joined by Graeme McDowell (32), Keegan Bradley

(33) and Francesco Molinari (64). With the lottery system, McIlroy got Billy Horschel (18), Brandt Snedeker (35) and Jason Dufner (53).

Masters champion Jordan Spieth, the No. 2 seed, drew Lee Westwood (26), Matt Every (40) and Mikko Ilonen (62).

The other change, of course, is the venue. Harding Park is a tight, tree-lined public course in San Francisco that hosted the 2009 Presidents Cup and a World Golf Championship in 2005. It's nothing like Dove Mountain in the high desert of Arizona, a wide-open course at altitude that favored power and was toward the bottom of just about every player's list of favorite courses.

Monday was a light day of practice, and there was a rare pro-am for a WGC event before the tournament begins on Wednesday.

There will be no halved matches during round-robin play. Tiebreakers will be determined by head-to-head matches, and in case of a three-way tie in a group, there will be a sudden-death playoff to see who advances.

The round of 16 on Saturday morning will be followed by the quarterfinals in the afternoon, and then the semifinals and championship match on Sunday.

Most players embraced the change, and it certainly helps with the sponsor and the public. No more than five of the top 10 seeds were around by Friday in the last three years of single elimination.

"Just because you have a bad nine holes doesn't mean you're going home until the weekend. That's a comforting fact," Snedeker said. "But you still have to play great golf. I think everyone is excited about the fact there's no way to fake it. The guy playing the best is going to get out of his group."

There is a different buzz to the new Match Play. San Francisco is a refreshing change from Marana, Ariz., for one thing. And there was less a sense of urgency about the Wednesday matches. Everyone is guaranteed three cracks.

"And then it will start feeling like the old one," Jimmy Walker said. "But it's still match play. You're still trying to beat the other guy. You've got to play good."



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Murphy lifts Mets over Marlins

The Associated Press

MIAMI — Mets manager Terry Collins came up with a headline for the New York tabloids to describe second baseman Daniel Murphy's role in a comeback win Monday night.

"Murf-a-licious," Collins said.

Murphy hit a three-run homer with one out in the ninth inning, and the Mets snapped the Miami Marlins' five-game winning streak with a 3-1 victory.

The Marlins grabbed the lead in the eighth with three consecutive two-out singles, breaking up Dillon Gee's shutout bid in a game that took only 1 hour, 58 minutes.

It was the fastest nine-inning game in the majors since the Padres and Astros also finished in 1:58 on June 27, 2012, according to STATS.

Jarred Cosart matched Gee by allowing just two hits in eight scoreless innings. But the Mets rallied against closer Steve Cishek (0-1), who blew a save for the second time in three chances this year.

The Mets (15-5) won with five hits, bouncing back from a sloppy loss Sunday night to the crosstown Yankees. The Mets have the best record in the majors and improved to 5-0 against Miami, including a sweep of a four-game series at Citi Field.

Juan Lagares doubled to start the ninth when his long drive was misjudged by center fielder Marcell Ozuna, and Lucas Duda walked. Following a flyout, Murphy hit his second homer and raised a jubilant fist as the ball landed in the seats.

"I think I touched the bases," he said. "To be completely honest, I don't know." Cishek, meanwhile, yanked off his cap

in dismay. His ERA rose to 11.37.

"It's tough, especially since the Mets swept us last series," he said. "We really wanted to stick it to them, and this falls on me."

Murphy and Gee both started slowly this season for New York. Murphy came into the game batting only .169, though he did have a pair of RBI doubles Sunday.

"I'm just focusing on the at-bat at hand," he said. "No matter what I do, I'm not going to wake up tomorrow and be hitting .290, so one at-bat at a time is all I can control."

Gee is winless in four starts, and came into the game with a 5.60 ERA. But the right-hander took a three-hit shutout into the eighth.

"We can put to rest that Dillon Gee can't pitch at this level," Collins said. "There has been a lot of talk, and I feel terrible for him. He went out there tonight and showed he can do what he has done in the past."

Red Sox 6, Blue Jays 5: Mookie Betts hit a game-ending RBI single to lift host Boston to a victory over Toronto.

Yankees 4, Rays 1: Brian McCann hit a tiebreaking home run and Adam Warren pitched effectively into the sixth inning as host New York ended Tampa Bay's five-game winning streak.

Phillies 4, Cardinals 1: Cole Hamels won for the first time in seven starts dating to last September, and Ben Revere's two-run double in the seventh inning was the go-ahead hit for visiting Philadelphia against St. Louis.

Hamels (1-2) and John Lackey (1-1) both went seven innings. Hamels had a season-best nine strikeouts and allowed just four hits.

Royals 6, Indians 2: Alex Gordon,

Mike Moustakas and Kansas City kept AL Cy Young pitching award winner Corey Kluber winless this season, beating host Cleveland.

Braves 8, Nationals 4: Kelly Johnson homered and drove in three runs and Eric Stults pitched 6 1/3 strong innings as host Atlanta gave Washington their sixth straight loss.

Cubs 4, Pirates 0: Kris Bryant drove in two runs, Jason Hammel threw eight scoreless innings as host Chicago beat Pittsburgh.

Reds 9, Brewers 6: Jason Marquis hit a run-scoring single and slumping Jay Bruce homered and drove in three runs, helping host Cincinnati end a three-game losing streak by beating the worst team in the majors.

Mariners 3, Rangers 1: Taijuan Walker pitched seven solid innings, Nelson Cruz and had an RBI single against his former team as visiting Seattle beat Texas in a rain-delayed series opener.

Tigers 5, Twins 4: Yoenis Cespedes had a homer, a double and three RBIs to back David Price in visiting Detroit's victory.

Rockies 5, Diamondbacks 4: Justin Morneau hit a three-run homer and Tyler Matzek pitched five effective innings before leaving with a hamstring injury as Colorado held off host Arizona.

Dodgers 8, Giants 3: Dodgers rookie Joc Pederson homered, doubled in a run and made a sparkling defensive play to deprive Angel Pagan of an RBI double, leading host Los Angeles.

Astros 9, Padres 4: Colby Rasmus homered and drove in three runs as the surprising Astros beat the host Padres for their fourth straight victory.

Hamilton traded to Rangers

The Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Josh Hamilton is back with the Texas Rangers.

After two troublesome years with the Los Angeles Angels and less than halfway through a \$125 million, five-year contract, Hamilton was traded to AL West rival Texas with cash on Monday for a player to be named or cash.

The Angels are expected to pay most of the remaining \$80.2 million Hamilton is owed.

Hamilton never reported to the Angels this season after offseason right shoulder surgery. He self-reported a relapse of alcohol and cocaine use, but an arbitrator ruled he could not be disciplined by Major League Baseball.

Hamilton was the 2010 AL MVP and an All-Star in each of his five seasons with Texas from 2008-12. He struggled with injuries and lack of performance with the Angels.

No other players were involved in the deal. The Rangers will reportedly pay less than \$7 million of the remaining three years and about \$80 million on Hamilton's contract, and Hamilton will forfeit about \$6 million to the Angels to offset the benefit he will derive by playing in Texas, where there is no state income tax.

Riots prompt Orioles to postpone game

BALTIMORE — The Baltimore Orioles postponed a second straight game against the Chicago White Sox on Tuesday after a night of rioting near Camden Yards.

Public schools were shut, and Baltimore's mayor imposed a 10 p.m.-to-5 a.m. curfew.

The Orioles called off the game after consulting with Major League Baseball, and state and local officials.

No makeup dates were announced. The White Sox were in town for a three-game series that had been slated to start Monday, and it was their only planned visit on the schedule.

Monday's game was postponed around 40 minutes before the scheduled 7:05 p.m. start. The decision came after riots broke out following the funeral of Freddie Gray, who died April 19 of spinal cord and other injuries sustained while in police custody. Tuesday's game, also scheduled for 7:05, was called off shortly after 11 a.m.

Cards' Wainwright out for rest of season

ST. LOUIS — The tests results were no surprise. Before Adam Wainwright left the field in Milwaukee, the St. Louis Cardinals anticipated they'd be losing their staff ace for the season.

The 33-year-old pitcher will have surgery this week, likely Thursday, because of a completely torn left Achilles tendon. Recovery time is generally 9-to-12 months, and general manager John Mozeliak was "optimistic" the 6-foot-7 right-hander will be ready for spring training.

"Unfortunate news, but not unexpected after what we saw," Mozeliak said. "Given that it's his left leg, I think we're optimistic it'll be sooner rather than later, but as far as this year goes, he's done."

Zayat has 3 horses in Kentucky Derby

The Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Ahmed Zayat can't contain his enthusiasm at having three horses running in the Kentucky Derby. The fast-talking Egyptian businessman is alternately nervous, hopeful and tickled pink.

"Hyper" is how trainer Bob Baffert describes his client, whose American Pharoah is expected to be the early favorite for Saturday's 141st Run for the Roses.

Listening to Zayat's bubbly chatter, there's no hint of the run of bad luck he's endured at the Derby. Three times his horses have finished second behind long shots.

In 2009, 50-1 Mine That Bird sneaked up along the rail and beat Pioneer of the Nile. In 2011, Nehro was defeated by 20-1 Animal Kingdom. A year later, 15-1 I'll Have Another beat Bodemeister.

Baffert can count two of those losses among his Derby defeats, having trained Pioneer of the Nile and Bodemeister.

"Luckily they run the Derby every year," he said.

Zayat had a double-dose of bad luck in 2010. His early Derby favorite Eskendereya was withdrawn days before the race with a leg injury, and he filed for bankruptcy protection to keep his racing operation afloat after a bank claimed he defaulted on \$34 million in loans.

Baffert has won the race three times, but not since 2002. He's been training for Zayat since 2007, becoming close friends while enduring the sport's ups and downs together. They exchange calls or text messages "like 10 times a day," Zayat said.

"We know the game. It changes every

second, and every time he calls me my heart sinks for 30 seconds," the owner said, knowing it could be bad news about his horses.

Zayat took his first crack at the Derby in 2008, when Z Fortune finished 10th and Z Humor was 14th.

Now 52, he retired 10 years ago, having sold his beer distributorship to Heineken for \$280 million and plowed the proceeds into buying more horses. His love of the sport is a family affair, with Justin, one of his four children, acting as racing manager for Zayat Stables.

"He has a lot of passion," Baffert said. "The clients that have a lot of passion, those are the best clients because they really want to do well. They invest a lot of time along with money. It's like owning their own team. They're very competitive, which is good. It's a trainer's dream to have clients like that."

The sport has taught the ultra-competitive Zayat a tough lesson: You may win at a 25 percent clip, but 75 percent of the time you're going to lose. "The first orientation is getting adjusted to being competitive and yet needing to turn the page and move on."

Baffert is in the unusual position of training the probable favorite and second choice this year. He's got American Pharoah for Zayat, who lives in Teaneck, N.J., and undefeated Dortmund for Indian-born owner Kaleem Shah.

"Hope for a dead-heat," the white-haired trainer joked.

Zayat has a close-up view of American Pharoah's biggest rival every time he visits his colt at Baffert's barn. Dortmund is housed in a nearby stall.

"I have tremendous respect for

Dortmund, I have tremendous appreciation for Mr. Shah," Zayat said. "He's put a lot of money into the game. He's also passionate. If it's not going to be me [winning], it's going to be someone else."

Baffert refuses to choose between American Pharoah and Dortmund, comparing it to a parent asked to pick a favorite child.

Zayat has no such problem with his trio.

He is unabashedly partial to American Pharoah, the product of Zayat's first breeding attempt between sire Pioneer of the Nile and dam Little Princess Emma, named for one of his daughters.

"Sentimentally, I like him more," he said of the colt named by a fan through a contest on the family's website.

The brown colt with the unusually short tail — another horse chewed the end of it off on the farm — is coming off an eight-length win in the Arkansas Derby.

"From day one, he's been an absolute superstar," Zayat said.

Son Justin favors El Kabeir because he spends so much time in New York with the horse. The name translates to the boss, and it's how the elder Zayat's father is addressed by the family. The colt is trained by John Terranova, although he's also staying in Baffert's barn.

His third horse, Mr. Z, is named for Zayat, but not by choice. His four children submitted the name without him knowing because he thinks it's "corny" to name horses after yourself. Mr. Z is trained by four-time Derby winner D. Wayne Lukas. The chestnut colt is the most experienced among the 20-horse field, having raced 12 times with just one victory but nine in-the-money finishes.