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Navy responds to Russia's modern missiles

BY STEVEN BEARDSLEY
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The addition of a new weapon on a warship already bristling with advanced systems might not seem like a big deal for the U.S. Navy in Europe.

But earlier this year, when engineers working aboard the Spain-based destroyer USS Porter installed a missile launcher that can autonomously track and destroy incoming anti-ship missiles, it was an acknowledgment of a shift in this theater: For the first time in post-Cold War Europe, the Navy must account for an adversary capable of threatening its ships with modern weapons — Russia.

The Naples-based U.S. 6th Fleet made an urgent request last year to acquire the SeaRAM Close-In Weapon System, for installation on the Porter and three other destroyers based in Rota, Spain. Their concern is

the advanced anti-ship cruise missiles being installed by Russia on its surface ships, aircraft, submarines and coastal defense sites.

Still modernizing from its post-Soviet disrepair, the Russian fleet lacks the blue-water capability of the U.S. Navy. But by raising the stakes of confrontation with one of its ships, aircraft or submarines, it can try to alter the Navy's behavior in contested waters like the North Atlantic and Mediterranean.

The Russian navy is in the middle of an ambitious shipbuilding program that includes a new guided-missile corvette and two new classes of guided-missile frigates. It has stationed the first two of a planned six new ultra-quiet diesel Kilo-class submarines in the Black Sea, one of which fired land-attack cruise missiles at Syrian rebel targets from the Eastern Mediterranean last year.

"That sort of got people's at-

tention, as was precisely the intent," said Dmitry Gorenburg, a naval analyst at CNA Corp.

The military calls this strategy Anti-Access, Area Denial, or A2/AD, in which the presence of long-range precision-guided missiles forces an adversary to operate further from shore or regional waters. The Navy considers it a challenge to freedom of navigation and its ability to project power from the sea.

The Pentagon first mentioned A2/AD several years ago to describe China's fielding of large quantities of anti-ship missiles near sensitive areas. Yet recent tensions in Europe, with Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea Peninsula in 2014 and its support for separatists in eastern Ukraine have made it relevant to U.S. forces here.

A 2015 Office of Naval Intelligence report said the emphasis on missiles in Russia's new shipbuilding — in particular the Kalibr cruise missile being in-

stalled on all new submarines, corvettes, frigates and larger surface ships — is altering security in the region.

"The proliferation of this capability within the new Russian Navy is profoundly changing its ability to deter, threaten or destroy adversary targets," the authors of the report wrote.

Anti-ship missiles are getting faster, with longer ranges and more countermeasures designed to penetrate advanced defenses, said Mike Kofman, another analyst at CNA Corp. Submarine- or aircraft-fired anti-ship missiles have a range of 250 to 300 miles, he said.

This means that a ship stationed at the Russian naval base at Sevastopol, in Crimea, can put much of the Black Sea at risk. A common design is a multistage missile, in which the warhead boosts from the missile body to supersonic speed before striking its target.

Newest Reagan commander to keep focus on basics

BY JAMES KIMBER
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — It's been a good week for the newest commander of the USS Ronald Reagan, the Navy's only forward-deployed aircraft carrier.

Navy Capt. Michael Donnelly, known affectionately as Buzz, last week watched his alma mater Villanova win the NCAA men's basketball championship, and seven days later took command of the centerpiece of Pacific forces.

Donnelly, of Kent Island, Md., properly relieved Capt. Christopher Bolt on Tuesday during a change-of-command ceremony aboard the Ronald Reagan at Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan.

Donnelly is the seventh man to lead the Gipper from the captain's chair.

Donnelly takes command during an especially tense time in the region, with China's recent aggressiveness in the South China Sea and continued threats from North Korea. Despite those issues, Donnelly said he wants his crew to remain focused on fundamentals.

"There's already a strong culture of success here, and we all share many of the same goals," Donnelly said of Bolt's tenure. "It's about getting the basics right; take care of your equipment, take care of your people and execute. It sounds incredibly simple, but that's really the key to our success."

Without the fundamentals,

the more complex concerns "will just fall apart," he said.

The balancing act of maintaining security and stability in the Pacific while ensuring the ship operates properly throughout its expected 50-year lifespan is a key challenge, he said. Like his Villanova Wildcats, Donnelly said success will come from teamwork.

"Our success here is based entirely on individual excellence; we only succeed if we succeed as a team," he said. "We have very deliberate maintenance periods. We have very deliberate maintenance requirements. We have high standards. Every sailor here understands they have to do the right thing. When we live up to our standard, we

will operate successfully."

The Reagan is in a maintenance period that's scheduled to end within the next few weeks. Afterward, the crew will undergo standard sea trials before heading out for the next deployment. The vessel's stops could include Guam, Hong Kong and Australia.

The nuclear-powered aircraft carrier arrived at Yokosuka in October, replacing the USS George Washington, which arrived in 2008 and left last May for a major overhaul in the United States. The Reagan's deployment is part of Washington's "Pacific pivot," reflecting the Obama administration's view of the region as its highest long-term priority.

35 navies gather for Komodo exercise

BY ERIK SLAVIN
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. and China are among 35 world navies gathered in Indonesia for sea exercises and talks aimed at promoting stability amid regional tensions over territory and freedom of navigation.

Multilateral Naval Exercise Komodo continues with a second gathering after its launch in 2014.

The port and sea training coincide with the 15th Western Pacific Naval Symposium, a dialogue that produced the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea, or CUES, between the U.S. and Chinese navies two years ago.

CUES has been praised by both navies as instrumental in preventing conflict between U.S. ships navigating through what the majority of nations consider waters open to innocent passage and navigation under international law.

China maintains an ambiguous claim to about 90 percent of the South China Sea and has often shadowed U.S. ships in those waters. Beijing maintains it has the authority to regulate overflight and navigation over much of the area, which includes territory claimed by several other nations.

Lackland gunman reached plea deal after going AWOL

San Antonio Express-News

Tech. Sgt. Steven D. Bellino was a special operations veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan whose brief Air Force career was headed for an abrupt end on the day he confronted a squadron commander at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland.

His attorney said Monday that Bellino, who authorities believe gunned down Lt. Col. William Schroeder, 39, in a confrontation and then killed himself, had agreed to a plea deal after going AWOL last year following a confrontation during a

water training exercise.

The paperwork was being processed when Bellino arrived Friday morning at Forbes Hall, a facility on the base's Medina Annex used to train airmen for such elite Air Force missions as close-air support. It isn't clear why he went to see Schroeder, but it's believed he was going to face a disciplinary proceeding.

The hearing was required as part of the agreement that spared Bellino, 41, jail time and allowed him to keep benefits he'd earned in the Army and Ohio Army National Guard. Why a deal described as rou-

tine by the attorney, Dan Conway, could have gone so badly is still a mystery.

"I think this was a tragedy and everybody involved in the legal process is brokenhearted over this," said Conway, 37. "I think that we really need to take a hard look at what happened here"

Schroeder, himself a special operations veteran, was shot four times in a struggle with Bellino.

Bellino underwent an Air Force psychological exam in December, but Conway declined to reveal details about it.

India reluctant to officially tie itself to US

BY TARA COPP
Stars and Stripes

NEW DELHI, India — At the end of a three-day visit by Secretary of Defense Ash Carter to India, the two countries announced progress in some logistics- and technology-sharing programs but fell short on other key issues, including co-development of a future Indian aircraft carrier.

At a news conference Tuesday, Carter and Indian Defense Minister Manohar Parrikar said they have agreed "in

principle" to common logistics policies that will allow the increasing number of joint military exercises to proceed without new negotiations. Parrikar and Carter said they expect a memorandum of understanding on this issue to be signed in the next several weeks.

But the visit, which centered on talks about the modernization of the Indian navy and its increasing role in helping stabilize the region, also revealed the reluctance of the host country — traditionally a

major nonaligned nation — to officially tie itself more closely to the United States.

U.S. officials who traveled with Carter to India told reporters the hesitation resulted from the fact that the two nations started aggressively pursuing a close military relationship only in the last few years.

"We are learning how to converge strategically," one official said. "It will take time. And it's about building trusted relationships ... and going at a pace that our Indian counterparts — and that we — feel is appropriate."

Planning ensured smooth landing at Saber Junction 16

BY MICHAEL S. DARNELL
AND KENT HARRIS
Stars and Stripes

HOECHENSEE, Germany — Dozens of residents of this rural town gathered to watch as nearly 900 paratroopers leapt from their military aircraft Tuesday to farmlands below.

This air assault — part of the

U.S. Army Europe-led training exercise Saber Junction 16 — was the culmination of a year of planning and a journey that began hundreds of miles to the south in Vicenza, Italy, where the U.S. Army's 173rd Airborne Brigade is based.

From there they traveled the short distance to Aviano Air

Base, where hundreds of 173rd troopers, the Italian Folgore Airborne and the British 16 Air Assault squads prepared for the long trip to Germany aboard C-17s and C-130s. Once there, the soldiers dropped onto fields around the town, opened up to the military by the German Defense Ministry.

Such maneuvers outside U.S. Army training areas are unusual, said German Brig. Gen. Markus Laubenthal, the first non-U.S. USAREUR chief of staff.

"But it is important to ... get this kind of reality implemented and incorporated into our exercise," he said.

NHL teams turn focus to playoffs

Associated Press

Coach Barry Trotz and the Washington Capitals finally have something to play for.

Two weeks after the Capitals clinched the NHL's best record, Trotz can begin turning his attention to a first-round playoff matchup against the Philadelphia Flyers after Washington closed the season with a 2-0 loss to Anaheim.

"It was sort of a typical Game 82," Trotz said Sunday. "Everybody's just trying to get through it."

The outcome hardly registered with Trotz, who was intent on resting numerous regulars, including Alex Ovechkin and Braden Holtby, before the Capitals open the playoffs on Thursday.

He even joked the Flyers could have saved on their travel budget and not sent scouts to take notes.

"I don't know if they'll get a whole lot from that game," Trotz said.

A day after clinching its playoff berth with a 3-1 win over Pittsburgh on Saturday, Philadelphia closed the season with a 5-2 win over the New York Islanders. The

Flyers finished on a 15-6-2 run in which they passed four teams in the standings.

The Ducks' win over Washington vaulted them ahead of Los Angeles to clinch their fourth consecutive Pacific Division title. Anaheim opens the postseason on Friday against seventh-seeded Nashville.

"We're going to have our hands full," Ducks defenseman Cam Fowler said. "But we feel that we're in a good spot right now."

It's a significantly better situation than where the Ducks were at Christmas. Starting with a 4-2 win over Philadelphia on Dec. 27, Anaheim closed the season 34-10-5.

The Kings dropped to second in the Pacific and will face third-place San Jose in a series starting Thursday.

The other Western Conference matchups open Thursday and feature top-seeded Dallas against Minnesota and defending Stanley Cup champion Chicago opening at St. Louis.

In the East, the Islanders' loss left them in seventh, and they'll face Atlantic Division champion Florida starting Thursday. The Rangers stayed in third in the Metropolitan Division and face second-

place Pittsburgh on Wednesday. The Atlantic Division's second-place Tampa Bay Lightning will play third-place Detroit in a series that starts Wednesday.

Capital concerns? The Capitals won a franchise-record 56 games but closed their season going 3-3-3.

"It feels like we're in a total freefall, and it's really not that way at all. And I think [the players] have a good perspective on it," Trotz said. "There's a lot of great reasons to feel good about going forward to the playoffs right now."

The question is whether the Capitals can avoid more playoff collapses. Washington hasn't advanced past the second round since losing the 1998 Stanley Cup Final to Detroit.

First-time matchups: The North Stars left Minnesota for Dallas after the 1992-93 season before the NHL re-established its presence in the Twin Cities with the expansion Wild in 2000. The two Central Division rivals meet in the postseason for the first time.

The Islanders and Panthers also meet for the first time in the postseason. Florida is making just its fifth playoff appearance and has lost four straight series since being swept by Colorado in the 1996 Stanley Cup

Final. The Islanders have lost seven straight first-round series dating to 1994.

Familiar foes: The Blues and Blackhawks meet for the 12th time in the postseason. Chicago has won eight times, including the most recent a first-round series in 2014.

Coaching changes: The Penguins' and Wild's decision to switch coaches during the season paid off.

Pittsburgh went 33-16-5 under Mike Sullivan after Mike Johnston was fired in mid-December. As for Minnesota, John Torchetti went 15-11-1 after taking over for Mike Yeo, who was fired on Feb. 13.

Of the seven coaches who took over new jobs last offseason, three reached the playoffs, including Detroit's Jeff Blashill, who was promoted from the Red Wings AHL affiliate after Mike Babcock left to coach Toronto. San Jose's Peter DeBoer is back in the postseason for the first time since leading the New Jersey Devils on their run to the 2012 Stanley Cup Final, which they lost in six games to Los Angeles.

And then there's Philadelphia's Dave Hakstol, who was hired after spending 11 seasons at North Dakota.

West preview

Blackhawks, Kings draw daunting foes

Associated Press

The last two NHL champions don't exactly have a gilded path back to the Stanley Cup.

The Chicago Blackhawks and the Los Angeles Kings each need to beat a bitter rival just to get out of the first round in the Western Conference playoffs.

The defending champion Blackhawks meet the St. Louis Blues in an early meeting of regular-season powerhouses, while the two-time champion Kings face the rival San Jose Sharks for the fourth time in six years when the Stanley Cup postseason begins this week.

Top-seeded Dallas faces Minnesota in the other Central Division matchup, while the Pacific Division champion Anaheim Ducks host the Nashville Predators.

All eyes in the first round will be on the Blackhawks as they chase their fourth title in seven seasons. That's a heavy burden on the shoulders of captain Jonathan Toews, do-everything defenseman Duncan Keith and NHL scoring champion Patrick Kane, but few players have ever been more capable of lifting their team in the postseason.

They'll have to get in gear quickly against the Blues, who are wildly overdue for playoff success to match their regular-season prowess.

Another first-round rivalry series is set on the coast after the Kings blew a three-

goal lead and the Pacific title in their 82nd game, losing to Winnipeg and allowing Anaheim to snatch the division banner.

Here are some more things to watch in the Western Conference when the playoffs begin Wednesday:

Stars fell on Minnesota: Dallas' reward for its best regular season and first division title in a decade is a trip back to the franchise's former home in Minnesota. The series looks like a mismatch on paper, but the Wild have more playoff experience and less pressure than Jamie Benn and the 109-point Stars.

Duck dynasty: After falling one game short of the Stanley Cup Final last summer, Anaheim heads into the postseason with ample momentum from its stunning midseason turnaround. The Ducks were 29th in the NHL at Christmas, but went 34-10-5 after the holiday break.

Late start: Keith, the Conn Smythe Trophy winner in the Blackhawks' title run last season, will miss the series opener in St. Louis under suspension. If the Blackhawks could steal Game 1 without Keith, a world of pressure would sit squarely on the Blues.

Elliott's time: St. Louis goalie Brian Elliott quietly led the NHL in save percentage (.930) while playing five fewer games than Jake Allen. The Blues have had playoff troubles with goaltending before, but Elliott is in position for a breakthrough postseason against the Blackhawks.

East preview

Are Penguins, Caps on track to collide?

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Sidney Crosby's Pittsburgh Penguins and Alex Ovechkin's Washington Capitals are the favorites to come out of the Eastern Conference and could be on a collision course to meet in the playoffs for the first time since 2009.

Crosby and Ovechkin would face off in the second round, marking just the second postseason meeting between the two stars.

The Penguins won eight in a row and 14 of 15 before resting Crosby and defenseman Kris Letang in their regular-season finale. They open the playoffs against Henrik Lundqvist and the New York Rangers. The Presidents' Trophy-winning Capitals face the Philadelphia Flyers, who charged from 12th in the East to a wild-card spot in the second half of the season.

Only one of those four teams can emerge from the brutal Metropolitan Division, which represents half of the bracket in the wide-open East. On the Atlantic side, division champion Florida faces the New York Islanders and the banged-up Tampa Bay Lightning play the Detroit Red Wings, who are in the playoffs for the 25th consecutive season.

Washington clinched home-ice advantage throughout the playoffs with seven games to spare.

Pittsburgh is rolling into the playoffs without star center Evgeni Malkin and defenseman Olli Maatta.

Here are some things to watch in the Eastern Conference as the playoffs begin:

New cats on the block: Led by the goal-tending of Roberto Luongo and the play of the ageless Jaromir Jagr, the Panthers are in the playoffs for the first time since 2012 and for just the fifth time in franchise history.

Lightning in a bottle: The defending East-champion Lightning won't have forward Steven Stamkos and defenseman Anton Stralman for at least the first round, and a handful of other players, including defenseman Victor Hedman and forward Ryan Callahan, aren't 100 percent.

New York: The Islanders had a chance to essentially pick their playoff road, and their lackluster loss to the Flyers with several top players resting means they will face Florida instead of Pittsburgh.

New York II: Rangers goaltender Lundqvist is nearing the end of his prime, but his team has the playoff experience to surprise.

Fired up Flyers: After FaceTiming with ailing owner Ed Snider after clinching a playoff berth, the Flyers learned of his death Monday morning following a two-year battle with cancer. Philadelphia players have already said they're dedicating the 2016 playoffs to Snider, giving them fresh motivation after expending so much energy just to make the postseason.



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Cubs top Reds, break up no-no

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Reds left-hander Brandon Finnegan pitched 6 2/3 hitless innings before allowing a single to David Ross, but Addison Russell hit a three-run home run while Chicago roughed up Cincinnati's bullpen in a 5-3 victory Monday night in the Cubs' home opener.

Ross' single started a two-run rally, with Jason Heyward cutting the Cubs' deficit to 3-2 with a bases-loaded single off Tony Cingrani.

In the eighth, Cingrani (0-1) walked Ben Zobrist with one out and hit Jorge Soler. Russell then drove Jumbo Diaz's first pitch out to left-center, whipping the packed crowd into a frenzy and sending the Cubs to their sixth victory in seven games, matching their best start since 1998.

Jon Lester pitched six innings, allowing three runs and five hits. Adam Warren (1-0) worked a scoreless eighth for his first win as a Cub, and Hector Rondon struck out the side in the ninth for his second save in as many chances.

Orioles 9, Red Sox 7: Chris Davis hit a tiebreaking, three-run homer off new closer Craig Kimbrel in the ninth inning and drove in five runs, carrying visiting Baltimore over Boston in David Ortiz's final home opener.

Kimbrel (0-1), the All-Star reliever acquired in an offseason trade from San Diego, entered with the score 6-6. He walked Caleb Joseph with one out and Manny Machado with two outs, then gave up Davis' home run to center on a 97 mph pitch.

Mookie Betts homered off Zach Britton leading off the bottom half, and Boston had two on and no outs when Ortiz grounded into a double play. Britton then struck out Hanley Ramirez for his third save.

Astros 8, Royals 2: Collin McHugh bounced back from the shortest start of his career by pitching seven scoreless innings and Colby Rasmus hit a two-run homer as Houston won its home opener over Kansas City.

Carlos Correa had three hits and two RBIs for Houston, Jose Altuve had three hits and rookie Tyler White added a pair of hits for his fourth multi-hit game this year.

McHugh (1-1) allowed eight hits and

struck out four to bounce back from his last start, in which he allowed six runs and walked two in 1/3 inning of a 16-6 loss to the Yankees.

Marlins 10, Mets 3: Giancarlo Stanton homered to cap a seven-run second inning against Steven Matz, and visiting Miami handed the touted rookie his first regular-season loss.

Marcell Ozuna homered and doubled to break out of an early slump, and Adeiny Hechavarria had three RBIs from the No. 8 spot in the lineup. By the sixth inning, every Marlins starting position player had a hit and scored a run.

Chris Johnson reached base four times in his first start for Miami, and J.T. Realmuto had three of the team's 15 hits. Martin Prado had two singles and two walks in a game that dragged on for 3 hours, 45 minutes, before a sparse crowd at Citi Field.

Angels 4, Athletics 1: Mike Trout hit his first home run of the season and Nick Tropeano pitched five scoreless innings in his season debut as Los Angeles beat host Oakland and ace Sonny Gray.

Trout struck out looking twice but homered on the first pitch he saw from Gray in the sixth, a towering two-run shot that ricocheted off the right side of the bleachers just below the luxury suites in left-center field.

Gray (1-1) allowed three runs over 6 1/3 innings, struck out six and walked three.

White Sox 4, Twins 1: Austin Jackson hit a two-run, two-out single in the fourth inning, one pitch after just missing a grand slam, and Minnesota dropped to 0-7 with a loss in its home opener. It is the worst start for the franchise since the original Washington Senators lost their first 13 games in 1904, according to STATS.

Jose Quintana (1-0) completed six smooth innings with one run allowed for the White Sox, who have won five of their first seven.

Twins starter Kyle Gibson (0-2) was charged with one earned run over 5 2/3 innings.

Nationals 6, Braves 4: Falling to 0-6 for the first time in nearly 30 years, Atlanta lost to host Washington, which used Wilson Ramos' four singles and two RBIs to help cover up a shaky start by Max Scherzer.

Scherzer (1-0), pitching on a full week's

rest, won despite allowing two-run doubles to A.J. Pierzynski and Nick Markakis in the first two innings. The righty wound up going six innings and didn't let Atlanta score again in front of a sparse crowd announced as 18,119.

Ramos drove in the go-ahead run off Bud Norris (0-2) in the fifth, breaking a 4-all tie.

Pirates 7, Tigers 4: Gregory Polanco had two of Pittsburgh's six doubles, and the Pirates chased Justin Verlander during the fifth inning. Verlander (0-1) allowed seven runs and 10 hits — five of them doubles — in 4 1/3 innings.

Jonathan Niese (1-0) gave up four runs — three earned — and five hits in six innings. Mark Melancon pitched a one-hit ninth for his third save.

Rangers 7, Mariners 3: Colby Lewis allowed one run on four hits over six innings against Seattle's struggling offense and Rougned Odor drove in three runs to lead Texas.

Lewis (1-0) allowed a first-inning run on Nelson Cruz's two-out RBI double, then retired 13 straight before allowing an infield single to open the sixth when he failed to cover on Leonys Martin's bounce-off to first.

The Rangers erased a 1-0 deficit with runs in the second, third and fourth off Hisashi Iwakuma (0-1), who gave up three runs on eight hits in six innings.

Padres 4, Phillies 3: Alexi Amarista's safety squeeze in the seventh scored the go-ahead run in Philadelphia's home opener.

Wil Myers hit a solo homer for the Padres, who benefited from a strange double play and two video reviews going their way.

Kevin Quackenbush (1-0) struck out the only batter he faced, and Fernando Rodney pitched the ninth for his first save for the Padres.

Cardinals 10, Brewers 1: Michael Wacha (1-0) allowed four hits in six scoreless innings, and St. Louis had 10 extra-base hits in its home opener.

Jeremy Hazelbaker was 4-for-4 with a triple, double and sacrifice fly, lifting his average to .526, and fellow rookie Almedys Diaz had two doubles.

Yadier Molina had three hits, two RBIs and an uncontested steal off Taylor Jungmann (0-1).

Cavaliers nab East's No. 1 seed

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — LeBron James did all he could to downplay getting the No. 1 seed.

And then did everything he could to get it.

James scored 34 points with six rebounds and six assists in just three quarters, Kyrie Irving scored 35 and the Cleveland Cavaliers clinched the top seed in the Eastern Conference playoffs — and home-court advantage until the Finals — with a 109-94 win over the Atlanta Hawks on Monday night.

James, who tried to dismiss the importance of finishing atop the East before the game, scored 19 in the third quarter and sat for just four of the first 36 minutes as he helped the Cavs finish atop the conference for the third time in team history.

James finished 13-for-16 from the field, made all five free throws and delivered the kind of performance that has made him the world's best all-around player.

Rockets 129, Timberwolves 105: James Harden scored 34 points and Dwight Howard had 19 points and eight rebounds to keep Houston's playoff hopes alive with a victory over host Minnesota.

The Rockets (40-41) are tied with Utah for eighth place in the Western Conference after the Jazz lost to Dallas on Monday.

Mavericks 101, Jazz 92: Dirk Nowitzki scored 22 and Dallas clinched the No. 7 spot in the Western Conference playoffs with a win over host Utah, leaving one remaining postseason slot.

Dallas rode its two biggest stars to victory as Nowitzki hit four three-pointers and added 11 rebounds. Deron Williams scored 23 against his former team.

The Jazz (40-41) lost control of their own destiny and need to beat the Lakers on Wednesday and for the Rockets (40-41) to lose to the Kings.

Thunder 112, Lakers 79: Kevin Durant scored 34 points and Russell Westbrook had a triple-double by halftime to help Oklahoma City beat Los Angeles in the final road game of Kobe Bryant's 20-year career.

Bryant looked vintage in the first quarter with 13 points, but he went scoreless the rest of the way.

Hornets 114, Celtics 100: Jeremy Lin scored 19 of his 25 points in Charlotte's big second quarter, carrying the Hornets past host Boston.

Kemba Walker scored 18 points, and Al Jefferson and Marvin Williams each had 16 for the Hornets, who are in a tight race with Boston and Miami in the Eastern Conference playoff position.

It was just the Celtics' third loss in their past 21 home games.

Kings 105, Suns 101: Seth Curry had 20 points and tripled his previous career best with 15 assists and depleted Sacramento beat host Phoenix.

Curry, Stephen's brother, played 39 minutes — the most of his NBA career — while the Kings left three of their top players home for "rest" — DeMarcus Cousins, Darren Collison and Rajon Rondo.

Bulls 121, Pelicans 116: Jimmy Butler scored 12 of his 23 points in the last six minutes and short-handed Chicago beat injury-riddled host New Orleans.

Wizards 120, Nets 111: Ramon Sessions had 21 points and 12 assists, and visiting Washington recovered after blowing all of its 20-0 lead to beat Brooklyn.

Magic 107, Bucks 98: Ersan Ilyasova scored 22 points and Mario Hezonja added 19 to help Orlando defeat Milwaukee in its home finale.

Players adjusting to 'Chase Utley rule'

Associated Press

Something that used to be second nature in baseball — sliding hard into second base to prevent a double play — is deciding games and giving major leaguers fits a week into the season. From the AL to the NL, runners making that 90-foot dash are wondering: What's acceptable anymore?

Twice during opening week, a game turned on a slide that was ruled unacceptable. The most recent dust-up occurred Friday night in Milwaukee when Colby Rasmus was called for interference, resulting in a game-ending double play in the ninth inning that allowed the Brewers to hold on for a 6-4 win.

Astros ace Dallas Keuchel later vented on Twitter: "Are we even playing baseball anymore??? Unbelievable."

Better believe it's going to keep happening until everyone figures out what's allowed under the "Chase Utley rule," enacted after his slide broke the leg of Mets shortstop Ruben Tejada during the

playoffs. Players have to slide at the base and be able to maintain contact with it — Rasmus slid past the base and was called for interference.

Every team in the majors will see the play as another teaching moment. Major League Baseball sent 20 videos to teams in the offseason defining what's acceptable and what's not. The Pittsburgh Pirates show videos of the most recent "Utley rule" slides at the start of each series.

"Any time there becomes an issue in the league where a guy is called out, we show that slide so guys can see it," manager Clint Hurdle said Saturday morning before a game against the Cincinnati Reds. "When we have our next (team) meeting, Monday in Detroit, we'll show the slides that have happened from the last bit of slides."

"We catch them up on what's going on in the league, what's been called out and what's been called appropriate."

One week in, teams aren't so sure. Hurdle asked for clarification from MLB

on why a Cardinals runner wasn't called out for turning his body toward the infield while sliding into the base during their opening series.

Is that allowed? Was it a borderline call? Is it a gray area that needs to be cleared up?

"We're confused by it," Yankees manager Joe Girardi said Saturday before a game in Detroit. "We've told our players: Slide into the base. But I'm going to say it again: We've told players for years not to dive head-first into first base. What do they do? Their instinct takes over, they're playing hard, and they do it. So I think it's hard. I think it's going to be hard for players."

MLB knew there would be a break-in period. Only three days into the season, the outcome of a game was directly affected by the new rule. Tampa Bay got a 3-2 win over Toronto when Jose Bautista was called for an illegal slide into second base in the ninth inning, negating an errant throw by Logan Forsythe that would have let in a go-ahead run for Toronto.