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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Navy mulls if Russians violated pact

BY STEVEN BEARDSLEY

Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The Navy's top officer will ultimately decide if the latest encounter between Russian jets and a U.S. warship rise to a violation of the two navies' agreement on conduct at sea.

At a time when Russian jets and ships frequently shadow U.S. warships in European waters, the case might not be an obvious one.

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson will consider evidence catalogued by the commanding officer of the USS Donald Cook, the guided-missile destroyer that was buzzed repeatedly by Su-24 attack jets in international waters on Monday and Tuesday. The evidence will include a chronology of events and geographical reconstruction, as well as videos and photos released by the Navy on Wednesday showing the jets flying near the ship.

The report process is part of the Incidents at Sea agreement between the U.S. and Russia, originally signed in 1972 with the Soviet Union to prevent a misunderstanding from

escalating into a larger conflict.

The agreement prohibits "simulating attacks by aiming guns, missile launchers, torpedo tubes or other weapons" in the direction of a ship or aircraft.

The Navy says the two warplanes, Sukhoi Su-24 attack aircraft, flew in a simulated attack profile and failed to respond to ship advisories in English and Russian, actions it called "unsafe" and "unprofessional."

Other signs of an attack were absent, however, according to a defense official unauthorized to speak on the record, an apparent reference to electronic emissions used to paint the ship as a target. Both planes were also flying without visible ordnance.

"But you can clearly see on the video the way they were flying," the official said.

The Navy has said the aircraft came as close as 30 feet off the ship's aft and as low as the ship's bridge, close enough to create a wake in the surrounding waters.

The official was unaware if the U.S. had reported any violations of the agreement in recent years.

Moscow has already rejected the U.S. complaint, saying the Su-24 pilots had used

"all measures of precaution" and had complied with all safety regulations.

U.S. commanders have come to expect a visible Russian presence in the Baltic Sea and Black Sea, and many encounters are met with little, if any, response from the Navy. In an exception last year, the military released videos of Russian jets making several low passes near the USS Ross in the Black Sea — but only after Russian media claimed the ship was in Russian waters, an assertion denied by the Navy.

Even then, the Navy was reluctant to call the actions of the aircraft provocative, saying instead that Russia had every right to operate in international waters.

Other encounters have drawn more criticism, including the 2014 buzzing of the Donald Cook in the Black Sea, which the military called provocative and unprofessional.

Should Richardson conclude that this week's encounters violated the Incidents at Sea framework, the Navy would seek to raise the issue with their Russian counterparts. Even that might take a while — the two navies have met to discuss the framework only twice in the past three years.

Pentagon plan to boost minority officers raises concerns

USA Today

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon is considering a version of the NFL's "Rooney Rule" to diversify its officer corps, a proposal that has already raised internal concerns about its legality, according to documents obtained by USA Today.

The proposal, sent to Defense Secretary Ash Carter for approval, would require the Army, the Navy and the Marine Corps to consider minority candidates for key jobs such as aide-de-camp and military assistant to senior leaders. Those slots are often springboards to higher ranks. In the NFL, teams are required to interview minority candidates for top jobs, including head coach, under the Rooney Rule, named after Dan

Rooney, owner of the Pittsburgh Steelers.

Adopting a similar approach in the military "gives great prospect for alleviating persistent gaps in our senior leadership corps," according to the proposal developed by Brad Carson, who stepped down recently as the Pentagon's top civilian official for personnel issues. Each of the services and special operations forces have struggled for years to diversify its top brass with little effect.

For example, USA Today reported last year that of the Air Force's 280 generals, just 18 of them belonged to minority groups.

Overall, the active-duty force of more than 1 million troops is about 69 percent white, 17 percent black and 4 percent Asian,

according to Pentagon figures.

The services generally choose their senior leaders from front-line combat units such as infantry. Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, for example, is an infantry officer. Minority officers, however, are underrepresented in those units for a variety of reasons, including personal choice. Giving more minority officers a chance to serve as aides to top officers could encourage them to pursue a career as a senior leader, according to a Defense official familiar with the proposal but not authorized to speak publicly.

Carter has pushed a variety of policies to diversify the military. Carter believes that emphasizing diversity is essential for the military to attract and

retain the troops it needs for the future, said another Defense official also familiar with the proposal but not authorized to speak publicly about it.

The diversity proposal being considered by Carter, however, has drawn internal criticism. The Navy, while saluting the goal of greater diversity, worries that implementing policy carries the "significant risk of litigation," according to a memo. The Navy memo calls for analyzing data on the problem and developing "narrowly tailored efforts" to avoid lawsuits.

The proposal calls on the services to report to Carter by May 1 on how they will incorporate the policy into their diversity initiatives.

Carter: US sending troops, aircraft to Philippines

By TARA COPP
Stars and Stripes

MANILA, Philippines — The U.S. is deploying nine aircraft and hundreds of U.S. troops and special operators to at least seven bases in the Philippines as part of a new, regular presence there, Defense Secretary Ash Carter announced Thursday.

The first dispatch of forces, totaling about 275 people, will be pulled from the roughly 5,000 U.S. troops now in the Philippines as part of the bilateral Balikatan annual exercise, which ends Friday.

Additionally, the Defense Department announced that the U.S. and the Philippines twice have conducted joint patrols in the disputed South China Sea, once in March and once in April, and said the U.S. plans to continue regular joint patrols in the future.

The 275 servicemembers will remain in the Philippines through the end of the month but are expected to be replaced by follow-on personnel.

“There is going to be regular, periodic presence here of American forces,” Carter said. “But it may change in its nature and timing and duration, depending on what we and the Filipinos decide is optimal.”

Follow-on forces also could include different aircraft than those remaining this month, a senior defense official said.

“Follow-on rotations of additional aircraft will be determined in consultation with our Philippine allies,” said a Defense Department fact sheet provided to reporters.

Up to 75 Marines will be assigned to Camp Aguinaldo in greater Manila, headquarters of the Philippine armed forces, where they “will support increased operations in the region and will enhance our combined (command-and-control) capabilities,” according to the fact sheet.

The rotating forces also will include 200 airmen who will operate out of Clark Air Base, a former U.S. Air Force installation about 60 miles north of Manila on the main Philippine island of Luzon.

The airmen will deploy from various bases in the Pacific to support five A-10C Thunderbolt II attack aircraft from the 51st Fighter Wing at Osan Air Base in South Korea; three HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters from the 18th Wing at Kadena Air Base, Japan; and a MC-130H Combat Talon II special operations aircraft.

CDC confirms Zika causes severe birth defects

NEW YORK — Confirming the worst fears of many pregnant women in the United States and Latin America, U.S. health officials said Wednesday there is no longer any doubt the Zika virus causes babies to be born with abnormally small heads and other severe brain defects.

Since last year, doctors in Brazil have been linking Zika infections in pregnant women to a rise in newborns with microcephaly, or an unusually small skull.

Most outside experts were cautious about drawing such a connection. Now the U.S. Cen-

ters for Disease Control and Prevention says enough evidence is in.

“There is no longer any doubt that Zika causes microcephaly,” said CDC Director Dr. Tom Frieden. The CDC said it also is clear Zika causes other serious defects, including damaging calcium buildups in the developing brain.

Among the evidence that clinched the case: Signs of the Zika virus, which is spread primarily through mosquito bites and also can be transmitted through sex, have been found in the brain tissue, spinal fluid and amniotic fluid of microcephaly babies.

From The Associated Press

Strong quake kills 2, injures 45 in Japan

Associated Press

TOKYO — At least two people were killed and 45 injured by a magnitude-6.5 earthquake that knocked down houses and buckled roads in southern Japan on Thursday night.

Both victims are from the hardest-hit town of Mashiki, about 9 miles east of Kumamoto city on the island of Kyushu, said Kumamoto prefecture disaster management official Takayuki Matsushita.

Earlier, Japanese Red Cross Kumamoto Hospital said it had admitted or treated 45 people, including five with serious injuries.

The quake struck at 9:26 p.m. at a depth of 7 miles near Kumamoto city on the island of Kyushu, the Japan Meteorological Agency said. There was no tsunami risk.

“The shaking was so violent I couldn’t stand still,” said Hi-

ronobu Kosaki, a Kumamoto Prefectural Police night-duty official.

Japan’s Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said at least 19 houses collapsed, and hundreds of calls came in reporting building damage and people buried under debris or trapped inside.

“Because of the night darkness, the extent of damage is still unclear,” he said.

The damage and calls for help are concentrated in the town of Mashiki, about 800 miles southwest of Tokyo, Japan’s Fire and Disaster Management Agency said.

One of the victims in Mashiki died after being pulled from some rubble, and the other was killed in a fire, Matsushita said. A third person rescued from under a collapsed building is in a state of heart and lung failure.

USS Fort Worth heads to US under own power

By ERIK SLAVIN
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — One of the fastest ships in the Navy’s fleet will be taking a very slow trip back to San Diego for repairs later this year after a January mishap in Singapore damaged its main propulsion system.

The littoral combat ship USS Fort Worth will make it home under its own power, Pacific Fleet command said Wednesday in Hawaii.

It remained unclear for months whether the Navy would hire contractors to fully repair the ship in Asia or would partially repair the ship in preparation for a return to the

U.S.

With its diesel propulsion system down, the Fort Worth’s gas-turbine engines will be used to make the transit from Singapore to southern California in about six weeks.

It’s a plodding cruise for a ship whose top speed is listed on the Navy’s website as “more than 46 mph.”

The Fort Worth’s rough six-week time frame includes several underway supply replenishments and fueling stops.

The ship’s engine damage occurred Jan. 12, when the crew started the main engine and the port and starboard combining gears ground because of a lack of lubricating oil.

Warriors win 73rd

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif.— Stephen Curry and the Golden State Warriors took their last shot at Michael Jordan and history and they swished it — for 73.

Down to their final chance at the record, the Warriors became the first team in the NBA to win 73 games in the regular season, beating the Memphis Grizzlies 125-104 on Wednesday. It broke what many considered an unmatchable mark set 20 years ago by Jordan's Chicago Bulls — oh, and Golden State coach Steve Kerr, too.

"I want to congratulate the Warriors on their amazing season," Jordan said in a statement. "The game of basketball is always evolving and records are made to be broken. The Warriors have been a lot of fun to watch and I look forward to seeing what they do in the playoffs."

Curry achieved yet one more shooting milestone, becoming the first player to make 400 three-pointers in a season by knocking down 10 from long range on the way to 46 points and 402 total threes. Golden State saved one last record for the closing day of the regular season, and did it for a roaring, sellout home crowd. Yet these Warriors want nothing more than to build off their remarkable run so far and ride it to another title.

Draymond Green had 11 points, nine rebounds and seven assists as defending champion Golden State (73-9) topped the Jordan-led 1995-96 Bulls who went 72-10.

"It's a great way to finish off what was an amazing regular season," Kerr said. "I just told our guys I never in a million years would have guessed that that record would ever be broken. I thought it was like DiMaggio's hit streak, really. I was wrong, but I will say the same thing now that I said 20 years ago, 'I don't think this one will ever be broken.' Somebody's got to go 74-8. I don't see it, and I hope our fans aren't expecting that next year."

When the final buzzer sounded, Green bounded onto the floor and grabbed the game ball as confetti streamed down and "73 WINS" appeared on the scoreboard.

"We were going to play 82 games, anyway," Green said. "We might as well try to

win. It means that I'm on the best team ever. Not many people can say that — 15 guys can say that."

President Barack Obama, a Bulls fan, sent a tweet that said: "Congrats to the @warriors, a great group of guys on and off the court. If somebody had to break the Bulls' record, I'm glad it's them."

NBA Commissioner Adam Silver released a statement, saying: "Congratulations to the Golden State Warriors on their 73rd win and the best regular-season record in NBA history. The team held itself to a high standard throughout the season, playing with purpose every night and captivating fans around the world with its free-flowing style, spectacular shooting and flair for the dramatic. Kudos to the entire Warriors organization."

Curry came out and did what he has all along during this sensational season: let it fly from anywhere on the floor.

Curry had seven three-pointers by half-time, then hit No. 400 just 43 seconds into the third quarter.

Curry shattered his own single-season record of 286 from a year ago. When he hit his 400th, the reigning MVP raised his arms and patted his chest in celebration.

He made 10 of 19 three-pointers and shot 15-for-24 overall to go with six assists as fans chanted "M-V-P! M-V-P!" all evening. Klay Thompson added 16 points with four threes of his own before Curry rested the fourth quarter and Thompson most of it.

Already the Western Conference's No. 1 seed heading into the playoffs, Golden State had to get past the very Memphis team the Warriors squeaked by 100-99 four days earlier.

No champagne celebrations were planned for this focused bunch.

"Absolutely not. You've got to save that 'til June. I mean you might have a glass of wine after the game but that's about it," Thompson said. "This record doesn't mean a thing if we don't take care of business in the postseason."

Golden State finished 39-2 at home for the second straight year.

'Mamba out': Bryant drops 60 in epic final

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Kobe Bryant scored 60 incredible points. He carried a miserable Los Angeles Lakers team to an improbable comeback victory.

And with sweat and confetti all over his gold uniform for the final time, he expressed humble thanks to his fans and family for their loving support over two decades.

"What else can I say?" Bryant asked. "Mamba out."

Bryant utterly dominated his final game Wednesday night, wrapping up 20 NBA seasons with one last offensive showcase in the Lakers' 101-96 victory over the Utah Jazz.

He scored 23 points in the fourth quarter, posting his first 50-point game since February 2009 and rallying the Lakers from a 15-point deficit to win the final game of the worst season in franchise history.

It was messy, ridiculous and magical — even to the man who did it so many times over 20 years.

"It's hard to believe it happened this way," Bryant said. "I'm still shocked about it."

With the entire Staples Center crowd standing, Bryant made a three-pointer with 59 seconds left. He hit another with 31 seconds to play, putting the Lakers ahead 97-96. He finished with an assist before checking out for good with 4.1 seconds left in just the Lakers' 17th win of the season.

"The perfect ending would have been a championship," Bryant said with a smile. "But tonight was [me] trying to go out, play hard and try to put on a show as much as I possibly could. It felt good to be able to do that one last time."

Bryant and his teammates conspired for one last omnivorous scoring performance by the third-leading scorer in NBA history. He played 42 minutes and took a career-high 50 shots, his teammates at-

tempting to set him up for points on nearly every possession.

Kobe came up with the fifth highest-scoring game of his career. He became the oldest player to score 50 points in an NBA game with his highest-scoring performance since getting 61 against New York in 2009 — oh, and he had four assists and four rebounds.

"It just didn't surprise me, the way he would go out," said Lakers coach Byron Scott, Bryant's teammate in his rookie season. "Sixty points wasn't a surprise. I knew he had it in him."

The entire night was a tribute to Bryant, who is retiring after 20 seasons, five championship rings and 18 All-Star selections with the Lakers, who honored him before and after the game. Bryant is just the fifth player in NBA history to play 20 seasons, and the first with just one team.

"I think the most important part is that we all stayed together throughout," Bryant said to the crowd. "You'll always be in my heart, and I sincerely, sincerely appreciate it. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. I love you guys."

He also had a few laughs after finishing his 1,346th regular-season game with 33,643 career points.

"The thing that had me cracking up all night long is, I go through 20 years of everybody screaming to pass the ball," Bryant said with a grin. "And then the last night, they're like, 'Don't pass it!'"

Magic Johnson anchored a brief pre-game tribute by calling Bryant "the biggest and greatest celebrity we've had in this town for 20 years" and "the greatest to wear the purple and gold."

Bryant embraced his roles as a hero and villain throughout his career, and he mentioned the duality in describing his outlook on sports afterward. He had rocky times in Los Angeles, from his sexual assault charge in Colorado in 2003 to his feud with Shaquille O'Neal, who watched the finale at courtside.

It was all forgotten by the time Bryant took the Staples court for the final time.

Wizards fire Wittman after beating Hawks in finale

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Atlanta Hawks coach Mike Budenholzer is ready to move on.

Sure, his team blew a chance to grab the No. 3 playoff seed in the Eastern Conference.

And, yes, the Hawks looked far from perfect in their regular-season finale.

So what? Now they have to prepare to host the Boston Celtics in Game 1 of the postseason.

With a seemingly half-hearted showing against a bunch of backups, the Hawks lost 109-98 to the Washington Wizards on Wednesday and wound up seeded No. 4.

After the game, Wizards coach Randy Wittman was told he would not return next season, according to a person familiar with the decision. The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the move has not been announced by the team.

Atlanta finished 48-34 — the same record as the Miami Heat, who lost 98-88 at Boston but owned the tiebreaker over the Hawks and so earned the No. 3 seed. Because of Miami's loss, Atlanta would have moved up to No. 3

with a victory. Instead, the Hawks dropped their second game in a row.

Rockets 116, Kings 81: James Harden scored 38 points and host Houston took the final Western Conference playoff spot with an easy victory.

Spurs 96, Mavericks 91: Rookies Boban Marjanovic and Jonathon Simmons set career scoring highs and San Antonio rallied past host Dallas despite leaving home four starters and two key reserves.

Pistons 112, Cavaliers 110 (OT): LeBron James wore a black blazer and watched from the bench and all the starters for host Cleveland and Detroit rested for their first-round playoff matchup as Jodie Meeks scored 20 to lead the Pistons past the Cavaliers.

Raptors 103, Nets 96: Rookie Norman Powell scored a career-high 30 points and Toronto wrapped up the best regular season in franchise history by beating host Brooklyn.

Celtics 98, Heat 88: Isaiah Thomas had 21 points and host Boston rallied from 26 points down to beat Miami. Coupled with Atlanta's loss to Washington, Boston earned the fifth seed in the Eastern Conference.

Magic 117, Hornets 103: Al Jefferson scored 26 points and playoff-bound Charlotte closed out its best regular season in 16 years with a victory over visiting Orlando.

Pacers 97, Bucks 92: Solomon Hill scored a season-high 25 points to help visiting Indiana beat Milwaukee.

Bulls 115, 76ers 105: Nikola Mirotic scored 32 points, Justin Holliday added a career-high 29, and host Chicago closed a disappointing season.

Timberwolves 144, Pelicans 109: Karl-Anthony Towns had 28 points and 14 rebounds and host Minnesota sent coach Sam Mitchell out in style. GM Milt Newton and Mitchell were fired after the game.

Suns 114, Clippers 105: Mirza Teletovic scored 22 points to lead host Phoenix and the Suns finished their second-worst season in franchise history with a victory over a Los Angeles team made up almost entirely of Clippers bench players.

Trail Blazers 107, Nuggets 99: Damian Lillard had 21 points before sitting in the final quarter as host Portland, its playoff fate sealed earlier Wednesday night, beat Denver.



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Lee's home run lifts Mariners

Associated Press

SEATTLE — The Seattle Mariners are finding out just like everybody else: Dae-Ho Lee can catch up to a big league fastball.

Lee hit a two-run, pinch-hit homer with two outs in the 10th inning on Wednesday, lifting the Mariners over the Texas Rangers 4-2 for their first win of the year at Safeco Field.

After starting 0-5 at home, the Mariners won on Lee's second home run of the season. Robinson Cano hit his fifth homer for Seattle.

The right-handed hitting Lee, who spent the last four years in Japan after 11 seasons in his native South Korea, came on to bat for Adam Lind against left-hander Jake Diekman (0-1). Lee launched an 0-2, 97 mph fastball deep over the left field wall for his second homer.

"For him, when we first got to spring training, how was he going to handle the velocity? There were concerns there," Mariners manager Scott Servais said. "The thing that we kept seeing was he is able to make adjustments. He cuts down the leg kick, he cuts down his swing to make contact, and he's plenty strong enough that if he does square it up, he's got enough power."

Nelson Cruz reached on a one-out error by second baseman Rougned Odor but was forced out by Kyle Seager, setting up Lee, who had grounded out in a pinch-hitting appearance on Friday against Diekman.

"I watched a lot of video before the game, but it makes a difference when you've faced him before," Lee said through an interpreter. "Two strikes, I knew it was going to be a fastball. I just put in contact on the middle of my bat."

Diekman said he put the ball in the perfect spot for Lee, who became the first Mariners rookie to hit a pinch-hit walk-off

home run.

"That pitch needed to be much better. Yeah, that was terrible. Put it right where he could hit it," said Diekman, who had not allowed a run in his first five appearances. "It's our job to come in and get zeros."

Royals 4, Astros 2: Salvador Perez tagged Houston reliever Ken Giles for a tiebreaking two-run homer in the eighth inning, lifting visiting Kansas City.

Giles (0-1) has given up three home runs in four games, and flung his glove in the dugout after this latest shot. He was acquired from Philadelphia in the offseason after giving up a total of three homers in 113 games over the past two years.

Cubs 9, Reds 2: John Lackey pitched into the seventh inning and Kris Bryant hit his first homer of the season as host Chicago matched the best eight-game start in franchise history.

Dodgers 3, Diamondbacks 1: Adrian Gonzalez hit his first home run of the season and Alex Wood pitched into the eighth inning, leading host Los Angeles.

Wood (1-1) allowed a run and five hits in seven-plus, struck out three and walked three in his 100th major league appearance and 69th start.

Rockies 10, Giants 6: Nolan Arenado homered twice, doubled and singled to drive in a career-high seven runs and rookie Trevor Story had two triples as host Colorado tied a franchise record with 12 extra-base hits in beating San Francisco.

The Rockies set a team record with four triples. Story had three of Colorado's 18 hits.

White Sox 3, Twins 0: Carlos Rodon worked his way out of trouble several times to complete six scoreless innings and Jerry Sands hit a two-run home run to help Chicago keep host Minnesota winless.

At 0-8, the Twins have been outscored

33-13 this season.

Nationals 3, Braves 0: Tanner Roark pitched seven innings and Stephen Drew and Jayson Werth hit fourth-inning home runs as host Washington beat winless Atlanta for its fourth straight victory.

Indians 4, Rays 1: Carlos Carrasco pitched eight efficient innings and Jason Kipnis hit his first homer to help visiting Cleveland past Tampa Bay.

Tigers 7, Pirates 3: Jarrod Saltalamacchia hit a grand slam for his 100th career home run and Shane Greene pitched six strong innings in his first start since undergoing shoulder surgery last August as visiting Detroit beat Pittsburgh.

Blue Jays 7, Yankees 2: Jose Bautista had two hits and collected his 800th RBI and J.A. Happ worked six innings for his first victory of the season to help host Toronto beat New York.

Mets 2, Marlins 1: Kevin Plawecki grounded a tiebreaking, two-run single through a drawn-in infield in the seventh inning to help host New York stop a four-game losing streak.

Angels 5, Athletics 1: Matt Shoemaker pitched one-hit ball for six innings and Los Angeles beat host Oakland for its fourth straight win.

Brewers 6, Cardinals 4: Domingo Santana hit a go-ahead two-run homer in the ninth inning and Chase Anderson threw six innings without an earned run as Milwaukee beat host St. Louis.

Phillies 2, Padres 1: Maikel Franco homered, doubled and drove in both runs and Jerad Eickhoff struck out nine in seven scoreless innings to lead host Philadelphia over San Diego.

Red Sox 4, Orioles 2: Baltimore finally lost after opening the season with a team-record seven straight wins, beaten by the bats of Xander Bogaerts, Jackie Bradley Jr. and host Boston.

Rams acquire No. 1 pick

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — The Rams have gone Hollywood with one of the splashiest trades in NFL Draft history.

As if their return to Los Angeles after more than two decades in St. Louis wasn't bold enough, they traded for the No. 1 overall selection in this month's draft. The quarterback-strapped Rams sent a collection of picks on Thursday to the Tennessee Titans, freeing the way for coach Jeff Fisher's team to likely grab the QB they covet.

"Our philosophy has always been to build through the draft," Rams general manager Les Snead said in a statement. "This trade is a reflection of that goal and [team owner] Mr. [Stan] Kroenke's dedication to assembling a winning team on the field."

Tennessee swaps the top pick to the Rams along with its choices in the fourth and sixth rounds. The Rams will give the Titans their first-round pick (No. 15 overall) along with two second-round selections and their third-round pick in the draft starting April 28. The Titans also will receive the Rams' first- and third-round round picks in the 2017 draft.

Fisher, who coached the Titans from 1994-2010, including more than two seasons when they were the Houston Oilers, is familiar with such big moves. Four years ago, the Rams made a massive draft-choice deal with the Redskins that landed Robert Griffin III in Washington.

"In order to make a move of this magnitude you have to have a good trade partner," Fisher said in a statement. "We appreciate working with the Titans on an opportunity that can benefit both organizations."

This will be the first time the Rams have held the No. 1 pick since 2010 when they took Sam Bradford, a quarterback they traded to Philadelphia last year. The second-round pick the Rams got in that deal now belongs to the Titans.

After struggling with mediocre quarterback play last season, the Rams almost certainly are looking at Carson Wentz of North Dakota State and Jared Goff of California, considered the top prospects.

Tennessee certainly benefits, now holding six of this draft's first 76 picks. General manager Jon Robinson, hired in January, is looking to rebuild a franchise that has gone 5-27 the past two seasons. He noted Thursday that the extra picks give him more flexibility.

"I would say this doesn't really knock us out of moving back up. It doesn't mean we're going to," Robinson said. "It gives us options. Much like a play call sheet on game days, you want to have your full play sheet that you can call plays from. We want to have the same thing with the draft. We want to have multiple options and multiple plays, if you will, that we can go to to make this football team better."

Robinson also isn't shying away from making more trades before the draft.

"My phone it's still working," Robinson said. "Feel free to call."

The draft-shaking trade also impacts the Cleveland Browns, who have the No. 2 overall pick and have their sights set on landing a franchise quarterback after more than a decade of futility. They've extensively studied both Wentz and Goff, and still could get one, though perhaps not the one they prefer. Also, the recent signing of Griffin, coincidentally, as a free agent may have lessened their need to address the position.

Blues outlast Blackhawks in overtime

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Brian Elliott thwarted the Chicago Blackhawks at every turn.

The St. Louis Blues goalie was every bit as good as he was in the regular season, earning his first career playoff shutout in a 1-0 overtime victory over the defending Stanley Cup champions on Wednesday night.

He made 35 saves and didn't look at all like a player getting just his second playoff start in three years.

"You just try to get your emotions in check and try not to get too revved up, calm yourself down a little bit when needed," Elliott said.

"At this time of the year it's just about that next game. You're not looking at the past or the future."

David Backes scored at 9:04 of overtime trying to go across the ice to Alexander Steen, and the pass deflected off a Chicago Blackhawks defenseman in front of the net.

It was Backes' sixth career playoff goal. "I said out there, that's an ugly goal and I specialize in those," the Blues' captain said. "Rightfully so. First shot of the game for me, too."

Backes' shot got past Corey Crawford after bouncing off Trevor Van Riemsdyk's skate. Defensemen Jay Bouwmeester and Alex Pietrangelo assisted on the winner.

"I kind of felt it hit the inside of my pad and from there I was just hoping that it died," Crawford said. "It was a tough bounce, but we've got to feel good about how we played."

Elliott led the NHL with a .930 save percentage and was up to the task against a lineup led by scoring champion Patrick Kane and Jonathan Toews.

Elliott shared a playoff shutout in 2012 after relieving the injured Jaroslav Halak in Game 2 of the first round against San Jose.

Elliott came into the playoffs sharp after going 11-1 in his final 14 starts with three consecutive shutouts.

"We had a number of chances, especially on the power play," Toews said. "I think all four lines can generate a little bit more around the net."

The Blues had 10 shutouts during the regular season, seven of them on the road. Jake Allen had six of the shutouts.

Coach Ken Hitchcock thought there were enough chances for a 6-5 game, and thought the game-winner would be more impressive, too.

"I thought it would be a 2-on-1, top shelf," Hitchcock said. "I wasn't thinking fluky goal, but we'll take it. We'll take every win we can."

St. Louis cruised into the postseason with the third-best record in the NHL, winning eight of its last 10 games.

The Blues opened their previous series in 2014 against the Blackhawks with a pair of overtime victories, with Alexander Steen getting the winner in triple overtime in the opener. But Chicago won the last four, two in overtime.

Penguins 5, Rangers 2: Patrick Hornqvist had his first playoff hat trick as host Pittsburgh pulled away from New York in Game 1 of the Eastern Conference

quarterfinals.

Hornqvist added an assist, Sidney Crosby had a goal and two assists and backup goaltender Jeff Zatkoff excelled in his first postseason start, finishing with 35 saves. Tom Kuhnhackl also scored for Pittsburgh, which took advantage when New York goalie Henrik Lundqvist left with a facial injury after the first period.

Lundqvist played just 20 minutes after taking a stick to the face from teammate Marc Staal. Antti Raanta was shaky in Lundqvist's place, stopping 16 of 19 shots.

Derek Stepan scored twice for the Rangers, but New York never led as its quest to knock the Penguins out of the playoffs for a third straight year got off to an underwhelming start.

Lightning 3, Red Wings 2: Nikita Kucherov scored twice and Alex Killorn snapped a third-period tie, lifting host Tampa Bay past Detroit in Game 1 of their series.

Ben Bishop had 34 saves for the defending Eastern Conference champions, who got the winner from Killorn less than two minutes after a potential go-ahead goal was waived off when Detroit coach Jeff Blashill successfully challenged that Tampa Bay was offside before Victor Hedman scored.

Killorn took a feed from Tyler Johnson and slipped the puck past Jimmy Howard at 8:52 of the third.

Kucherov scored in the first and second periods and also assisted on the winner.

Mike Green and Justin Abdelkader scored for Detroit.