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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Apaches, 217 more GIs going to Iraq

BY TARA COPP
Stars and Stripes

BAGHDAD — The U.S. military will send Apache attack helicopters and additional troops to help the Iraqi army in the fight for Mosul, Defense Secretary Ash Carter announced Monday.

The additional forces are being sent “to make sure the defeat of [the Islamic State group] is lasting,” Carter said during a visit with U.S. troops at Baghdad International Airport.

The additional troops, numbering 217, will include advisers, force protection personnel and aviation support for the Apaches, said a senior defense official, who briefed reporters before Carter’s announcement.

Most of the advisers are expected to be Special Forces soldiers who will embed at the

brigade and battalion levels to provide tactical guidance as the Iraqi army’s 15th Division advances toward Mosul. The advisers, previously at the division level, will now move to smaller units closer to the front lines.

The additional U.S. military support is intended to help accelerate Iraq’s fight for Mosul, a senior defense official told reporters traveling with Carter. There are about 5,000 Islamic State fighters in Mosul, said Col. Steve Warren, the Baghdad-based spokesman for Operation Inherent Resolve. The terrorist group captured Mosul, Iraq’s second-largest city, in summer 2014 and uses it as its de facto headquarters.

The additional forces will bring the force level of U.S. troops in Iraq to 4,087, a U.S. official said. That does not in-

clude an estimated 1,000 U.S. troops who are in the country but are not part of the Pentagon’s official count, including special operations forces, some logisticians, troops on temporary duty and forces who are rotating in to replace departing forces.

About 5,000 troops from the Iraqi army’s 15th Division are operating in the 70-mile swath between Makhmour and Mosul, as Iraqis work with U.S. Marines to clear villages south of Mosul. The Marines are operating out of a fire base near Makhmour and provide artillery support to the Iraqis. The base has already come under attack by the Islamic State group, resulting in the death of Staff Sgt. Louis Cardin and injuries to eight other Marines.

As the Iraqi forces and their U.S. advisers advance, the

Apaches could be used for overhead cover and to react quickly to observed threats.

Carter also announced that the U.S. would bring in additional High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems to provide fire support to the Iraqi army to help clear villages south of Mosul in preparation for the future fight to retake the city.

Carter arrived Monday in Baghdad to meet with U.S. military and Iraqi political leaders, including Lt. Gen. Sean MacFarland, the U.S. commander of the coalition campaign against the Islamic State; Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi; and Defense Minister Khaled al-Obeidi. Carter also held a conference call with Massoud Barzani, the president of the self-ruled Kurdish region in the north, or Kurdistan.

Pentagon misled lawmakers on sexual assault cases

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon misled Congress with inaccurate and vague information about sexual assault cases that portrayed civilian law enforcement officials as less willing than military commanders to punish sex offenders, an Associated Press investigation found.

Local district attorneys and police forces failed to act against U.S. servicemembers who were subsequently prosecuted in military courts for sex crimes, according to internal government records that summarized the outcomes of dozens of cases. In a number of cases, however, the steps taken by civilian authorities were described incorrectly or omitted. Other case descriptions were

too imprecise to be verified.

There also is nothing in the records that supports the primary reason the Pentagon told Congress about the cases in the first place: to show top military brass as hard-nosed crime fighters who insisted on taking the cases to trial.

The records were obtained through the Freedom of Information Act by the advocacy group Protect Our Defenders, which provided the documents exclusively to the AP. Protect Our Defenders was scheduled to release a report Monday that criticizes the Pentagon’s use of the cases to undermine support for Senate legislation that would mandate a major change in the way the military handles sexual assault allegations.

The bulk of the cases involved soldiers.

Army spokeswoman Tatjana Christian said the case descriptions were written by service attorneys who had “personal and direct knowledge of the circumstances.” She said they contacted the local authorities in each case to ensure the description was accurate, although there is no indication of that in the summaries. The Army declined to make a service official available for an interview.

Previously, the more than 90 cases had been discussed publicly only as statistics that underpinned the Pentagon’s objections to the Senate bill, the Military Justice Improvement Act.

Three years ago, Navy Adm. James Winnefeld, then vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, used the numbers to warn

a Senate panel that if approved, the bill would result in fewer sexual assault cases going to trial. Winnefeld retired from military service last year.

The consequences could be significant if lawmakers believe they were misinformed. A backlash could stoke additional support for the Senate bill that’s failed to pass largely because of the military’s steadfast opposition. Another vote on the legislation could come as early as June.

The legislation aims to stop sexual assaults by stripping senior officers of their responsibilities to decide whether to prosecute sexual assault cases and giving that authority to seasoned military trial lawyers. Protect Our Defenders, a nonpartisan organization, supports the bill.

S. Korea sees signs North planning 5th nuclear test

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea's president said Monday that there are signs that North Korea is preparing for a fifth nuclear bomb test amid reports of increased activity at the country's main nuclear test site.

In a regular meeting with her top adviser, President Park Geun-hye said North Korea could carry out such a test to try to bolster morale as the country deals with tough international sanctions imposed after it conducted a fourth nuclear test and a long-range rocket launch earlier this year.

Park didn't elaborate on what signs pointed to another

nuclear test, but she ordered the military to be ready to deal with any provocation by Pyongyang, according to media pool reports on the first part of the meeting posted on the website of her office.

Speculation about a fifth nuclear test increased last month when the North's state media cited leader Kim Jong Un as ordering a test of a nuclear warhead and ballistic missiles capable of carrying warheads.

Kim's order came amid rising animosity with South Korea and the United States over their annual military drills that North Korea describes as an invasion rehearsal. The drills are set to run until next week.

Damage in Houston after a foot of rain falls

HOUSTON — More than a foot of rain fell Monday in parts of Houston, submerging scores of subdivisions and several major interstate highways, forcing the closure of schools and knocking out power to thousands of residents, who were urged to shelter in place.

Sylvester Turner, mayor of the nation's fourth-largest city, told residents to stay home to fend off a weather system he called "stubborn." More rain was projected over the next two to three days.

Rain gauges in parts of Harris County, which includes most of Houston, showed water levels approaching 20 inches since

late Sunday night. Flood control officials reported 13 bayous and creeks out of their banks. Turner said seven bayous within Houston were topped.

No deaths or injuries were immediately reported.

Several shelters were established for people forced from their homes. At least 100 people taken from apartment complexes in the north part of the city were being sheltered at a shopping mall.

"There are areas of the city that have not flooded for a long period of time that have flooded," Turner said.

From The Associated Press

GI said assailed by 2 Turks on air base

Staff and wire reports

Two members of a Turkish nationalist youth group were detained after trying to put a sack over the head of a U.S. soldier at an air base in southern Turkey, according to Turkish media reports.

The state-run Anadolu Agency reported Sunday that two members of the right-wing group, Yalcin Semir Akarsu and Cenk Kizilirmak, were placed under house arrest after the incident Saturday at Incirlik Air Base.

U.S. European Command said the servicemember was uninjured.

"As the incident evolved, two other U.S. servicemembers came to the assistance of the victim," said Lt. Col. Dave Westover, a EUCOM spokesman. "The two Turkish individuals then ran off into the dark before they were detained while trying to leave the Turkish base."

It remains unclear how the two men gained access to the base, but there was a Turkish invitation-only event being held at Incirlik around the time of the incident, Westover said.

Westover described the event as an "isolated incident" and said U.S. and Turkish authorities are investigating.

Turkey's private Dogan news agency reported that Kizilirmak filmed his friend as he

chased the soldier.

The nationalist Turkish Youth Union posted footage on Twitter in which the man identified by Dogan as Akarsu is heard as saying: "You put a sack over our soldiers' heads in 2003. You are responsible for that and for the terrorism in our country."

He was referring to an incident in July 2003 in which a group of Turkish special forces operating in northern Iraq were arrested by U.S. soldiers and led away with hoods over their heads to be interrogated. They were released after 60 hours in response to protests by top Turkish leaders, but what became known as "the Hood event" was seen by many Turks as a deliberate insult.

Akarsu also was referring to the series of bombings in Turkey since last summer, some claimed by Kurdish militants and others blamed by the authorities on the Islamic State group.

Incirlik is a critical base in the fight by the U.S.-led coalition against the Islamic State and includes strike aircraft, drones and refueling planes. Last month, the State Department and Pentagon ordered the families of U.S. diplomats and military personnel to leave posts in southern Turkey due to "increased threats from terrorist groups" in the country.

High court likely split on Obama immigration executive order

Tribune Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court appeared deadlocked Monday over President Barack Obama's plan to offer work permits to as many as 4 million immigrants living in the U.S. illegally.

A 4-4 tie vote — possible since the death of Justice Antonin Scalia — would be a defeat

for Obama, since it would leave in place a lower court's ruling to block his program.

Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Anthony Kennedy, whose support Obama would likely need to win, sharply questioned the administration's attorney.

Kennedy said Congress, not the president, had the authority to decide which groups of im-

migrants could stay lawfully in the United States. "It is a legislative act, not an executive act," Kennedy said.

Roberts quoted Obama's 2012 remark that he could not broadly extend relief to millions of immigrants who were here illegally.

"What was he talking about?" the chief justice asked.

U.S. Solicitor General Don-

ald Verrilli said the president was acknowledging he could not grant citizenship or even a path to citizenship to these immigrants.

Throughout the argument, the four liberal justices defended the president's executive action and said it was consistent with past decisions by earlier chief executives to shield some immigrants.

'Big 3' lift Cavs over Pistons

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — LeBron James isn't all alone.

One year after he carried the Cavaliers as far as he could in the postseason, James once again has Kyrie Irving and Kevin Love by his side.

Cleveland's Big 3 is playoff healthy again.

Irving scored 31 points in his first playoff game since being injured last year in the NBA Finals and Love, who was knocked out in the first round by an injury a year ago, added 28 to lead the Cavaliers to a 106-101 victory over the young and confident Detroit Pistons in the opener of their first-round playoff series Sunday.

James added 22 points and 11 assists for the top-seeded Cavs. They are favored to win the Eastern Conference again but got all they could handle from the fearless Pistons.

Cleveland's championship chances were dealt a major blow when Love's shoulder was dislocated in just his fourth playoff game last year at Boston. The Cavs advanced to the Finals without him only to have Irving break his kneecap in Game 1 against Golden State, an injury that left James to fight the Warriors on his own.

As he sat between his teammates — who combined with him for 81 points, 24 rebounds and 18 assists — following the game Sunday game, James looked relieved.

"For these two guys, they were just excited to get back to this moment," he said. "These guys have been working hard, Kyrie on his knee, Kevin on his shoulder just to get back to this moment. It was great to be out on the floor with them and for them to put together the performance that they did."

Love made two critical 3-pointers in the fourth quarter and the Cavs overcame a seven-point deficit by outscoring the Pistons 30-18 over the final 10:52.

Kentavious Caldwell-Pope scored 21 points and Marcus Morris had 20 — but just one after halftime — and Reggie

Jackson added 17 for the Pistons, making their first playoff appearance since 2009. Andre Drummond had 13 points and 11 rebounds for the Pistons, who made 15 3-pointers but missed a couple open ones down the stretch when their playoff inexperience showed.

Despite the loss, Jackson and his teammates didn't lose any confidence.

"We don't care who you put in front of us," said Jackson, slapped with a technical with 3:24 left. "We fear nobody and experience is going to be our best teacher. We're going to learn on the fly. We think we have a chance."

Game 2 is Wednesday night at Quicken Loans Arena, which was on edge for much of Game 1 as the Pistons, who beat Cleveland three times during the regular season, flirted with an upset.

For more than 40 minutes, the Pistons, who have just one starter with playoff experience, matched the Cavaliers shot for shot. Detroit's young squad wasn't intimidated and Jackson's 3-pointer tied it 88-88 with 6:29 left.

But that's when Love, who has had two uneven seasons since coming to Cleveland, buried consecutive 3s to put the Cavs ahead by four and finally allow a sellout crowd of more than 20,000 a chance to relax.

"My mentality was to be aggressive all night," said Love, who added 13 rebounds. "We have to do that the entire series."

The Pistons hung around and were within four at 100-96 on a free throw by Morris, but James cut to the basket for a layup and Jackson missed a 3-pointer before Irving's two free throws gave Cleveland an eight-point lead.

Heat 123, Hornets 91: Luol Deng scored 31 points on 11-for-13 shooting, Hassan Whiteside added 21 points and 11 rebounds in his postseason debut, and host Miami routed Charlotte in Game 1 of the Eastern Conference series.

Dwyane Wade scored 16 points in 26 minutes, Joe Johnson and Amare Stoudemire each had 11 points, and Goran Dragic finished with 10 assists.

Miami scored 41 points in the first quar-

ter to tie one franchise playoff record, set another with the 123 points — topping the 121 in the 2012 NBA Finals clincher against Oklahoma City — and never trailed.

Nic Batum scored 24 points for the Hornets. Kemba Walker added 19.

Game 2 is Wednesday night in Miami.

Spurs 106, Grizzlies 74: Kawhi Leonard had 20 points and San Antonio beat visiting Memphis in Game 1 of their Western Conference series, handing the Grizzlies their worst postseason loss.

LaMarcus Aldridge added 17 points, and Tony Parker had 15 points and six assists for San Antonio. The Spurs sat their starters in the fourth quarter to rest them for Game 2 on Tuesday night in San Antonio.

San Antonio shot 68 percent in the third quarter, outscoring Memphis 33-14 to break open what had been a relatively close game against the short-handed Grizzlies.

Memphis matched a postseason low in the first quarter with 13 points, and only Xavier Munford's 15-foot jumper with 46.1 seconds remaining kept it from matching the worst output in any quarter.

Vince Carter had 16 points to lead Memphis. Zach Randolph was held to six points on 3-for-13 shooting.

Memphis' previous largest losing margin was 27 points against Oklahoma City on May 11, 2011.

Clippers 115, Trail Blazers 95: Chris Paul had 28 points and 11 assists as one of three Clippers with a double-double, leading host Los Angeles over the Portland Trail Blazers in the opener of their first-round playoff series.

Blake Griffin had 19 points and 12 rebounds, DeAndre Jordan added 18 points and 12 rebounds and J.J. Redick had 17 points. The Clippers are 6-0 with Griffin in the lineup since he returned from a 45-game absence two weeks ago.

Damian Lillard led the Blazers with 21 points, while backcourt mate CJ McCollum was held to nine points.

Game 2 is Wednesday night at Staples Center.

Edwards gets win at Bristol

Associated Press

BRISTOL, Tenn. — Carl Edwards took his first celebratory back flip of the season and easily stuck the landing.

"I considered not doing it," he said. "I haven't done one for a while."

He earned that acrobatic moment because his No. 19 Toyota gripped Bristol Motor Speedway much better than his Joe Gibbs Racing teammates Sunday.

Edwards avoided tire issues that plagued his teammates and took off on the final restart to win the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series on the half-mile bullring. In fact, he made it look easy.

Starting on the pole for the second straight week, Edwards' Camry led eight times for 276 of 500 laps en route to his first victory since September at Darlington and fourth at Bristol. Dale Earnhardt Jr. was second, followed by Kurt Busch, Chase Elliott and Trevor Bayne.

"We didn't have any trouble, and that's just a testament to everyone at the shop and whole team," said Edwards, who now trails new points leader Kevin Harvick (seventh) by a point.

"It's really awesome to have a win so we can really have fun and focus on the championship."

Edwards' flawless day contrasted the right-front tire problems endured by teammates Kyle Busch, Matt Kenseth and Denny Hamlin after all of them started in the top five.

Busch, the defending series champion and points leader coming in, had trouble throughout the race. He finally exited after his car smacked the wall on Lap 259 and sustained heavy damage, failing to finish a race for the first time since June at Michigan.

"I just kept getting tighter in the long run, not sure why that was," said Busch, who had two other tire failures and was penalized for speeding off pit road. "I guess it wasn't meant to be."

Kenseth led three times for 142 laps and seemed to be one of the few drivers capable of challenging Edwards before his day ended early after he cut a right front tire a second time and hit the wall.

Hamlin had problems too, enough to cause Goodyear to announce it would examine all of those tires from Busch and Kenseth to determine if the failures were due to the tire makeup or the aggressive setups drivers use at the high-banked track.

"Because all of them had the same problem, we wanted to take a look," Goodyear racing director Greg Stucker said.

Earnhardt meanwhile had to overcome a dead battery that stalled his No. 88 Chevy at the start and initially left him two laps down. He battled back to get on the lead lap by Lap 200.

"We didn't have a good enough car to run in the top five today, but (crew chief) Greg (Ives) and those guys did a great job getting our laps back," Earnhardt said. "We were just lucky on those restarts as to where we lined up and that really helped us."

Ethiopians sweep Boston Marathon

Associated Press

BOSTON — Ethiopians nearly swept the Kenyans off the podium at the Boston Marathon on Monday, winning both the men's and women's races for the first time in history and taking five of the six spots on the victory stand.

Lemi Berhanu Hayle won the men's race in 2 hours, 12 minutes, 45 seconds, pulling away from defending champion Lelisa Desisa as they crossed over the Massachusetts Turnpike heading into Kenmore Square. Hayle won by 47 seconds, with Yemane Adhane Tsegay an additional 30 seconds back to round out an all-Ethiopian top three.

Atsede Baysa won the women's race, coming from 37 seconds behind with less than 5 miles to go. The two-time

Chicago Marathon champion finished in 2:29:19 hours, 44 seconds ahead of fellow Ethiopian Tirfi Tsegaye.

Joyce Chepkirui was third in the women's race, the lone Kenyan to medal in a race that had been dominated by her countrymen for decades. The results come as the World Anti-Doping Agency put Kenya on probation after more than 40 athletes tested positive for performance-enhancing drugs since the 2012 Olympics — nearly one a month.

Most of the top Americans, including 2014 winner Meb Keflezighi, skipped the race after running in the U.S. Olympic trials in February. Other countries pick their teams for the Summer Games by committee, and the performances in Boston could help Desisa and Hayle earn a ticket to Rio de Janeiro.

Zachary Hine, of Dallas, was the top U.S. man, finishing 10th. Neely Spence Gracey, of Superior, Colo., was the first American woman to finish, coming in ninth.

On a clear and windless day, cool temperatures at the start warmed to 62 degrees by the time the winners reached the Back Bay.

It was supposed to reach the mid-70s later in the afternoon — an added challenge for the rest of the 30,000-runner field that left Hopkinton in four waves Monday morning.

Fifty years after Bobbi Gibb sneaked onto the course and became the first woman to finish the race, more than 14,000 women left Hopkinton for the 26.2-mile trek to Boston's Copley Square, where a commemorative logo greeted them at the finish. Gibb served as the grand marshal.



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A-Rod ends drought, snaps Yankees' skid

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Alex Rodriguez took an immediate liking to his new spot lower in the batting order.

Dropped three rungs to sixth in a struggling lineup, Rodriguez hit a two-run homer that snapped his hitless skid and sent the New York Yankees past the Seattle Mariners 4-3 on Sunday, ending their four-game losing streak.

"Sometimes you've got to do that; you've got to shuffle the deck a little bit," Rodriguez said. "Whatever it takes to win."

Masahiro Tanaka topped old pal Hisashi Iwakuma in the first major league pitching matchup of former Japanese teammates, a game that was broadcast live on television back home — at 2 a.m. in Tokyo.

Brett Gardner had three hits, including an RBI double that stopped New York's 0-for-30 stretch with runners in scoring position. He scored the tiebreaking run on a wild pitch by Iwakuma (0-2) in the fifth inning.

Still, the Yankees continued to struggle at the plate in clutch situations, finishing the three-game series 1-for-35 with RISP.

"You don't ever want to get swept, especially at home," Gardner said. "I thought we played pretty well today."

New York salvaged a win thanks in large part to Tanaka (1-0), who yielded three runs — two earned — and six hits in seven efficient innings. He struck out six and walked none, improving to 4-0 in four career starts against Seattle.

Tanaka worked out of a bases-loaded jam in a 24-pitch first inning, when Kyle

Seager drove in a run with a groundout. The right-hander needed only 93 pitches to get through seven.

"Just extremely satisfied being able to get that win," Tanaka said through a translator.

Dellin Betances and Andrew Miller combined to strike out all six batters they faced on 13 pitches apiece, with Miller working the ninth for his third save.

"It seems whatever I do, he does it better," Betances said. "We feed off each other." Said catcher Brian McCann: "Those guys are ridiculous."

Steve Clevenger had an RBI single for the Mariners, who had won three straight following a five-game slide. Nori Aoki tripled and scored on Seth Smith's single.

Iwakuma, teammates with Tanaka from 2007-11 on the Tohoku Rakuten Golden Eagles in Japan, was charged with four runs and eight hits in seven innings.

"I was very excited to face (my) ex-teammate," Iwakuma said through a translator. "Just watching him, in general, he was pitching with composure and he kept the ball down. Looking at that, I said to myself, 'I've got to keep the ball down, too.' And I was able to make adjustments, but it was kind of too late."

Dodgers 3, Giants 1: Kenta Maeda pitched seven strong innings, Joc Pederson drove in the tying and go-ahead runs with a fifth-inning homer, and host Los Angeles beat San Francisco.

Maeda (2-0) allowed a run and four hits, struck out seven and walked three. The Japanese-born right-hander had pitched six scoreless innings of five-hit ball in each of his two previous starts and extended his shutout streak to 14 2/3 in-

nings before Joe Panik ended it with a third-inning homer.

Chris Hatcher pitched a perfect eighth inning and Kenley Jansen got three outs in the ninth to pick up his fifth save in as many appearances.

Jeff Samardzija (1-1) allowed three runs and six hits in six-plus innings.

Phillies 3, Nationals 2: Freddy Galvis hit an RBI double off Jonathan Papelbon with two outs in the 10th inning to lift host Philadelphia, ending the Nationals' seven-game winning streak.

Bryce Harper set a career high by homering in his fourth straight game, hitting a solo shot against Jeanmar Gomez (1-0) for a 2-1 lead in the 10th. The Phillies then rallied off Papelbon (0-1), their former closer.

Rays 3, White Sox 2: Matt Moore (1-0) struck out 10 over 6 1/3 innings, allowing two runs and five hits, and Brandon Guyer tied a career high with four hits for the host Rays.

Mets 6, Indians 0: Steven Matz (1-1) struck out a career-high nine and allowed three hits over seven innings. Given a six-run, second-inning lead, Matz retired the side in order three times and allowed two runners in the same inning once for visiting New York.

Braves 6, Marlins 5: Rookie Mallek Smith hit an RBI single against Edwin Jackson (0-1) with two outs in the 10th inning as Atlanta completed a three-game sweep after arriving in Miami 0-9.

Twins 3, Angels 2: Oswaldo Arcia's single down the left field line scored Byron Buxton in the 12th as host Minnesota completed a three-game sweep.

Pirates 9, Brewers 3: Andrew

McCutchen homered for the second straight day, and Matt Joyce and Gregory Polanco each had three of host Pittsburgh's 17 hits.

Blue Jays 5, Red Sox 3: Aaron Sanchez (1-0) allowed two hits in seven innings of one-run ball, and Jose Bautista drove in two runs with a solo homer and a double for visiting Toronto.

Astros 5, Tigers 4: Jose Altuve led off Houston's first inning with a solo home run and had three RBIs, and George Springer also hit a solo homer as host Houston won its first series this season.

Cardinals 4, Reds 3: Eric Fryer had three hits, including the go-ahead double with two outs in the eighth off Ross Ohlendorf (2-1). A backup to All-Star catcher Yadier Molina, Fryer got his first start this season and is 6-for-6 at the plate for host St. Louis.

Rockies 2, Cubs 0: Nolan Arenado homered twice off Jon Lester (1-1), and Tyler Chatwood pitched seven innings in combining with Miguel Castro and Jake McGee on a three-hitter for visiting Colorado.

Athletics 3, Royals 2: Josh Reddick's sacrifice fly off Joakim Soria (1-1) broke an eighth-inning tie after Billy Burns tripled into the right-field corner for host Oakland.

Diamondbacks 7, Padres 3: Yasmany Tomas homered twice, drove in three runs and scored three times for visiting Arizona.

Islanders grind out OT win against Panthers

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Thomas Hickey saw an opening in overtime, went to the net and gave the New York Islanders a big win in their Brooklyn postseason debut.

Hickey scored 12:31 into the extra period to lift the Islanders to a 4-3 victory over the Florida Panthers on Sunday in Game 3 of their first-round series, giving New York a win in its first playoff game at the Barclays Center.

"We had a good shift and grinded them out a little bit," Hickey said. "Somebody went to change, I saw a gap, and an unbelievable pass and (it) just got off my stick."

Hickey's one-timer off a pass from Brock Nelson from behind the net gave the Islanders a 2-1 lead in the best-of-seven series. Game 4 is also in Brooklyn on Wednesday night.

Hickey also scored the overtime winner at Washington on April 5 that clinched the Islanders' third playoff berth in four years.

"He's got a knack for finding the right spot," fellow defenseman Travis Hamonic said. "I haven't seen the replay yet. I just saw him celebrate and everyone started jumping up on the bench."

Ryan Pulock, Shane Prince and Frans Nielsen scored for the Islanders, and Thomas Greiss had 36 saves. John Tavares and Kyle Okposo each had two assists.

Reilly Smith had a goal and two assists, and Aleksander Barkov and Nick Bjugstad also scored for the Panthers. Smith has four goals and four assists in the series. Roberto Luongo stopped 35 shots.

The Panthers were leading 2-0 when Aaron Ekblad appeared to give them a

three-goal advantage just past the 4-minute mark of the second period. However, that goal was overturned on a coach's challenge when video showed Florida was offside when it entered the zone, firing up the raucous crowd.

New York coach Jack Capuano credited video coach Matt Bertani with alerting the bench to call for a review.

"At times, you can see from the (bench) where it might be goalie interference or offsides," Capuano said, "but our video guy did a great job calling that in. That was the turning point. Down by two is a lot different than down by three."

Penalties on Alex Petrovic and Jussi Jokinen 25 seconds apart gave the Islanders a 5-on-3 advantage 5:08 into the period. New York quickly took advantage as Pulock scored just 13 seconds later, sending the sellout crowd into another frenzy.

"Our fans were great," Hickey said. "I had goosebumps after the anthem. They stuck with us and we fed off that."

But the Panthers regained their two-goal lead just 15 seconds after the Islanders' power play ended as Bjugstad knocked in the rebound of a shot by Smith at 7:23.

However, Prince took a feed from Pulock and fired it up high on Luongo's blocker side to make it 3-2 with 8:12 remaining. Then, about 40 seconds after Dmitry Kulikov was whistled for clipping, Nielsen tied it with a backhander past Luongo with 3:05 left in the period.

"We get up to a good lead," Panthers coach Gerard Gallant said. "We had about five or six minutes of the second period where we didn't play well and it cost us two goals."

Smith got the Panthers on the scoreboard at 2:25 of the first period as he backhanded a bouncing rebound off a shot by Petrovic from the left side of the net over a diving Greiss' stick for his fourth goal of the series.

"Reilly was awesome," Gallant said. "Every game, that line's been real good for us. He's contributed big time and put pucks in the net."

Smith, who tied Dave Lowry for the franchise record with goals in three straight playoff games, also hit the crossbar with a backhand attempt later in the first.

Barkov made it 2-0 just 1:11 into the second period.

Smith's shot from the right side was wide right, but the rebound came off the end boards to Barkov on the left side and he knocked in the rebound for his first goal of the postseason.

Predators 3, Ducks 2: Craig Smith had a goal and an assist, Pekka Rinne made 27 saves and Nashville confidently claimed their second straight road victory to open their first-round series against Anaheim.

Shea Weber and Mattias Ekholm also scored as the Predators took a 2-0 playoff series lead for the first time in franchise history with another win over the Pacific Division champions.

Nate Thompson cut into the lead with 2:42 to play, but Nashville closed out just its second road playoff victory since 2012. Game 3 is Tuesday night in Nashville.

Blues 3, Blackhawks 2: Jaden Schwartz scored at 13:32 of the third period with Patrick Kane in the penalty box for high-sticking, and St. Louis beat host Chicago for a 2-1 lead in the Western Conference series.

Patrik Berglund also scored in the third

as St. Louis rallied for the win after a difficult 3-2 loss in Game 2 that included two key coach's challenges that went against the Blues.

Brian Elliott made 44 saves, keeping St. Louis in the game during Chicago's strong second period.

Kane, the NHL's leading scorer this season and one of the favorites for league MVP, got four minutes for a high stick on defenseman Alex Pietrangolo, and St. Louis made the most of the chance to go in front.

Vladimir Tarasenko passed down low to David Backes, who sent it right to Schwartz in the slot.

He beat Crawford low on the glove side for his third career playoff goal and a 3-2 lead with 6:38 left.

Colton Parayko also scored for St. Louis. Brent Seabrook and Artem Anisimov scored for Chicago.

Game 4 is Tuesday night in Chicago.

Red Wings 2, Lightning 0: Andreas Athanasiou and Henrik Zetterberg scored, Petr Mrazek made 16 saves and Detroit beat visiting Tampa Bay to cut its deficit to 2-1 in the Eastern Conference series.

Game 4 is Tuesday night at Joe Louis Arena. Game 5, which is now necessary, will be at Tampa Bay.

After brawling late in the last game, gloves were dropped, fists flew and there were piles of players on the ice when Game 3 ended.

Ben Bishop made 28 saves for the Lightning. Their top line of Tyler Johnson, Nikita Kucherov and Alex Killorn was shut down after each of the three had six points in the first two games.