

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## House bill to reverse Army cuts draws fire

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — A bill by House Republicans reversing Army troop cuts ran headlong into Democratic opposition Wednesday during a first public hearing.

California Rep. Susan Davis, top Democrat on a military personnel subcommittee, said Congress has no clear way to pay for the GOP proposal to keep 20,000 soldiers and without funding it could further hollow out the Army or lead to more dramatic cuts.

Republicans have vowed to block the Army plan to drop from 492,000 to 450,000 active-

duty soldiers — a three-year drawdown forced by spending caps imposed by fiscal conservatives in Congress. The service projects the drawdown could save \$7 billion.

Despite the opposition, the measure setting end strength at 480,000 was passed by the subcommittee and will be considered next week by the full House Armed Services Committee, which is controlled by a Republican majority.

“By requiring this number of soldiers without providing the money or support to pay for it, the subcommittee is offering an unfunded mandate that would result in a larger but more hollow force,” Davis

said during the initial hearing on the National Defense Authorization Act, an annual bill setting defense policy.

Republicans in the House and Senate have argued the Army must maintain higher troop numbers due to increasing threats around the world. But Congress is locked into defense spending limits for the next two years, according to an agreement struck last fall to end political gridlock.

Once the agreement expires, lawmakers will again face the possibility of deep across-the-board cuts to defense and other federal spending called sequestration, due to a law passed in 2011 aimed at reducing the

public debt.

Davis said an unfunded increase in troop numbers this year followed by sequestration cuts in 2018 could result in a sudden and larger drawdown.

“We could end up in a situation where Congress, having required the Army to increase its end strength, then ends up forcing the Army to draw down by 30,000 soldiers in a single subsequent year with this course of action,” she said.

Her concerns echoed those of Gen. Mark Milley, the Army chief of staff, who recently warned lawmakers that mandating higher troop numbers without a larger budget would be a disaster.

## Iraq: ‘Tightening the noose,’ or ‘grudging incrementalism’?

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama’s decision to send still more American troops to Iraq, and to put military advisers closer to the front lines against the Islamic State group, fits a pattern of ever-deepening involvement in a country whose war Obama exited with supposed finality in December 2011.

From the initial contingent of 170 U.S. soldiers who entered Baghdad as advisers in June 2014, after the Islamic State militants overran much of northern and western Iraq and seemed poised to threaten Baghdad, the troop total jumped to 1,550 six months later. It topped 3,000 in April 2015 and then edged higher. The latest increase announced Monday by Defense Secretary Ash Carter pushes the authorized total above 4,000. More increases seem likely.

What the Pentagon calls “tightening the noose” on the militants, critics call indecisive steps with limited chance to

succeed.

One of the most vocal critics of Obama’s Iraq policy, Republican Sen. John McCain, dismissed Carter’s announcement that the U.S. would send another 217 troops to Iraq in support of the Iraqi security forces’ preparation for an assault on the Islamic State stronghold of Mosul.

“Grudging incrementalism,” McCain called it.

Patrick Martin, an Iraq specialist at the Institute for the Study of War, is skeptical that the U.S. approach is sufficiently aggressive.

“The addition of 217 advisers ... is not going to be nearly enough to actually make a significant difference on the ground in the near future,” he said in an interview. On the other hand, the U.S. offer to fly Apache attack helicopters in support of an Iraqi advance toward Mosul is a significant move, Martin said, noting that it would be the first time the Iraqis have accepted that kind of support since U.S.

forces returned to Iraq in 2014.

Obama’s approach in Iraq has been tempered not just by his pledge to end U.S. military involvement there after he took office in 2009 but also by the Iraqis’ own political failings, which even now cast doubt on the durability of any battlefield victories U.S. troops can help the Iraqis achieve. In 2007, at the peak of the Iraq War, the U.S. had about 170,000 troops there.

Rather than commit large ground combat units to Iraq or Syria, Obama in 2014 opted for providing a support role on the ground, backed by bombing from the air.

Nearly two years later, the Islamic State group has been weakened and squeezed but remains a credible threat. It not only holds territory in Iraq and Syria but also has spread to Libya and Afghanistan while launching deadly attacks in Paris and Brussels.

On a visit to Baghdad this week, Carter described the

decision to deploy another 217 soldiers as “more of the same,” in the sense that it aligns with the U.S. strategy of providing more support to Iraqi forces as they gain momentum, while not doing the fighting for them.

Most of the additional 217 troops would be Army special forces, who have been used throughout the anti-Islamic State campaign to advise and assist the Iraqis. For the first time, the advisers are authorized to assist the Iraqis at battalion level, meaning with smaller Iraq combat units likely to be closer to the front lines.

The extra U.S. troops also would include trainers, soldiers to provide security for the advisers, as well as maintenance teams and crews for the Apache attack helicopters that Carter said the Iraqi government has agreed would be needed. The U.S. also will provide additional sets of mobile artillery, known as HIMARS, to support Iraqi ground forces as they advance toward Mosul.

# Clinton, Trump take NY vote

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Hillary Clinton emerged from New York's presidential primary closer to clinching the Democratic nomination and becoming the first woman to reach that milestone. Republican Donald Trump strengthened his own path to the general election with a commanding victory, but has little room for error in the states ahead.

The front-runners now hope to replicate their strong showings in New York in the cluster of Northeastern states next up on the primary calendar. Clinton was scheduled to spend Wednesday campaigning in Pennsylvania, while Trump had a rally planned in Maryland, as well as in Indiana.

Following her win in New York, a jubilant Clinton made clear she was moving past her

unexpectedly competitive primary battle with Bernie Sanders and setting her sights on the general election.

"The race for the nomination is in the home stretch, and victory is in sight," Clinton declared to cheering supporters.

She mentioned Sanders only briefly as she appealed for support from his loyal backers, and saved her toughest talk for Trump and Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, deeming both "dangerous" for America.

Trump, too, is eager to move past the Republican primaries. With at least 89 of New York's 95 delegates in hand, he insisted it was "impossible" for any of his rivals to catch him and warned party leaders against trying to take the nomination away from him at the convention.

Ohio Gov. John Kasich won at least three New York delegates;

Texas Sen. Ted Cruz was in danger of getting shut out. Neither has a mathematical chance of clinching the nomination before the Republican convention in July.

Cruz panned Trump's win in New York as little more than "a politician winning his home state," then implored Republicans to unite around his candidacy.

"We must unite the Republican Party because doing so is the first step in uniting all Americans," Cruz said. A freshman senator who has clashed repeatedly with his own party, Cruz has generated only lukewarm support from GOP leaders who see him as the only option for stopping Trump.

Clinton's triumph padded her delegate lead, putting her 80 percent of the way toward clinching the Democratic nomination that eluded her eight years ago.

# No gains in meeting of NATO and Russia

BY JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

Common ground proved elusive Wednesday during the first meeting in two years between NATO and Russian leaders, who quarreled over the conflict in Ukraine, NATO's top official said.

"During the meeting it was reconfirmed we disagree ... when it comes to the facts, the narratives and the responsibilities for the crisis in and around Ukraine," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said after several hours of talks at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

At the top of the agenda was the continuing conflict in Ukraine, where a Russian intervention in 2014 served as the trigger for the alliance's military buildup in eastern Europe.

Stoltenberg put the blame for the hostilities squarely on Russia, saying Moscow continued to back separatists with weaponry and military guidance. During the meeting, Moscow deflected criticism by countering that Ukraine was in the midst of a civil war.

"Many allies also conveyed a very strong message that we disagree when Russia tried to portray this as a civil war," Stoltenberg said.

Other issues discussed included the war in Afghanistan, regional terrorism concerns and the need for more transparency between Russian and NATO militaries conducting exercises around Europe, he said.

The meeting of the NATO-Russia Council marked the first such gathering since June 2014, which was just a few months after hostilities in Ukraine began. The panel was set up in 2002 to improve relations between the former Cold War foes, typically meeting on a monthly basis.

# Big boost sought in shipbuilding budget

BY ERIK SLAVIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

An arm of the House Armed Services Committee wants Reagan-era spending for the Navy even as the service seeks to shed ships and aircraft amid potential defense budget cuts down the road.

The Seapower and Projection Forces subcommittee wants to increase shipbuilding to \$20.6 billion — \$2.3 billion more than the Obama administration's budget request, according to a subcommittee markup of the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act released Tuesday in Washington.

The markup calls for more of everything — from ships to missiles — and faster production of carriers and submarines.

The subcommittee's recommendations remain far from enactment. The full committee will vote on them well before a House vote and later reconciliation with the Senate's defense legislation.

"With this legislation, we are rejecting further budget cuts, bending the curve lines, and making a down payment on the 350-ship Navy we need for national defense," Rep. Randy Forbes, R-Va., said in a statement.

The proposal comes during a year that the final defense budget isn't threatened by sequestration, a mechanism of across-the-board federal budget cuts, following a bipartisan deal last fall.

The Defense Department will face \$100 billion in cuts from 2018 to 2021 if Congress can't come to another deal, Defense Secretary Ash Carter told Congress in March.

The subcommittee markup would prevent the Navy from inactivating 11 of its 22 guided-missile cruisers under a "phased modernization plan," Forbes said. It also prevents the Navy from cutting costs by disbanding one of its 10 carrier air wings.

The Navy is legally mandated

to maintain 11 carriers; however, it has only 10 on active duty while work continues on the USS Gerald R. Ford.

The USS George Washington is undergoing a multiyear overhaul, with other aging carriers scheduled afterward for similar overhauls and nuclear refueling.

That gives the Navy nine operable carriers, though at any given time some of those are in port under maintenance.

"The Secretary of the Navy's schedule to procure 1 aircraft carrier every 5 years will reduce the overall aircraft carrier inventory to 10 aircraft carriers, a level insufficient to meet peacetime and war plan requirements," the subcommittee markup said.

The markup includes an additional \$433 million for a new destroyer, \$856 million for an amphibious ship and \$385 million for a littoral combat ship as part of what Forbes labeled the largest shipbuilding funding level since 1988.

# George ready for next stage

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — When the burning sensation in Paul George's shattered right leg finally subsided in August 2014, the Indiana Pacers' young star made a commitment to himself and his fans.

He would return to the basketball court even better.

Twenty months after suffering the unforgettably gruesome injury in Las Vegas, George has written the next chapter in his comeback tale with an incredible start to the NBA playoffs.

In Game 1 against Toronto, George scored 27 of his 33 points in the second half, almost willing the Pacers to a 100-90 victory over the East's No. 2 seed. He added 28 points in Monday's loss, leaving George with two-game totals of 61 points, eight rebounds, seven assists, five steals and a field-goal percentage of 54.1 percent. He's 6-for-8 on three-pointers and 15-for-17 from the free-throw line, playing the same way he did when he led the Pacers to back-to-back Eastern Conference finals against LeBron James and the Miami Heat.

"There's no stopping PG. He's playing phenomenal," Raptors All-Star guard Kyle Lowry said after Toronto's 98-87 victory in Game 2. "You're not going to stop him from getting 25 or 30. He's going to get that, that's how talented he is."

George's amazing journey has been a series of steady steps.

Eight months after snapping his leg when he crashed into a basketball stanchion during a U.S. national team scrim-

mage and countless hours of grueling rehab, George returned to game action sooner than many thought possible. Seven months after that, the 6-foot-9 forward was named November's Eastern Conference player of the month after averaging 27.2 points, 8.1 rebounds and 4.4 assists.

In February, George made his third All-Star appearance, started for the second time, broke the All-Star Game record with nine three-pointers and finished with 41 points, one short of Wilt Chamberlain's record from 1962. George finished the regular season ranked among the league's top 10 in scoring (23.1 points), steals (1.9) and three-pointers made (210) and produced the highest single-season point total (1,874) of his career.

On Thursday, George will have a chance to give the Pacers a 2-1 lead in this best-of-seven series when he makes his first home playoff appearance since May 28, 2014.

"I'm real excited to be back on the stage where I was able to make my name," George said.

Yet George isn't completely healthy.

Last week, coach Frank Vogel said this season was expected to be a "recovery year" for George and that there are times George feels soreness in his surgically-repaired right leg.

"I knew right away, in training camp, that I was going to be OK. I knew I was OK last summer," George said. "But I've still not regained all of my strength and explosiveness. I'm hopeful I'll get that explosion, that quick step back and be lighter

on my feet. I do feel good with where I'm at right now."

George spent this transition year learning how to play the four spot after spending his first five seasons playing almost exclusively at the three spot. He still thrived — and he doesn't turn 26 until May 2.

Vogel figures George is only scratching the surface of what's possible.

"It (the comeback) is remarkable. It's just a testament to his work ethic and his competitiveness to get back to this level this fast," Vogel said. "Injury aside, guys grow from year six to year 10, so we do still think there's more there."

First, though, George has big plans for the rest of this year.

He believes the Pacers, who have won seven of nine, are playing their best basketball at the right time and could make a surprising postseason run. And whenever the Pacers' season ends, George has another goal — playing for Team USA at the Rio Olympics, another major step on the comeback trail.

"It's a dream of mine," he said. "I want to represent my country and do it alongside the best players in the country. We'll see, after the season, how my body is feeling."

So far, things look just fine.

George is playing well, his body is holding up and the Raptors have discovered how difficult the matchup can be.

"We've just got to make it a little bit more difficult (on George)," Lowry said. "He's getting to his spots a little bit too easy."

# McGregor won't be in UFC 200

Associated Press

Conor McGregor is officially out of UFC 200. His fighting future remained unclear.

McGregor, one of the biggest draws in UFC, created a stir Tuesday when he tweeted that retirement was on the horizon and the UFC later tweeted that McGregor had been pulled from its marquee show on July 9.

The 27-year-old McGregor tweeted, "I have decided to retire young. Thanks for the cheese. Catch ya's later."

But is it truly exit cage left for the Irish star?

McGregor was scheduled for a rematch against Nate Diaz in the main event of UFC 200.

UFC President Dana White told ESPN that he pulled McGregor from the card after he decided not to attend pre-fight promotional appearances in Las Vegas.

"Is Conor McGregor retiring? Only he can answer that question," White told ESPN. "I don't know. But he will not be a part of UFC 200."

White added he was working on a new main event and could keep Diaz on the card. The stacked card already included an interim featherweight championship bout between Jose Aldo and Frankie Edgar and Miesha Tate defends her bantamweight title against Amanda Nunes.

Diaz beat McGregor by submission in the second round of a welterweight bout March 5 at UFC 196, ending one of the most lucrative pay-per-view shows in mixed martial arts history.

McGregor's 15-fight winning streak ended in the bout, which was fought 25 pounds above his usual 145-pound fighting weight. The rematch was set to be contested at 170 pounds, the UFC said.

The loss punctured the intimidating aura gathered by McGregor, the loquacious Irish star who sits alongside Ronda Rousey as the UFC's biggest pay-per-view stars. McGregor had stopped his previous five opponents, and he landed numerous big shots on Diaz before tiring and losing the fight on the ground to Diaz's superior jiu-jitsu.

Although McGregor said immediately after the loss that he would probably return to featherweight, he decided instead to take a rematch with Diaz, the entertaining veteran. Diaz accepted the first fight less than two weeks beforehand after lightweight champ Rafael Dos Anjos dropped out with an injury.

McGregor is still the UFC's featherweight champion, but Aldo and Edgar will meet for the interim belt.

The winner was scheduled to get the first shot at a unification fight against McGregor.

All of those dream bouts are suddenly uncertain.

Diaz playfully replied to McGregor's tweet with his own "retirement" announcement. He tweeted, "I guess my work here is done I'm retiring too."

McGregor's coach, John Kavanagh, added fuel to the retirement speculation with his own tweet that said, "Well was fun while it lasted."

# Spurs have easy time against Grizzlies

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — The more things change the more the San Antonio Spurs remain constant.

Twelve years to the day after holding Memphis to franchise lows in total points and points in a quarter, San Antonio put another stranglehold on the Grizzlies.

Patty Mills had 16 points, Kawhi Leonard added 13 and San Antonio never trailed in beating Memphis 94-68 on Tuesday night to sweep the first two games of the first-round series in imposing fashion.

The Grizzlies' lowest postseason production came two days after they suffered their largest postseason defeat.

"We're coming to a gunfight with some spoons," Memphis forward Matt Barnes said. "We've got to do something to try to switch this up at home next game."

If history and the Grizzlies' current state are any indication, Memphis' prospects don't look good heading into a home game Friday night.

The Spurs first established those dubious records against the Grizzlies on April 19, 2004, on their way to a sweep of their first-round series.

Don't expect San Antonio to relax following 30- and 26-point victories. Not with Spurs coach Gregg Popovich telling

his team to play with some pride during a timeout of a game they led by 29 points.

"You've got to fight," Leonard said. "We've got to still execute. [We] turned over the ball a lot today. They were physical. They've got hands, but there's still opportunity for us to improve. They're still an NBA team."

LaMarcus Aldridge had 10 points and eight rebounds in 26 minutes. Aldridge sat out the entire fourth quarter along with Leonard and Tony Parker while Tim Duncan and Danny Green made brief appearances.

Tony Allen led Memphis with 12 points and Zach Randolph had 11 points and 12 rebounds.

After matching a franchise low with a 13-point first quarter in Game 1, the Grizzlies lowered that mark by tying a franchise low for any quarter with 11 points in Tuesday's opening period.

**Hawks 89, Celtics 72:** Host Atlanta held Boston to the lowest-scoring first quarter in the playoffs since the NBA went to the shot clock, building a 21-point lead and holding on despite an ugly shooting performance of its own for a victory and a 2-0 lead in the opening-round series.

Al Horford and Kyle Korver led Atlanta with 17 points apiece, but this game was essentially decided in the first 12

minutes.

The Hawks started out 9-for-13 from the field, knocking down six from beyond the three-point arc. Korver made four from long range, a big turnaround from a 1-for-10 performance in Game 1 that didn't include any threes. Atlanta led 24-3 just 6½ minutes into the game.

Even after failing to score the rest of the period, the Hawks still led 24-7 heading to the second.

That, for all intents and purposes, was it.

Game 3 is Friday night in Boston.

Boston struggling was not unexpected, given the Celtics were without two key players. Avery Bradley, the team's second-leading scorer, went down in Game 1 with a badly strained hamstring and is unlikely to play the rest of the series. Then, after the morning shootaround, the Celtics ruled out key backup Kelly Olynyk because of a lingering shoulder injury.

Even so, no one expected it to be this bad.

Boston made just 3 of 23 shots from the field in the first period, missing all six attempts beyond the three-point arc. Isaiah Thomas went 1-for-6. Marcus Smart, starting in place of Bradley, missed all five of his shots. Evan Turner and Tyler Zeller each went 0-for-3.



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# Blues take 3-1 lead; NHL probes Shaw

Associated Press

CHICAGO — The lessons were difficult and painful. Three straight years of regular-season success for St. Louis, followed by playoff failure.

The Blues learned. They persevered, and they are roaring right now.

Vladimir Tarasenko scored on two dazzling wrist shots, Brian Elliott made 39 saves and St. Louis beat the Chicago Blackhawks 4-3 on Tuesday night to open a commanding 3-1 lead in their first-round playoff series.

"We just have a belief that we can beat anybody," Blues coach Ken Hitchcock said.

Jaden Schwartz scored a tiebreaking power-play goal in the third period for the second straight game as St. Louis moved one step closer to advancing to the second round for the first time since 2012. The Blues looked ready for deep playoff runs in each of the last three seasons only to be eliminated in the opening series each time.

Game 5 is Thursday night in St. Louis.

"There's a good feeling that we're more cohesive and playing for each other and doing the right things all over the ice than we ever had in this locker room," captain David Backes said, "and that bodes well for our group."

Duncan Keith had two goals for Chicago, which dropped consecutive home playoff games for the first time since 2012. Andrew Shaw had a goal and two assists, and Corey Crawford finished with 16 saves after getting into a fight with Blues rookie Robby Fabbri during a wild second period.

Shaw was sent off for interference at 17:56 of the third, hurting Chicago's chance for a comeback. While sitting in the penalty box, it looked as if Shaw directed a gay slur toward someone on the ice, and a gay rights group affiliated with the NHL said it planned to reach out to the league "to assist in an appropriate response."

The NHL said Wednesday it is investigating the incident.

Spokesman John Dellapina said that the league would have no comment until the investigation is completed.

"Emotions are high. I don't really know what's said," Shaw said when asked about what happened. "Like I

said, I was obviously upset with the call. Being that late in the game, it doesn't give us a chance to tie it up."

With Keith in the box for holding Alexander Steen, Schwartz intercepted a clearing attempt by Blackhawks defenseman Trevor van Riemsdyk and beat Crawford low on his stick side at 1:36. Schwartz had the game-winning goal in St. Louis' 3-2 victory in Game 3 on Sunday.

Steen then picked off a pass by van Riemsdyk and went in all alone on Crawford for his first goal of the series at 4:46, stunning the sellout crowd of 22,212.

"Steen getting that unassisted breakaway was a huge play for us," Elliott said.

A fortunate bounce for Keith off Tarasenko's stick and over Elliott gave the Blackhawks some hope, but Elliott shut the door from there.

Before Schwartz and Steen broke through, it was the Tarasenko show once again for St. Louis. The dynamic wing has three goals and two assists in the series and 13 goals in 17 career playoff games.

The Blackhawks had a 2-1 lead and momentum before Andrew Ladd was penalized for interference at 17:09 of the second. Just 22 seconds later, Tarasenko whistled a shot under Crawford's glove for the tying score.

"I don't know how he shoots the puck like that," Backes said. "I wish he'd tell me his secret. But he's a talent."

Tarasenko's goal capped a frenetic second period that included a fight between Crawford and Fabbri after the forward was pushed into the goaltender on a rush to the net. Crawford skated into the corner and shoved Fabbri before the two wrestled on the ice.

The crowd responded with chants of "Co-rey! Co-rey!" and the resulting fracas between the teams somehow generated a power play for the Blackhawks. Fabbri (interference), Alex Pietrangolo (roughing) and Kevin Shattenkirk (roughing) were sent off for St. Louis, and Crawford (roughing) and Ladd (roughing) were penalized for Chicago.

"I felt like I got pushed from behind and I tried to do my best to fall away from him," Fabbri said. "I guess he didn't like that."

**Penguins 3, Rangers 1:** Matt Cullen beat Henrik Lundqvist on a semi-breakaway after beating two de-

fensemen early in the third period as visiting Pittsburgh spoiled the return of Rangers captain Ryan McDonagh with a win in Game 3 of their first-round series.

Sidney Crosby also scored and Matt Murray made 16 saves in his return to action in helping the Penguins take a 2-1 lead in the best-of-7 series.

Game 4 is Thursday night in New York. The Rangers have lost four consecutive playoff games at Madison Square Garden going back to last season's Eastern Conference final against Tampa Bay.

Kris Letang iced the game with an empty-net goal.

Rick Nash scored for the Rangers, who played without an injured McDonagh (upper body, hand) in the first two games in Pittsburgh. Lundqvist made 28 saves, giving up a power-play goal to Crosby and a one-on-one chance to Cullen.

**Lightning 3, Red Wings 2:** Ondrej Palat scored with 2:59 left in the third period, lifting Tampa Bay over host Detroit for a 3-1 lead in the first-round series.

Ben Bishop stopped 26 shots for the Lightning and Petr Mrazek made 30 saves for the Red Wings.

Palat was in a perfect position right in front of the net to make the most of Jonathan Drouin's pass on the game-winning goal. Drouin had three assists.

Nikita Kucherov had power-play goals in the first and second period to give Tampa Bay a 2-0 lead late in the second, but Detroit's Darren Helm and Gustav Nyquist scored late in the period to tie the game.

Game 5 is Thursday night at Tampa Bay.

**Ducks 3, Predators 0:** Frederik Andersen made 27 saves as Anaheim shut out host Nashville to take a 2-1 lead in the first-round playoff series.

The Ducks have not lost three straight to open a post-season series since the 2006 Western Conference finals, and they didn't come close to dropping a third straight this year.

Andersen, who started in net after John Gibson took the first two losses in Anaheim, posted his second post-season shutout despite taking Shea Weber's slap shot off his head. He has 15 postseason wins since 2014.

Chris Stewart had a goal and an assist, and Jamie McGinn and Rickard Rakell each scored.

# Harper's grand slam lifts Nats over Marlins

Associated Press

MIAMI — The game was scoreless until the seventh inning, and runs then came so quickly for the Washington Nationals that Bryce Harper lost count. And he drove in most of them.

Harper hit a grand slam, one of four home runs in a seven-run seventh for the Nationals, who beat the Miami Marlins 7-0 Tuesday.

Four homers in an inning was a Nationals record, and a record for Marlins pitchers.

"Everybody got together and started rolling," Harper said. "Scoring those seven runs or whatever we did in the seventh — I don't know how many we had — yeah, seven — brought a little calm over the dugout and let us breathe a little bit."

Stephen Strasburg (3-0) struck out 10 while pitching three-hit ball for eight innings. He was locked in a pitching duel against Adam Conley until Jayson Werth hit his 200th career homer with one out in the seventh.

Wilson Ramos homered on the next pitch, and after Washington loaded the bases, Harper hit his seventh homer off left-hander Chris Narveson.

"I was trying to go deep," Harper said. "I got a good pitch to drive and did my job."

Ryan Zimmerman followed with a solo homer, his first.

Harper has homered in five of the past six games, and has 20 RBIs.

"What he's doing is pretty special," Werth said. "He has really coming into his own. He's one of the best players in the game, and he's got good guys around him too. That helps."

The grand slam was the second of Harper's career, and his second in five

days. Strasburg happened to be on third base for both.

"It was weird being on third again for another Harper grand slam," Strasburg said. "I guess it's all on me — I've just got to get to third."

The dimensions at Marlins Park were shortened before the season, but only Zimmerman's home run benefited from the cozier confines. Ramos' homer bounced off the top of the fence.

Washington's Daniel Murphy, who came into the game leading the majors in batting, went 2-for-4 to hike his average to .422. Strasburg had two singles to raise his career average to .149.

"Everybody is swinging the bat well," Harper said. "Even Strasburg."

The right-hander also lowered his ERA to 1.25. Strasburg gave up an extra-base hit for the first time this year when Stanton doubled with one out in the fourth, but he advanced no farther.

Nationals starters improved to 8-2 with an ERA of 1.98. Shawn Kelley completed the four-hitter for Washington's second shutout.

**Reds 4, Rockies 3:** Sensing that Jorge De La Rosa wasn't paying attention, the host Reds were off and running.

Jay Bruce had two of the Reds' five steals in the second inning off De La Rosa — their biggest inning on the bases in roughly a century — and Cincinnati held on for a victory.

Brandon Phillips had four hits, and Billy Hamilton doubled home two runs during Cincinnati's four-run second inning off De La Rosa (1-2). The inning included those record five steals off the left-hander's slow move to the plate. The Reds hadn't

stolen so many bases during an inning since at least the 1920s, per information provided by the teams from the Elias Sports Bureau.

"A rarity, like an eclipse," Bruce said.

De La Rosa was having trouble getting his fastball to go where he wanted, so he started throwing more change-ups and ignoring runners, who took off at every opportunity. It was the most steals that the Rockies had ever allowed in an inning.

**Rays 3, Red Sox 0 (10):** Drew Smyly and the Rays bullpen held the Red Sox to one hit and Kevin Kiermaier hit a solo home run in the 10th as Tampa Bay beat host Boston for its third straight win.

**Brewers 6, Twins 5:** Scooter Gennett hit a tiebreaking single in the ninth inning as visiting Milwaukee ended Minnesota's four-game winning streak.

**Cubs 2, Cardinals 1:** Jason Hammel worked six sharp innings and had both RBIs for visiting Chicago.

**Padres 5, Pirates 4:** With Mark McGwire managing for the first time in place of ejected Andy Green, Wil Myers and Derek Norris hit two-run homers and Adam Rosales added a solo shot for host San Diego, who rallied to win.

Green was tossed for arguing after a sequence in which Andrew McCutchen was awarded home on a balk by Colin Rea, and then the umpires twice reversed their call, eventually giving the Pirates the run. McGwire came out to lead Green off the field.

**Athletics 3, Yankees 2 (11):** Jed Lowrie tied his career high with four hits, doubling in the 11th inning and scoring the go-ahead run on Mark Canha's single

to lead visiting Oakland.

**Royals 8, Tigers 6:** Salvador Perez hit a three-run homer and had a career-high five RBIs and Yordano Ventura twice escaped bases-loaded jams as host Kansas City held on to beat Detroit.

**Mets 11, Phillies 1:** Neil Walker hit two of the Mets' six home runs and Logan Verrett pitched six scoreless innings to help New York beat host Philadelphia.

**Rangers 7, Astros 5:** Prince Fielder hit a towering home run and Ian Desmond had his first two-hit game with Texas as the host Rangers beat Houston in the first meeting of 2016 between the AL West playoff teams from last season.

**Blue Jays 4, Orioles 3:** Marcus Stroman allowed three runs in seven innings and Troy Tulowitzki drove in two runs as Toronto beat host Baltimore.

**White Sox 5, Angels 0:** Mat Latos didn't allow a hit until the fifth inning while Todd Frazier and Jose Abreu hit solo home runs to help host Chicago snap a three-game losing streak.

**Indians 3, Mariners 2:** Carlos Carrasco allowed a run in 6 1/3 innings and Francisco Lindor had three hits for host Cleveland.

**Braves 8, Dodgers 1:** Tyler Flowers went 4-for-4 and drove in three runs and Mallex Smith had three RBIs for host Atlanta.

**Diamondbacks 3, Giants 0:** Robbie Ray pitched six scoreless innings and Jake Lamb continued to slug against the Giants by tripling home a run as the Diamondbacks beat San Francisco.

Jean Segura and Paul Goldschmidt also drove in runs for the Diamondbacks, who won their fourth in five games.