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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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ISIS uses civilians as 'human sacrifices'

BY CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

IRBIL, Iraq — The anti-Islamic State coalition faces a “more sinister” tactic than ISIS’s use of civilians as human shields in the battle for Mosul, a top U.S. official said.

Officials at a coalition “strike cell” here have witnessed many ISIS fighters pulling women and children from homes and hiding behind them to block strikes. But they now believe militants are sneaking families into homes and intentionally drawing fire toward them as “human sacrifices” to stymie coalition air and artillery support.

“It’s their attempt to slow us down, restrict our fires and make it an even fight again,” said Army Brig. Gen. John B. Richardson IV, deputy commanding general of the coalition in Irbil, the Kurdish region’s capital. He is one of a few officers charged with approving coalition strikes.

It’s the latest revelation from officials scrambling to reassure the public after a March 17 incident in which hundreds of civilians were killed in an apparent U.S. strike in western Mosul.

Iraqi officials who called for the Mosul strike have said they were targeting fighters on the rooftops and claim they were unaware of civilians in the basement. They also said the area was booby-trapped with added ex-

plosives to amplify the carnage.

Local authorities have said nearly 300 civilians were killed, among the highest civilian death tolls in decades. The incident, which the coalition is still investigating, has brought heightened scrutiny of the international alliance and put Pentagon officials on the defensive, as observers have raised questions about strike protocols.

In addition, reports of mass civilian casualties are politically embarrassing for Washington, coming in the wake of the Obama administration’s sharp criticism of Russia’s bombing campaign in the Syrian city of Aleppo, which ended in a government victory in December.

The number of alleged coalition strikes involving civilian deaths in Iraq and Syria has increased in recent months, according to both the coalition and outside observers.

U.S. officials acknowledge that some civilian loss of life is unavoidable in close-quarters urban combat. They have attributed the increased casualties to the quicker pace of operations in Iraq and Syria.

Officials are now also pointing to ISIS tactics to explain the matter. After visiting Iraq this week, Marine Corps Gen. James Dunford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters the militants are “herding civilians into buildings,” but he said Iraqi and coalition forces were adapting their tactics

to avoid noncombatant casualties.

ISIS, which has held the city since 2014, is hardly known for humanitarianism, having built a reputation for beheadings and other brutal killings. It has long used human shields, and its fighters have been accused of targeting fleeing civilians in an effort to keep the populace in Mosul since the Iraqi-led campaign to retake it began in October.

But Richardson said the militants had until recently been clearing homes of residents before establishing defensive positions.

“To their credit, they were fighting fairly,” he said. “They made it much less complex as far as strikes.”

Then, sometime last month that changed, he said. He ties this to the group’s attempted offensive against the elite, U.S.-trained Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Service during a stretch of bad weather. They thought cloud cover would hamper the coalition and leave them to a “fair fight” they believed they could win, he said. But they miscalculated.

“For three days, they got blasted,” he said of the militants. “We were killing them in rapid fashion and we were making it an unfair fight.”

That, he believes, triggered a strategic decision to counter the coalition’s capabilities by raising the civilian death toll and blaming U.S. and Iraqi forces.

US vows to keep up pressure on Syria

Associated Press

PALM BEACH, Fla. — The U.S. is vowing to keep up the pressure on Syria after the intense nighttime wave of missile strikes from U.S. ships, despite the prospect of escalating Russian ill will that could further inflame one of the world’s most vexing conflicts.

Standing firm, the Trump administration on Friday signaled new sanctions would soon follow the missile attack, and the Pentagon even was probing whether Russia, itself, was involved in the chemical weapons assault that spurred President

Donald Trump to action. The attack against a Syrian air base was the first U.S. assault against the government of President Bashar Assad.

Much of the international community rallied behind Trump’s decision to fire the cruise missiles in reaction to last week’s chemical weapons attack that killed dozens of men, women and children in Syria. But a spokesman for Russian President Vladimir Putin warned that the strikes dealt “a significant blow” to relations between Moscow and Washington.

A key test of whether the rela-

tionship can be salvaged comes next week when Secretary of State Rex Tillerson becomes the first Trump Cabinet member to visit Russia.

British Foreign Minister Boris Johnson also had planned to visit Russia, but decided Saturday to cancel the trip because of the fast-moving events in Syria. Johnson, who condemned Moscow’s continued defense of Assad, said Tillerson will be able to give a “clear and coordinated message to the Russians.”

At the United Nations on Friday, Russia’s deputy ambassador, Vladimir Safronkov, strongly criticized what he

called the U.S.’s “flagrant violation of international law and an act of aggression” whose “consequences for regional and international security could be extremely serious.” He called the Assad government a main force against terrorism and said it deserved the presumption of innocence in the chemical weapons attack.

The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, said the world is waiting for the Russian government “to act responsibly in Syria” and “to reconsider its misplaced alliance with Bashar Assad.”

'Horrible' images moved Trump to action

The Washington Post

When President Donald Trump began receiving his intelligence briefings in January, his team made a request: The president, they said, was a visual and auditory learner. Would the briefers please cut down on the number of words in the daily briefing book and instead use more graphics and pictures?

Similarly, after Trump entered office, his staff took President Barack Obama's Syria contingency plans and broke the intelligence down into more-digestible bites, complete with photos, according to current and former U.S. officials with knowledge of the request.

Last week, it was the images — gruesome photos of a chemical weapons attack on Syrian civilians — that moved Trump, pushing the president, who ran on an "America first" platform of nonintervention, to authorize the launch of 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles at Syrian targets Thursday night.

Senior administration officials and members of Congress who spoke with Trump said the president was especially struck by two images: young, listless children being splashed with water in a frantic attempt to cleanse them of the nerve agent; and an anguished father holding his twin babies, swathed in soft white fabric, poisoned to death.

As the carnage unfolded on cable news, which the president watches throughout the day and deep into the night, Trump turned to his senior staff, talking about how "horrible" and "awful" the footage out of Syria was, said one top adviser.

"What the world saw last night was the United States commander in chief, and also a father and grandfather," Kellyanne Conway, counselor to the president, said Friday.

Horrific images were not the only reason military action made sense for Trump. Whatever his concern for the people of Syria — a country whose refugees would not be able to enter the United States for 120 days under Trump's latest travel ban

proposal — he has been eager to show a clear victory more than two months into his tumultuous young presidency.

A strike against Syria could help him demonstrate independence from Russia and its president, Vladimir Putin, whose alleged efforts to interfere in the 2016 presidential race have proved a major distraction. And Trump wants to show that he is a tougher and stronger leader than Obama, who received scathing criticism when he drew a "red line" with Syria over its use of chemical weapons and then declined to act when President Bashar Assad bounded over it.

Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., on Friday questioned Trump's "24-hour pivot on Syria policy," noting that until Assad's regime launched its chemical attack, Trump had not made Syria a priority. White House press secretary Sean Spicer had told reporters the week before that the United States had to accept the "political reality" of Assad's grip on power.

"There is no strategy on Syria," Murphy said. "He clearly made this decision based off an emotional reaction to the images on TV, and it should worry everyone about the quixotic nature of this administration's foreign policy and their potential disdain for the war-making authority of the United States Congress."

About 54 hours after receiving news of the attacks in his daily briefing Tuesday morning, Trump — by then at his private Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida for a summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping — gave the order to target Shayrat air base.

At 7:40 p.m. Thursday, as Trump and Xi were midway through a meal of pan-seared Dover sole with champagne sauce and dry-aged prime New York strip steak (a Trump favorite), a naval destroyer launched the first of nearly five dozen Tomahawk cruise missiles, lighting up the sky in eastern Syria.

White House aides and Trump

deputies said that while the photos clearly affected Trump, he made his final decision after consulting with his advisers in a process they described as deliberative and thorough.

Over an intensive 2½ days, the president's national security team convened several high-level meetings with representatives from the Pentagon, the State Department, intelligence agencies and the National Security Council.

"I don't think it was an emotional reaction at all," said Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who was involved in the discussions. "President Trump evaluated the facts, that the attacks occurred on his watch, and [as he] reflected upon prior responses or lack of responses, he came to the conclusion that we cannot yet again turn away, turn a blind eye from what's happened."

But the process was especially — and perhaps intentionally — quick, in contrast to the style of Obama, who prided himself on making decisions based on information, not emotions, a manner his critics derided as "dithering," as former Vice President Dick Cheney put it early in Obama's first term.

Trump learned of the chemical attack Tuesday morning, asked for options on how to respond Wednesday and received them Thursday, the day he authorized the strike.

He asked the Defense Department to prepare potential responses after the Pentagon assessed that the Syrian military was responsible for Tuesday's chemical strike and for chemical attacks March 25 and March 30 against civilians near Hama air base, U.S. military officials said.

U.S. Central Command has had plans for striking the Syrian government for years and has significant assets in the region, enabling a quick response once a decision was made.

The National Security Council deliberated Wednesday night, and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and other senior officials discussed the possibilities,

senior military officials said. Ultimately, aides presented Trump with three options, but the president narrowed them to two and asked aides to flesh out more details.

Thursday, Trump held another meeting aboard Air Force One as he flew to Palm Beach, Fla. Some officials — including national security adviser H.R. McMaster, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, Chief of Staff Reince Priebus and senior adviser Stephen Bannon — joined him in the plane's wood-paneled conference room, with others piped in via secure videoconference from Washington as the presidential jet streaked southward.

Once on the ground in Florida, aides said, Trump gave Mattis the order to move forward. The defense secretary passed it along to Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford Jr., chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Army Gen. Joseph Votel, chief of U.S. Central Command.

The missiles were launched about three hours later, at 3:40 a.m. local time, to minimize civilian casualties.

In the process, the president — who had championed an "America first" worldview rooted in the belief that U.S. foreign policy had become too interventionist — appeared to swing sharply in the other direction.

It was unclear whether Trump fully considered the ramifications of his decision. Russia, whose president has supported Assad and whose troops operate inside Syria, reacted initially with pique, canceling a key air agreement designed to avoid military confrontations with U.S. forces in the skies, before later agreeing to restore the deal.

And even as the White House touted support for the decision in Congress and foreign capitals, administration officials acknowledged that the attack, which they described as commensurate with Assad's violation of "international norms," would not eliminate his ability to do it again.

Admiral takes over at Gitmo

Miami Herald

GUANTANAMO BAY NAVAL BASE, Cuba — Guantanamo entered a new era Friday with the installation of the first prison camp commander of the Trump administration, an admiral charged with running the wartime prison that could grow for the first time in nearly a decade.

“The work you do, the mission you execute is vitally important, incredibly complex and not well understood by many people,” said Rear Adm. Edward Cashman as he assumed command of the detention center, which holds 41 captives and is run by a 1,750-member staff.

A day earlier, the head of U.S. Southern Command urged Congress to fund a new prison staff barracks, signaling the unending nature of the detention center President George W. Bush opened, President Barack Obama failed to close,

and President Donald Trump vowed to load up “with some bad dudes.”

Adm. Kurt Tidd, the SOUTH-COM commander, arrived Thursday night to preside at the brief ceremony in the base chapel — and introduce Cashman to representatives of the Navy community of about 5,500 residents as “one of our Navy’s rising stars.” Tidd called Cashman “no stranger to pressure and intense scrutiny” as he became the 17th commander of detainee operations.

“Make no mistake about it, detainee operations are an essential tool in our counterterrorism toolkit. They’re an operational, legal and moral imperative against an unconventional enemy,” Tidd said.

A total of 41 captives remain of the 780 or so men and boys who passed through the prison camps since a Marine general opened Camp X-Ray in January 2002. If Congress hadn’t

blocked it, the Obama administration would have transferred the last 41 to the United States to close that chapter of history. Instead, 10 of those who remain have been charged at the war court, called military commissions, and the rest are considered prisoners in the war on terror.

The departing commander, Rear Adm. Peter J. Clarke, was the first submariner to lead the detention center staff, and left to an uncertain future. He was temporarily assigned to the Washington, D.C., headquarters of the Chief of Naval Personnel, pending a future assignment.

Cashman takes charge as essentially the “re-opener” — poised to accept the first new prisoner since March 2008, if U.S. forces take a captive suitable for prisoner-of-war-style detention or war crimes trial by military commissions.

Tenn. state senator pick for secretary of the Army

USA Today

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump has nominated Tennessee state Sen. Mark Green to become secretary of the Army.

The White House made the announcement Friday.

Green is a former Army officer and West Point graduate who is popular among many tea party-aligned Republicans. His nomination still must be confirmed by the U.S. Senate.

The Tennessean first reported Green as a finalist for the position last month, and some expected an announcement when Trump visited Nashville for a rally in March. Green spoke at the event with other lawmakers and leaders, but no announcement was made. His remarks referenced additional funding and resources Trump has suggested he wants to provide to the military.

The secretary of the Army, which is the top civilian leader for the U.S. Army, has oversight of the 140-plus Army reserve installations worldwide and an approximately \$150 billion budget.

The White House’s selection of Green comes after Vincent Viola, Trump’s previous nominee for the position, withdrew his nomination in February. Viola, a billionaire and owner of the Florida Panthers NHL team, withdrew after he said he couldn’t separate himself from his businesses enough so as not to pose a conflict of interest.

Green, 52, a physician, was deployed overseas three times during his military service. He was an Army medic for a special operations team that captured Saddam Hussein and wrote a book about the experience. After his Army career, Green founded AlignMD, an emergency room management firm, which was acquired by American Physician Partners in 2016 as part of a \$24 million deal.

Operation Git-Meow aims to help prison’s feral cats

Miami Herald

GUANTANAMO BAY NAVAL BASE, Cuba — This base best known for its wartime prison has cats. Lots of cats. Kitty cats. Dumpster cats. House cats. Abandoned cats. Foster cats. Stray cats. Tabby cats. Cuban cats.

By the estimate of activists who want to do something about it, it has upward of 500 feral cats.

In an unusual alliance, some troops, civilians and visitors have teamed with the global animal rescue group SPCA International and are asking the Navy’s permission to sterilize the cats. They’re also setting up a nonprofit organization to help soldiers or sailors on temporary assignment here adopt them and take them home.

The group’s name? Operation Git-Meow.

“I have taken care of over 40, actually 50, cats in about 3½ years,” said Git-Meow founder and foster-cat mom Tina Marie Parr, the wife of a base contrac-

tor. She’s built a small shelter in her backyard and is scouting for something larger and more permanent.

Erika Kelly, who spotted the problem on a visit to the base and has now set up Operation Git-Meow as a corporation seeking IRS 501(c)3 tax-exempt status, estimates there are 500 to 600 feral cats at Guantanamo. “They’re not fixed. They’re not vaccinated,” she says. “They’re interacting with people, overbreeding, and it’s unhealthy for the people and unhealthy for the cats.”

Git-Meow members recently met with the dog-owning base commander, Navy Capt. Dave Culpepper, to offer an alternative solution at no cost to taxpayers:

They proposed that the skipper permit civilian volunteers on base periodically — trappers to catch the wild cats, veterinarians and vet techs to neuter and vaccinate them — to control and calm rather than try to kill off the feral cat population.

That would require a special waiver of a Navy regulation.

U.S. military rules specifically prohibit “trap-neuter-release programs due to the adverse impacts stray animals pose such as the potential threat to public health; the threat to wildlife, including endangered species and migratory birds; and damage to natural habitats,” base spokeswoman Julie Ann Ripley said by email.

“We do this all over the world,” says Meredith Ayan, executive director of SPCA International, during a recent scouting visit.

Guantanamo-based group members aspire to build a shelter to tame some. Off-duty troops seeking a timeout would be welcome to come, stroke and cuddle them in a sanctuary of sorts.

These cat lovers also are designing a sponsorship system for U.S. troops and contractors to actually adopt one. Not all military flights on and off the base will allow people to bring pets. And for those that do, it can be costly.

Sweden detains suspect in truck attack

Associated Press

STOCKHOLM — The suspect in Stockholm's deadly beer truck attack is a 39-year-old native of Uzbekistan who previously had been on authorities' radar, Swedish authorities said Saturday. The prime minister urged citizens to "get through this" and strolled through the streets of the capital to chat with residents.

Swedes flew flags at half-staff Saturday to commemorate the four people killed and 15 wounded when the hijacked truck plowed into a crowd of shoppers Friday afternoon in Stockholm. Prime Minister Stefan Lofven declared Monday a national day of mourning, with a minute of silence at noon.

Sweden's police chief said authorities were confident they had detained the man who carried out the attack.

"There is nothing that tells us that we have the wrong person," Dan Eliason told a news conference Saturday, but added he did not know whether others were involved in the attack. "We cannot exclude this."

Eliason also said police found something in the truck that "could be a bomb or an incendiary object, we are still investigating it."

Prosecutor Hans Ihrman said the suspect has not yet spoken to authorities and could not confirm whether he was a legal resident of Sweden. Anders Thornberg, head of the Swedish Security Service, said security services were working with other nations' security agencies to investigate the attack, but declined to elaborate.

Police declined to comment on media reports about overnight police raids around Stockholm or if they were hunting any more suspects in the case. They said the

suspect had been on their radar before but not recently, and did not explain why authorities apparently had not considered him a serious threat.

Eliason told reporters the suspect was "a more marginal character."

Sweden's health service said 10 people were still hospitalized for wounds from the attack and four of them were seriously injured.

Many in Sweden were shocked by the attack, questioning whether Swedish society — considered democratic and egalitarian — had failed in some way.

Visiting the attack site at an upscale department store, Sweden's Crown Princess Victoria laid roses on the ground Saturday and wiped away a tear.

"We must show a huge force, we must go against this," she told reporters.

Calif. governor: Historic drought over — for now

Associated Press

FRESNO, Calif. — Thirsty California lawns faded to brown from a lack of water in four extraordinarily dry years have revived to bright green in neighborhoods across the state.

Dry riverbeds of sand and tumbleweeds that snake their way through farmers' fields now charge with water swelling up their banks.

Scenes like these and many others prompted California Gov. Jerry Brown on Friday to declare an end to the state's drought emergency that had drained reservoirs and wells, had devastated forests and farmland and had forced millions of people to slash their water use.

The turnaround has been stark. After years of brown fields and cracked earth, monster storms blanketed California's Sierra Nevada Mountains this winter with deep snow that flows into the network of rivers and streams that supply much of the state's water.

Still, lifting the emergency drought order is a largely symbolic measure that doesn't remove most of the restrictions.

Officials insisted they're holding onto some conservation rules for the 40 million residents of the nation's most populous state.

California uses more water each year than nature makes available, and one wet winter won't change the long-term outlook, environmentalists cautioned.

"Water may appear to be in abundance right now," said Kate Poole, director of the Natural Resources Defense Council. "But even after this unusually wet season, there won't be enough water to satisfy all the demands of agriculture, business and cities, without draining our rivers and groundwater basins below sustainable levels."

Brown declared the emergency in 2014, and officials later ordered mandatory conservation for the first time in state history.

Even now, the governor has kept the drought emergency in place for four counties, most of them at the state's farming heartland, where emergency drinking water projects will continue to help address diminished groundwater supplies.

Gorsuch OK keeps right lean to Supreme Court

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — With Neil Gorsuch's confirmation as the 113th Supreme Court justice on Friday, it won't be long before he starts revealing what he really thinks about a range of hot topics he repeatedly side-stepped during his confirmation hearing.

In less than two weeks, the justices will take up a Missouri church's claim that the state is stepping on its religious freedom. It's a case about Missouri's ban on public money going to religious institutions, and it carries with it potential implications for vouchers for students to attend private, religious schools.

Other cases the court could soon decide to hear involve gun rights, voting rights and a Colorado baker's refusal to design a cake for a same-sex couple's wedding. Some of those cases may come up April 13, which could be Gorsuch's first private conference — where justices decide whether to hear a case. It takes four votes to do so, though the court does not generally announce each justice's

decision.

Both sides in the bruising battle over Gorsuch's nomination think they have a good sense of how he will come down on the big issues of the day, from his record as an appellate judge in Denver since 2006 and his recommendation by conservative groups. They expect Gorsuch to, in effect, restore the working conservative majority that was in place when Justice Antonin Scalia was alive. Gorsuch will take the seat of the conservative icon who died in February 2016.

While that remains uncertain, it's safer to say Gorsuch should know his way around the venerable building.

Like Chief Justice John Roberts and Justices Stephen Breyer and Elena Kagan, Gorsuch once served as a law clerk at the court, so the building's layout and its idiosyncratic ways will be somewhat familiar to him.

Further easing Gorsuch's transition is that his former boss, Justice Anthony Kennedy, remains on the court. It's the first time a justice will serve alongside his former clerk.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Wild turkey dodges rush hour traffic

MA LYNNFIELD — A wild turkey is giving thanks after safely making its way across a heavily trafficked Massachusetts interstate during rush hour.

A helicopter camera caught the dramatic scene in Lynnfield, just north of Boston.

The fowl ran afoul of motorists on Interstate 95 on Wednesday. Some drivers had to swerve to avoid striking it.

The turkey walked most of the way but decided to fly across the last few lanes after a near miss.

The bird was part of a flock that caused intermittent traffic delays by trotting onto the highway.

Canada geese settle in outside hospital

NE OMAHA — A pair of well-known Canada geese has again built a nest near an Omaha hospital, but this time chose an especially busy locale: a flower pot near the emergency room doors.

The geese, dubbed Ralph and Alice after the bickering TV couple on “The Honey-mooners,” have nested near Lakeside Hospital every spring since 2005, security officer Tom Stock told the Omaha World-Herald.

Hospital workers say they’re confused as to why the birds chose such a busy location. In past years, the pair selected quieter sites near a garden or the sleep lab.

Hospital staff is looking after the birds. Signs have been posted asking visitors to neither feed nor disturb the geese. And when the goslings hatch, security workers will escort the family to a nearby lake.

Hand reattached after cut off by machete

MA LOWELL — A Massachusetts man whose hand was cut off by a machete during a fight has had it reattached, and authorities say the suspect has been ordered held without bail.

The Sun of Lowell, Mass., reported that police responded to a Lowell public housing project Wednesday night. Prosecutors said officers at first found only the hand because the victim ran away screaming.

The suspect, Domingo Ayala, 54, was ordered held without bail Thursday pending a hearing to determine whether he is dangerous. He faces charges including assault and battery with a dangerous weapon.

Prosecutors say the victim got into an argument with Ayala’s son, and at some point Ayala retrieved the machete.

Restaurant seeks owner of 1947 ring

WV HUNTINGTON — Workers at a West Virginia restaurant are looking for the owner of a wedding ring believed to be 70 years old.

The Herald-Dispatch reported the men’s gold ring inscribed with a message and a 1947 anniversary date was found in January at Jim’s Steak and Spaghetti House in Huntington. The restaurant’s employees have had no luck finding the owner.

Restaurant owner Sally Tweel Carder said the ring was found near a coat rack, leading her to believe the ring may have been accidentally pulled off.

Carder said the ring has an attached guard indicating it may have been worn by someone else whose fingers were not

as large as the original owner.

Heavy construction equipment stolen

NY HUNTINGTON — A group restoring a century-old lighthouse on Long Island’s North Shore says an 800-pound piece of construction equipment has been stolen from the work site.

Members of the Huntington Lighthouse Preservation Society told Newsday that a pile grapple was stolen from a barge being used to restore the lighthouse’s foundation. A pile grapple is used to lift and move heavy building material.

The group said the machinery, discovered missing on March 27, is too heavy to have fallen off the barge. A check of the water around the barge found no sign of the equipment.

13 sought after attack by party bus mob

CA HUNTINGTON BEACH — Police in Southern California have obtained arrest warrants for 13 people who investigators say got off a party bus and stormed a 7-Eleven, robbing the store and assaulting a clerk.

Huntington Beach Officer Jennifer Marlatt said the suspects in the Jan. 7 incident belong to a Los Angeles-based street gang.

The Orange County Register reported Wednesday that detectives have already arrested 11 other people on various offenses in connection with the robbery.

At least 30 of the 80 passengers ran through the 7-Eleven and some began stealing items and assaulting the clerk when he intervened.

Eventually, the group got back onto the bus, which was stopped by police a short dis-

tance later.

Quadruplets accepted at Ivy League colleges

OH HAMILTON — Quadruplet brothers in Ohio have all been accepted at some of the nation’s top universities, including each of them to both Yale and Harvard.

The Wade brothers of the northern Cincinnati suburb of Liberty Township say they have been notified in recent days of acceptances from a number of notable schools.

Aaron, Nick, Nigel and Zachary haven’t made their decisions, though Aaron likes Stanford University and his three brothers are leaning toward Yale. Financial aid offers likely will play an important role.

Solar panels to power coal museum

KY FRANKFORT — Don’t look to the Kentucky Coal Museum to bring coal back.

The museum is installing solar panels on its roof, part of a project aimed at lowering the energy costs of one of the city’s largest electric customers. It’s also a symbol of the state’s efforts to move away from coal as its primary energy source as more coal-fired power plants are replaced by natural gas. The state legislature recently lifted its decades-old ban on nuclear power.

The museum is in Benham, once a coal camp town whose population peaked at about 3,000, according to 85-year-old Mayor Wanda Humphrey. Today, it has about 500 people, and Humphrey says she is the mayor because no one else wants the job.

From wire reports

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Westbrook earns triple-double average

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Russell Westbrook joined Oscar Robertson as the only players in NBA history to average a triple-double for a season.

That didn't make him feel much better about his or his team's awful Friday night, when Westbrook failed for the second game in a row to break Robertson's 55-year-old, single-season record for most triple-doubles.

The dynamic Thunder guard fell two assists shy of what would have been his 42nd in the Oklahoma City Thunder's 120-99 loss to the Phoenix Suns.

Of averaging a triple-double for the season, Westbrook said, "You could never say in a million years that I would think that was even possible."

And as for not getting 10 assists?

"My main goal since I got here, especially this season, is

to win a championship," Westbrook said. "If I wanted to get 10 assists, I could get 10 assists. Everybody wants to see the record broke, but it's bigger than that for our team and for me."

On a rough night all around, Westbrook had 23 points (on 6-for-25 shooting, 2-for-12 on three-pointers), 12 rebounds and eight assists, along with eight turnovers before coach Billy Donovan pulled him with 2:34 to play.

Devin Booker scored 21 of the Suns' 25 points in the fourth quarter and finished with 37 as Phoenix snapped a 13-game losing streak.

"From the start of the game, Russ was chasing history," Booker said. "... Unbelievable player. I'm sure he's going to get it. I'm happy it wasn't here but we locked in defensively."

Westbrook did get the six assists he needed to assure that he'd join Robertson as the only players to average a triple-dou-

ble for a season — breaching double figures for all three categories. Robertson averaged 30.8 points, 12.5 rebounds and 11.4 assists for the Cincinnati Royals in the 1961-62 season.

After the game, Westbrook went straight to the practice court and stayed there for nearly an hour.

"Get your mind right," he explained. "You understand how important a game is and you want to make sure I'm playing the best that I need to play for my teammates. Tonight I felt like I let them down."

Westbrook stayed in the game long after the outcome seemed certain. Donovan said he hadn't given up on being able to win the game.

"No, I wasn't trying for the triple-double," the coach said. "I've seen enough miraculous things this year — at Dallas and Orlando — and I thought about taking him out at the stoppage of play around 3:40, 3:45. I just

said, you know what, he gets hot around the three-point line, we make a couple of shots. ... I just wanted to give our team every opportunity."

Westbrook had probably his worst shooting first half of the season and his teammates didn't show much interest in the contest as the Suns opened a 28-point lead.

He missed his first 11 shots before sinking a 17-footer with 50.4 seconds left in the half. He followed that quickly with a three-point play on an acrobatic drive to the basket.

But his halftime stats were ugly: 2-for-13 shooting, 0-for-4 on threes, seven rebounds, three assists and six turnovers.

Phoenix, meanwhile, shot 61 percent in the first half, led by Warren's 15 points on 7-for-10 shooting, to Oklahoma City's 39 percent and led 71-48 at the half.

Letdown: James, Cavs stunned by Hardaway, Hawks

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — As the jaw-dropping loss began to sink in, LeBron James sat on the floor away from his teammates, alone in his thoughts.

The playoffs are just days away, and the NBA champions are lost again.

Tim Hardaway Jr. scored 15 of his 22 points in the fourth quarter as the Atlanta Hawks, despite resting center Dwight Howard and sitting three other key starters, stunned James and the Cleveland Cavaliers 114-100 on Friday.

Coming off a win over Boston on Thursday night, the Hawks outworked and outgunned the Cavs, who blew a chance to move closer to securing the top seed in the Eastern Conference with the kind of flat, uninspired performance that has become the norm in a disjointed season.

James struggled to explain what went wrong just two days

after the Cavs had played one of their best games this season, blowing the Celtics out in Boston. That win seemed to signal a change, an acknowledgment that the postseason was quickly approaching and it was time to get serious.

And now, this.

"You expect for us to want to get better and we were doing that and we took a couple steps back tonight," James said.

"The energy level was just real bad," a disillusioned James said afterward. "I don't know why."

Mike Dunleavy added 20 for Atlanta and the veteran got a little revenge against the Cavs, who tossed him in as part of a trade for Kyle Korver in February. The Hawks recorded 39 assists and moved a game ahead of Milwaukee for fifth place in the East.

However, the Hawks, who also sat Paul Millsap, Kent Bazemore and Dennis Schroder, weren't celebrating. They host

the Cavs on Sunday.

"It doesn't mean anything," Hardaway said. "We've got to see them again. We know they're a great basketball team and they're the defending champs. We've got to come back on Sunday with the same intensity and the same mindset because they're going to come after it."

It was a shocking letdown by the Cavs, who have dealt with injuries all season, but don't have any excuse for not giving it their all with so much at stake.

Raptors 96, Heat 94: DeMar DeRozan scored 38 points as Toronto beat Miami in the Raptors' final regular-season home game.

Grizzlies 101, Knicks 88: Mike Conley scored 31 points to help host Memphis wrap up the No. 7 seed in the West with a win over short-handed New York.

Pistons 114, Rockets 109: Stanley Johnson hit a tiebreak-

ing three-pointer with 32.4 seconds left and added two free throws to lift visiting Detroit past Houston.

Nuggets 122, Pelicans 106: Rookie Jamal Murray scored a career-high 30 points, including several high-soaring dunks, and host Denver beat New Orleans to keep its post-season hopes alive.

Spurs 109, Mavericks 89: Bryn Forbes scored a career-high 27 points while his team rested most of its starters, leading visiting San Antonio past a Dallas team that pulled most of its key veterans in the second half.

Jazz 120, Timberwolves 113: Gordon Hayward scored a career-high 39 points as host Utah overcame an 11-point deficit to beat Minnesota.

Lakers 98, Kings 94: Julius Randle scored 25 points and Corey Brewer stole an inbounds pass with 5 seconds to play, was fouled and made both free throws to lead Los Angeles over visiting Sacramento.

Contenders abound at Augusta National

Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — Fans of dominant, wire-to-wire performances and runaway winners, this Masters is not for them.

Forget a Tiger Woods-style blowout. Unlike that performance 20 years ago, Augusta National has a traffic jam atop the leaderboard that will likely take the entire weekend to untangle.

Sergio Garcia, Rickie Fowler, Charley Hoffman and Masters rookie Thomas Pieters are tied at 4-under 140 through two rounds of the year's first major. William McGirt is next at 2 under with Olympic gold medalist Justin Rose and ageless Fred Couples heading another group three shots behind.

At even par are three past champions in Phil Mickelson, Adam Scott and Jordan Spieth, all capable of grabbing this event by the throat over the weekend.

"We're in a position now where we," Spieth said, "I think, can go out there and win this thing."

Join a crowded club.

There are 18 players within six shots of the lead, a margin that can shrink as quickly as a couple of crowd-pleasing eagles on

the 13th and 15th holes. That group includes world No. 2 Rory McIlroy, who was only five shots behind despite not shooting under par either of the first two rounds.

"If I can put together a 67 or a 66 tomorrow, I feel like I'll be right in there for Sunday," said McIlroy, seeking to complete the career grand slam with a missing Masters win.

Hoffman held a four-shot lead after a first-round 65. He ballooned to a 75 with five bogeys in a six-hole stretch. Hoffman was happy to walk off the course with a share of first.

"Being in position going into Saturday here at the Masters is going to be special," Hoffman said. "I'm not going to put too much pressure on myself, but I'd be lying to say it's not a great feeling and a great spot to be."

It's a sentiment shared by most of the top 20 after the first two rounds here.

Keep an eye on: Jordan Spieth bounced back from a quadruple-bogey in the opening round to shoot 69, putting himself right back in the mix at even-par 144 for the tournament. Spieth won the green jacket in 2015 and was the runner-up in his other two

appearances. Among the other contenders: former U.S. Open winner Justin Rose (143) and past Masters champions Adam Scott and Phil Mickelson (both at 144).

Ageless Couples: Oh, and let's not forget ageless Fred Couples, who surged into contention a quarter-century after winning the green jacket. The 57-year-old shot 70, closing with a brilliant birdie on the 18th hole for a 143 at the midway point. "I really know the course very well," Couples said. "I feel like my age is still OK, because I can drive it far enough."

Heading home: Defending champion Danny Willett made a snowman at the first hole and never quite recovered. The quadruple-bogey led to a 78 that kept him from returning for the weekend by a single stroke. He was the first reigning champion to miss the cut since Mike Weir in 2004. Also heading home early was two-time champion Bubba Watson, who had made the cut in all eight of his previous Masters appearances. Some other former winners who won't be making use of their green jackets come Sunday: Angel Cabrera, Trevor Immelman, Zach Johnson and Vijay Singh.

Braun scores on wild pitch, lifts Brewers

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — The Brewers mobbed Ryan Braun at home plate after he scored the winning run by beating a desperate throw home from catcher Willson Contreras.

It was a satisfying end to an 11-inning game for Milwaukee against the defending World Series champion Chicago Cubs.

Braun scored from third base on a wild pitch by reliever Mike Montgomery with one out, and the Brewers turned crucial double plays in the 10th and 11th innings to beat their NL Central rivals 2-1 on Friday night.

"It was a fun game, for sure," Milwaukee manager Craig Counsell said. "The bottom line was we pitched really well. We pitched outstanding."

Jared Hughes (1-0) provided 1²/₃ innings of scoreless relief, getting two double plays. The one in the 11th was started on a nice stab by first baseman

Jesus Aguilar.

Brewers fans cheered loudly, drowning out the sea of blue-clad Cubs fans who made up about two-thirds of the crowd of 28,000-plus at Miller Park.

Tigers 6, Red Sox 5: JaCoby Jones capped a wild eighth inning with a bases-loaded walk as Detroit outlasted flu-bitten Boston to win its ninth straight home opener.

Pirates 5, Braves 4: David Freese and Francisco Cervelli hit back-to-back home runs as Pittsburgh won its home opener in snow flurries, beating Atlanta.

Padres 7, Giants 6: Rookie Manuel Margot hit his first two big league homers and Yanger-vis Solarte had a go-ahead two-run double in the seventh inning, helping San Diego win its home opener over San Francisco.

Rockies 2, Dodgers 1: Kyle Freeland allowed one run in six solid innings in his major league

debut, leading hometown Colorado past Los Angeles.

Nationals 7, Phillies 6: Bryce Harper, Daniel Murphy and Jayson Werth hit homers to back Max Scherzer and Washington held on to spoil Philadelphia's home opener.

Marlins 7, Mets 2: Zack Wheeler lasted just four innings in his return from Tommy John surgery, giving up Derek Dietrich's go-ahead, two-run triple and Christian Yelich's two-run homer in host New York's loss to Miami.

Rays 10, Blue Jays 8: Evan Longoria homered during a five-run first inning against wild Francisco Liriano and host Tampa Bay Rays went on to outscore Toronto.

Rangers 10, Athletics 5: Nomar Mazara hit his first grand slam and had a career-high six RBIs to lead host Texas over Oakland for its first victory of the season.

Royals 5, Astros 1: Jason

Vargas got his first win in nearly two years as visiting Kansas City beat Houston.

Twins 3, White Sox 1: Phil Hughes pitched six strong innings for his first win in almost a year as visiting Minnesota beat Chicago for its first 4-0 start since 1987.

Reds 2, Cardinals 0: Amir Garrett pitched two-hit ball for six innings to win his major league debut, a sharp start for the former St. John's basketball player as visiting Cincinnati beat St. Louis.

Diamondbacks 7, Indians 3: Paul Goldschmidt doubled in two during a five-run fifth inning as host Arizona rallied from three down to beat Cleveland.

Angels 5, Mariners 1: Cameron Maybin and Kole Calhoun homered, and Jesse Chavez (1-0) pitched five-hit ball into the sixth inning of host Los Angeles' victory over Seattle.

US women capture world hockey title

Associated Press

PLYMOUTH, Mich. — The U.S. women's hockey players threw their sticks and gloves in the air and celebrated, capping an emotionally charged two-week stretch with a 3-2 overtime win over Canada in the women's world championship final Friday night.

Hilary Knight made the post-game party possible by scoring 10:17 into the extra period to make the Americans winners on and off the ice. After threatening to sit out the tournament, they won a contentious fight with USA Hockey for better wages that will allow the country's best female hockey players to make a living playing the sport.

"I'm so proud of this team for performing the way we did after battling the way we did off the ice," said Meghan Duggan, the Americans' captain. "A lot of history was made."

The U.S. won its fourth straight world championship title and eighth in the last 10 tries against its Canadian rivals, who are the defending Olympic champions.

Brianne Jenner tied it at 2 for Canada midway through the

third period on a power play after Kacey Bellamy's second goal early in the period gave the Americans their first lead in the gold-medal game.

The U.S. had two power plays in the third period with 7:24 and 2:24 left along with another power play early in OT, but couldn't capitalize on the opportunities to score a go-ahead goal with an extra skater.

Canada's Meghan Agosta scored 1:01 into the game, and Bellamy tied it 3½ minutes later.

Nicole Hensley stopped 28 shots for the U.S.

Canada's goaltender, Shannon Szabados, was tested much more and made 37 saves.

"She was unbelievable," Agosta said. "She kept us in the game."

The Americans boldly said they would boycott the tournament, which would've embarrassed USA Hockey at a tournament held in an arena named after the organization, if they didn't get more money and perks their male counterparts get such as flying in business class and staying at nice hotels. The landmark deal allows them to make more than \$70,000 during non-Olympic years and

as much as \$129,000 in Olympic years, including 2018, when combined with contributions from the United States Olympic Committee.

"We knew that was going to be a bond that was unbreakable," Knight said.

USA Hockey looked like it tried to break the unified front of American women, trying to find lower-caliber players to take their spots in the world championship if Plan B became necessary.

"They didn't want to forgo this opportunity, but they were willing to do it," Dee Spagnuolo, one of the attorneys who represented the women without a fee, said during the first intermission at USA Hockey Arena. "Every time we huddled up to make tough decisions before and during negotiations, they were united and firm. This team off the ice is so united and in adverse, tense situations in games, it helps them win on the ice, too."

The U.S. carried the momentum from the win against USA Hockey into the eight-nation tournament by dominating the competition until their rivals pushed them into OT.

The Americans were the bet-

ter team in the end, though, creating lots of scoring chances in the sudden-death period that could have lasted up to 20 minutes. They didn't need that much time to finish the Canadians off with a second straight OT victory in a world championship gold-medal game.

Knight, who made a no-look, between-the leg pass to set up Bellamy's second goal, was trailing on a 3-on-2 rush when Coyne dropped a pass to her and she scored from the inside of the left circle. In the 2011 world championship final, Knight also scored the gold-medal winning goal in OT.

"She's one of the best in the world and she comes up big when you need her and the moment is huge," Bellamy said. "That's what's what make her so special. When everything is on the line, she comes through clutch."

When Knight lit the goal lamp, the jubilant Americans screamed and hugged.

"Nothing compares to a gold-medal game against Canada," Bellamy said. "The emotions are so high. The energy in the building was incredible and it was a really fast-paced game and we had to fight to the end."

Lightning down Canadiens, keep playoff hopes alive

Associated Press

MONTREAL — Tampa Bay rookie Yann Gourde pointed to the two points in the standings — not his own two goals.

"It's pretty amazing feeling scoring two goals against Montreal in this building, but what we really wanted was two points tonight and that was my main concern," said Gourde, from St. Narcisse, Quebec. "It's amazing just being in this situation, a playoff push. It's very fun."

Nikita Kucherov had his 40th goal of the season and the Lightning kept their playoff hopes alive with a 4-2 victory over the Montreal Canadiens on Friday night.

Alex Killorn also scored for the Lightning. They need to win their final regular-season game Sunday against Buffalo and have Toronto and the New York Islanders lose to take the final spot in the Eastern Conference.

The Lightning are 19-6-4 since Feb. 4.

"We've had a lot of guys hurt, but there's definitely been an urgency in these last 20 games where we haven't been close to a playoff spot and now we're a point away," Killorn said.

Dwight King and Artturi Lehkonen scored for the playoff-bound Canadiens.

The desperate Lightning faced a Canadiens team that

had already clinched first place in the Atlantic Division and rested three banged up starting defensemen — Shea Weber, Jordie Benn and Alexei Emelin.

"I thought we struggled in the back tonight," Montreal coach Claude Julien said. "But on Wednesday, we'll have a lot of players back."

Kucherov could have had three goals in the first period.

The 23-year-old Russian was robbed by Carey Price 3:59 into the game, then froze the Montreal defense on a rush and hit a post from the slot at 11:42, but Gourde fired in the rebound to open the scoring.

At 19:50, Ondrej Palat flipped a pass into the neutral zone that

the speeding Kucherov controlled with a quick slap of the stick before beating Price inside the near post.

Lehkonen found King coming off the bench with a stretch pass. He went in alone to beat Andrei Vasilevskiy between the pads for his first goal in 16 games as a Canadien at 9:59 of the second.

Killorn got it back at 14:19 on a rush after Cory Conacher forced a turnover at the Tampa Bay blue line.

Lehkonen saw his pass go in off a skate at 4:36 of the third but, only 21 seconds later, Gourde was left alone on the left side and put Conacher's pass into an open side for a fifth goal in his last seven games.