

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## Trump confronts dilemma of Syria

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In heated exchanges with his national security team in recent weeks, President Donald Trump repeatedly made clear he saw little incentive for the United States to be involved in Syria's intractable civil war.

Then he pushed the U.S. military back into the quagmire.

In doing so, Trump is trying to confront a dilemma that haunted his predecessor, Barack Obama. Syria's seven-year civil war presents few fast or easy solutions for the U.S., yet the geopolitical rivalries at play, the presence of Islamic State and other extremists and the atrocities perpetrated by President Bashar Assad's government make the situation impossible to ignore.

Thus far, Trump and his top advisers have sent mixed messages about what Friday's U.S., British and French strikes may

mean for his administration's future commitment in Syria.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis described the action as a "one-time shot" in retaliation for the Syrian government's apparent use of chemical weapons in an April 7 attack that killed more than 40 people.

Trump, however, cast the strikes in more sweeping terms, promising he was ready to keep the U.S. military engaged if Assad were to use deadly gases again. "We are prepared to sustain this response until the Syrian regime stops its use of prohibited chemical agents," Trump said in a televised address to the nation from the White House on Friday night.

His comments were echoed Saturday by Nikki Haley, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, who said the president told her the military was "locked and loaded" if Syria launched another chemical weapons attack.

The president's statement was a marked shift from his recent posture on Syria. Earlier this month, he privately told advisers the U.S. was getting "nothing" out of being involved in Syria and he made clear he wanted the 2,000 American troops currently there fighting ISIS militants out by the fall.

That order left many of Trump's national security advisers on edge, concerned that pulling out even that small U.S. force would result in a power vacuum that Iran could fill.

It did win him praise from political supporters who perceive Syria as a costly wasteland and see Trump as a president who promised an "America First" agenda that did not include sustained American military commitments overseas.

The importance of that pledge to some Trump backers quickly became apparent, with even the relatively limited American intervention in Syria leaving them

deeply frustrated.

"This is not why Donald Trump got elected," said Laura Ingraham, the Fox News host who has been supportive of the president.

Ann Coulter, another conservative commentator, spent the weekend highlighting angry messages on Twitter from apparent Trump supporters, including one who wrote that while "the direct damage was some buildings in Damascus, the collateral damage was Trump's political support base."

If Trump was bothered by the growing criticism, he didn't show it. He took to Twitter on Saturday morning and wrote "Mission Accomplished" — adopting a phrase that haunted President George W. Bush during the Iraq War. For some, those two words represent the short-sightedness about how quickly the U.S. can become entangled in a protracted Middle East conflict.

## Experts: Syria strikes may bolster Kim's nukes resolve

BY KIM GAMEL  
*Stars and Stripes*

SEOUL, South Korea — President Donald Trump may have just given North Korea's leader a new excuse not to give up his nuclear weapons, experts say.

The North has long maintained that its nuclear and missile programs are needed for self-defense against a U.S. attack, with some 28,500 American servicemembers poised across the heavily fortified border that divides the peninsula.

The U.S.-led targeted airstrikes punishing Syrian President Bashar Assad for an apparent chemical attack against civilians were exactly

the type of assault that Kim Jong Un's regime fears.

Experts say that could undermine the U.S. administration's goal of persuading Kim to abandon his nuclear ambitions just weeks ahead of a planned summit between the two leaders.

Kim "may view this as added justification for possessing nuclear weapons, as a way to deter this type of intervention," said Catherine Dill, a defense analyst at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies in Monterey, Calif.

"Similarly, it may weaken the general international position of the U.S. at a crucial time leading up to negotiations, es-

pecially if U.N. hours are spent discussing this strike rather than North Korea," she added.

North Korean officials have pointed to NATO airstrikes that led to the downfall of Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi years after he agreed to give up his nuclear weapons as justification for their position.

Gadhafi, who brutally suppressed his people, agreed in 2003 to eliminate his weapons of mass destruction. But the dictator was ousted and killed in 2011 after the international community intervened to support protesters against his rule.

At the time, North Korea called the West's deal with Libya a bait-and-switch ap-

proach and warned the crisis amounted to a "grave lesson" that "one should have power to defend peace."

North Korea is believed to have its own massive stockpile of biological and chemical weapons.

The threat was highlighted when the North Korean leader's estranged half-brother, Kim Jong Nam, was killed when suspects smeared the banned nerve agent VX on his face at a Malaysian airport on Feb. 13, 2017.

Pyongyang also has been accused of sharing the technology in exchange for foreign currency to thwart U.N. economic sanctions.

# Syrians dance, chant in defiance of West

Associated Press

DAMASCUS, Syria — Hundreds of Syrians poured into the streets of Damascus on Saturday, dancing and chanting in defiance of what they called the West's "failure" to shake their nation's resolve with airstrikes that jolted the capital only hours earlier.

The demonstrations in support of President Bashar Assad were carried live on state TV, which also reported that Syrian air defenses had intercepted most of the missiles fired by the United States, Britain and France to punish Syria's purported use of chemical weapons. The broadcaster also urged people not to believe media reports that exaggerated the results of the airstrikes.

"We are not scared of America's missiles. We humiliated their missiles," said Mahmoud Ibrahim, who waved a Syrian flag as he hung out of his car window.

As car horns blared, the crowd moved toward nearby Damascus University, where pro-government fighters danced and waved their automatic rifles over their heads. Many denounced President Donald Trump and also waved flags of Syria's allies, Iran and Russia, as they cheered Assad.

The display of national fervor later mixed with celebrations over the news that the Syrian army declared the eastern suburbs of Damascus "fully liberated" after the last group of rebels left the town of Douma. Its recapture marks the big-

gest victory for Assad's forces since the capture of the eastern half of the city of Aleppo in 2016.

The fall of Douma came after a punishing government offensive and a surrender deal struck with rebel groups. It also followed the purported use of chemical weapons there on April 7, which activists say killed more than 40 people in the town and led to Saturday's airstrikes by the West.

"Trump failed in his aggression," said Mohammed Hammad, 51, a civil servant. "Trump's failure came with the victory of our army in Douma, which marks the biggest victory for the Syrian Arab Army."

The bombardment began at 4 a.m., with loud explosions thundering in Damascus and the sky turning orange as fires raged in the distance.

Associated Press reporters saw smoke rising above eastern Damascus and spotted fiery streaks of surface-to-air missiles. The call to morning prayers at dawn mixed with the whoosh of missiles.

Shortly after the one-hour attack ended, vehicles with loudspeakers blared nationalist songs.

"Good souls will not be humiliated," Syria's presidential account tweeted after the airstrikes began.

Later, a video showing Assad walking into his office carrying a briefcase was posted on the same account. "Good morning, steadfastness," the caption read.

As the sun rose, hundreds had gath-

ered in Damascus' landmark Omayyad Square, celebrating what they said was the army's success in foiling the U.S.-led military action. The widely broadcast celebrations and the hastily organized police deployment in Douma appeared to be the government's response to the airstrikes.

The limited airstrikes came at a time when the Assad government is feeling empowered after having secured the region near the capital following other military victories backed by Russia and Iran in seven years of civil war.

Trump announced the airstrikes Friday night to attack Syria's chemical weapons program. He said Washington is prepared to keep pressure on Assad until he ends a "criminal pattern of killing his own people" with the internationally banned weapons.

Syria has repeatedly denied using banned weapons. Inspectors from the international chemical weapons watchdog group were in Damascus and had been expected to head to Douma on Saturday.

The limited strikes were deplored by the Syrian opposition, which saw the West as lacking an international strategy for dealing with the civil war.

Nasr al-Hariri, a senior opposition leader, said the international community must take responsibility for any retaliation by the Syrian government against civilians in opposition areas. He called for a strategy that leads to a political solution to "save it from the brutality of the Syrian regime."

## In preparation for attack, US distracts with warship ruse

Bloomberg News

President Donald Trump's outrage over another apparent chemical weapons attack by Syrian President Bashar Assad was clear. And for the second time in his presidency, the U.S. commander in chief demanded retaliation.

As images of sick or dying children flooded global media last week, the U.S. guided missile destroyer USS Winston Churchill was en route to the Mediterranean to join a flotilla of allied warships, including another destroyer, the USS Donald Cook.

It was a ruse.

While both vessels carry as many as 90 Tomahawk missiles — the main weapon used in the strike on Syria — neither ship in the end fired a shot. Instead, according to a person familiar with White House war planning, they were part of a plan to distract Russia and its Syrian ally from an assault Assad's government could do little to defend itself against.

It worked. Pentagon officials on Saturday said they faced little resistance to their targeted attack on what they said were three Syrian chemical weapons facilities. Most of the Syri-

an countermeasures, including defensive ballistic missiles, were fired after U.S. and allied weapons hit their targets, Lt. Gen. Kenneth McKenzie told reporters on Saturday.

As Trump addressed the nation at 9 p.m. Washington time, a barrage of 105 U.S., British and French missiles converged on Syria.

They came from the Red Sea, the Arabian Gulf and the Mediterranean, homing in from three directions to overwhelm whatever missile defenses Assad's regime might employ. Russia's more advanced air defense system didn't engage the

allied weapons.

According to the Pentagon, the allied weaponry included six Tomahawk cruise missiles launched from the Virginia-class USS John Warner submarine. The sub-launched missiles, built by Lockheed Martin Corp., had never previously been used in combat.

The cruiser USS Monterey fired 30 Tomahawks, and the destroyer USS Laboon fired seven Tomahawks from the Red Sea. The destroyer USS Higgins fired 23 Tomahawks from the North Arabian Gulf, according to McKenzie.



## Navy extends time for female sailors to convert to sub force

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Navy has extended the deadline for female enlisted sailors to convert to submarine force ratings.

Sailors in ranks E-1 to E-8 now have until June 1 to apply, the Navy announced last week. The deadline had been April 11.

This is the fourth round of female sailor selections for conversion to submarine force ratings. The Navy said selections from this round of applications would be for initial integration in 2019 of the USS Georgia, an Ohio-class submarine from Kings Bay, Ga. Selections will also go to fill openings on the previously

integrated subs, Florida and Michigan, because of the rotation of personnel to shore duty. The USS Florida, an Ohio-class cruise missile submarine, is also homeported in Kings Bay, while the USS Michigan, an Ohio-class nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine, sails out of Bangor, Wash.

The Navy lifted the ban on women serving on submarines in 2010. Soon afterward the service began bringing female officers on board. The first group of enlisted women started serving on board the Michigan in 2016, followed by the Florida.

The Navy says that by 2020 it plans to have about 550 enlisted women serving on board seven Ohio-class subs, comprising 20 percent of crews.

## Marines to honor WWII vet who repatriated comrades' remains

BY SETH ROBSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Marine Corps was to present a flag Saturday to the family of a Navy landing craft commander who ferried troops to Tarawa and dedicated his final years to repatriating the remains of fallen comrades.

Memories of Tarawa and other Pacific World War II battlegrounds haunted Leon Cooper, 98, who died after a fall on Nov. 16 in Malibu, Calif., said his daughter, Jeanie Cooper, 57, of San Jose.

A group of Marines were to present an American flag to the fallen sailor's youngest son, Bill Cooper, 47, during a "celebration of life" ceremony at Calamigos Ranch in Malibu, she said.

The former Navy lieutenant and Higgins boat commander brought Marines ashore during a November 1943 assault on Tarawa and returned to collect the dead and wounded after the

three-day battle.

"He took a lot of [young Marines] to their deaths," Jeanie Cooper said. "He spent the last 25 years of his life trying to repatriate them. He felt like he owed it to them."

More than 1,000 Marines were killed fighting on the atoll 2,400 miles southwest of Hawaii, and hundreds were still missing in action decades after the war ended.

Cooper went back there in 2008 and was featured in a documentary called "Return to Tarawa: The Leon Cooper Story."

The documentary led to legislation aimed at getting the Pentagon to prioritize the return of remains from Tarawa.

In 2015, after dozens of sets of remains were recovered from the atoll, Cooper, who participated in six battles including the battle of Iwo Jima, began advocating for the return of all servicemembers lost in the Pacific during the war.

## Concerns remain as first North Korea-US summit looms

BY KIM GAMEL  
*Stars and Stripes*

SEOUL, South Korea — Denuclearization may have been the magic word that helped persuade President Donald Trump to agree to a summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

However, concerns about what Kim's regime means by that term have cast a shadow over the historic meeting.

In extending the invitation for talks, North Korea expressed a will to denuclearize in exchange for security guarantees, according to South Korean envoys who met with Kim in Pyongyang.

That traditionally has meant the withdrawal of U.S. troops and an end to Washington's long-standing agreement to use its nuclear assets to protect the South if necessary.

U.S. and South Korean officials, meanwhile, insist their alliance is stronger than ever, and the ultimate objective is the complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantling of the North's nuclear weapons program.

Experts say Pyongyang is likely to demand a steep price after demonstrating rapid progress in its weapons program with dozens of missile tests and two underground nuclear explosions last year.

"Those who have negotiated nuclear matters with Pyongyang know that Kim's words were a familiar North Korean demand to end the 'threat' posed by the U.S.-South Korea alliance, the presence of U.S. troops in Korea, and the nuclear umbrella that defends South Korea and Japan," Evans Revere, a former senior State Department official for East Asia, wrote in a recent commentary.

The presence of some 28,500 U.S. servicemembers in South Korea is the cornerstone of the alliance that was forged in the 1950-53 Korean War, which ended in an armi-

stice instead of a peace treaty.

It's also one of the key reasons China maintains support for its defiant communist protégé, fearing a collapse of the North Korean regime would bring the Americans closer to its doorstep.

Beijing has denounced the North's nuclear program and signed onto punishing U.N. economic sanctions aimed at stopping it. But President Xi Jinping met with Kim last month in his first trip abroad since taking power in 2011.

Trump thanked China for its help Thursday, saying "they've been really terrific at helping us get to some kind of settlement."

But China is probably still trying to counter U.S. influence in the region despite the overtures, said Oriana Skylar Mastro, a security expert at the American Enterprise Institute.

"Beijing could demand that the United States soothe North Korea's security concerns by ceasing U.S.-South Korean military exercises, reducing the U.S. military presence in South Korea and normalizing relations with Pyongyang," she said in an article for Foreign Affairs magazine.

Kim told the Chinese during his visit to Beijing that the issue of denuclearization can be resolved if South Korea and the United States "create an atmosphere of peace and stability while taking progressive and synchronous measures for the realization of peace," the official Xinhua news agency reported.

It didn't elaborate, but the South Korean envoys who relayed the summit invitation said the North made clear it wouldn't need nuclear weapons "as long as military threats to the North are eliminated and the regime's security is guaranteed."

Neither side has outlined an agenda for the first U.S.-North Korea summit, which Trump has said will occur in May or June.

# Trump calls for Comey to be imprisoned

*The Washington Post*

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump attacked James Comey in a fusillade of tweets Sunday morning, calling for the former FBI director to be imprisoned as Trump served up a number of his favorite theories and alleged misdeeds without evidence.

Trump's tweets are part of a broader effort by the White House and the Republican National Committee to discredit Comey, who has written a damaging tell-all book called "A Higher Loyalty," to be released Tuesday. A Sunday night interview on ABC News kicks off his national book tour and publicity campaign for the memoir.

Comey's book is a scathing depiction of his interactions with Trump, in which he likens the president to a mob boss.

Trump fired Comey in May amid a sprawling investigation into Trump's 2016 campaign and Russian meddling in the election. Comey's firing then spurred a special counsel and a broader investigation into the president's campaign and administration — an investigation that now includes potential obstruction of justice and Trump's business dealings.

The book, obtained by news outlets and reviewed last week, has caused great agita for Trump. The president has also grown infuriated in the past week by the FBI raiding the office and home of Michael Cohen, his personal attorney.

"The big questions in Comey's badly reviewed book aren't answered, like how come he gave up classified information (jail), why did he lie to Congress (jail), why did the DNC

refuse to give server to the FBI (why didn't they TAKE it), why the phony memos, McCabe's \$700,000 & more?" the president tweeted before 8 a.m. Sunday.

Andrew McCabe was fired as deputy FBI director last month.

The tweets were filled with unproven assertions.

Comey has not been formally accused of disclosing classified information or lying to Congress.

The memos Trump references are ones Comey wrote memorializing his meetings and phone calls with the president and which have since become public. Comey asked a friend to give some of those memos to *The New York Times*, but the memos are not thought to contain classified material.

Trump has continued to al-

lege McCabe was deferential to Hillary Clinton during the FBI's investigation of Clinton's use of a private email server because McCabe's wife took donations from a Clinton ally for a state Senate race in Virginia. McCabe has denied the accusation.

McCabe's attorney, Michael R. Bromwich, responded Sunday to the president's claims, tweeting: "1. The book isn't out so you don't know what's in it. 2. The Comey and McCabe memos are very real. 3. The story about 'McCabe's \$700,000' has been fully explained. 4. Your strategy of attacking beloved former FBI leaders — not smart."

Trump also attacked Comey for saying in the book that political considerations may have driven him to reopen the Clinton investigation in the last days of the election campaign.

## Ex-DOJ employees urge Congress to 'forcefully respond' if Mueller fired

*The Washington Post*

WASHINGTON — More than 200 former Justice Department employees are urging Congress to "swiftly and forcefully respond" should President Donald Trump fire Robert Mueller, the special counsel investigating Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election, or Deputy Attorney General Rod J. Rosenstein, who is overseeing the federal probe.

"It is up to the rest of us, and especially our elected representatives, to come to their defense and oppose any attempt by the President or others to improperly interfere in the Department's work," said a statement signed by 245 former officials who worked under current and previous administrations, some as far back as that of President Richard M. Nixon.

The former officials, many of whom said they served with Mueller and Rosenstein at the Justice Department, decried the recent attacks against the

agency.

Trump has launched a protracted attack against the Justice Department, accusing it and the FBI of politicizing the investigative process "in favor of Democrats and against Republicans." He also mocked the agency in a recent tweet, criticizing it for not cooperating with Congress and calling it an "embarrassment to our country."

Much of Trump's ire over the past year has been focused on Mueller's expanding probe, which is also looking into any possible coordination between the Trump campaign and the Russian meddling in the 2016 election, along with any other misdeeds discovered, including the possibility of obstruction of justice by the president and the role foreign money may have played to influence the election or the administration's policy.

The *New York Times* reported that Trump had sought to fire Mueller at least twice. The first instance was in June amid media reports Mueller

was looking into possible obstruction of justice, but Trump reportedly backed down after White House counsel Donald McGahn threatened to resign. The president reportedly tried again in early December, when he was angered by reports of subpoenas to obtain information about his business dealings with Deutsche Bank, according to the *Times*.

The former Justice officials' statement comes amid reports that Trump allies have been urging the president to fire Rosenstein.

The deputy attorney general most recently signed off on an FBI search of the home, office and hotel room of Michael Cohen, Trump's longtime personal attorney, who is reportedly under investigation for possible bank fraud and campaign finance violations.

Confidants of Rosenstein told NBC News on Friday that he seemed to have accepted the possibility that he may soon lose his job.

## Boston marks 5 years since marathon attack

*Associated Press*

BOSTON — Boston marked the fifth anniversary of the deadly Boston Marathon bombings Sunday with solemn remembrances and charitable acts.

Democratic Mayor Marty Walsh and Republican Gov. Charlie Baker laid wreaths early in the morning at the spots along downtown Boylston Street where two bombs killed three spectators and maimed more than 260 others on April 15, 2013.

One wreath was laid by Baker in front of Marathon Sports as bagpipes played in the background. In another spot, the family of victims Martin Richard and Lingzi Lu were comforted by Walsh as another wreath was placed where the second bomb went off by the Atlantic Fish restaurant. Hundreds of silent people gathered to watch behind barricades.

People left bouquets of flowers, handwritten notes, candles and stuffed toys.



# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Man charged in failed robbery, 'busjacking'

**MD** NEW CARROLLTON — A man is accused of trying to steal a Metrobus in Maryland after the bus operator interrupted a passenger robbery.

Tariq Kirkland, 38, allegedly attempted to rob a passenger at knifepoint. News outlets cite a Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority news release saying the bus operator heard the commotion, pulled over and called the transit's authority center.

The release said Kirkland then attempted an armed "busjacking" by ordering the driver and 16 passengers to leave. Upon exiting the bus, the driver flagged down a Prince George's County Police officer who detained Kirkland. Kirkland is charged with attempted armed carjacking, attempted robbery and first-degree assault.

## Town wants UFO memorial moved

**MA** SHEFFIELD — A memorial in a remote corner of Massachusetts that marks a 1969 UFO sighting has been ordered moved, but one man who experienced a close encounter is objecting.

The 5,000-pound memorial in Sheffield was installed in 2015 but was moved about 30 feet a few weeks later when it was discovered it was on town land.

Now, Town Administrator Rhonda LaBombard told The Berkshire Eagle it has to be moved again because it's on a town right-of-way easement.

That's not sitting well with Thom Reed. He was 9 when he, his mother, grandmother and brother saw what he described as a "self-contained glow" that flooded their car with an amber light.

## Home student banned from attending prom

**FL** DEFUNIAK SPRINGS — A 17-year-old home-schooled student is being banned from a high school's prom even though she has participated in extracurricular activities there.

The Northwest Florida Daily News reported that Hannah Cooper bought an \$800 gown, and her date rented a tux in anticipation of Saturday night's Walton High prom, but she was told the previous Monday she couldn't attend.

Florida law says home-schooled students can participate in their local school's extracurricular activities, and Cooper had attended fall's homecoming dance, helped build the Class of 2019 float and tried out for softball. But school officials said the prom is an event not an activity and only Walton High students and their dates can attend.

## Police raid pot factory in city neighborhood

**OH** CLEVELAND — Cleveland police alerted by odors emanating from a building's exhaust system raided a large indoor marijuana grow operation in an inner-city neighborhood.

Cleveland.com reported that police during a raid Friday found around 250 plants and 300 pounds of harvested marijuana inside a building outfitted with grow lights worth hundreds of thousands of dollars.

A man identified as the operator of the grow site was arrested.

## Dad delayed by shave; baby is born in vehicle

**MS** COLUMBIA — A soon-to-be Mississippi father thought he had

time to shave before taking his pregnant wife to the hospital, but he cut it too close.

After shaving to be ready for church if it was a false alarm, Carl Sanders loaded Aquilla Sanders into the car on April 8 to drive from Columbia to a Hattiesburg hospital.

WDAM-TV reported Aquilla Sanders' water broke during the trip. She said that two minutes later, she pushed, and baby Lorin arrived.

Carl Sanders said he saw the baby's head and pulled over to help. The family phoned for an ambulance, but a passer-by helped with the delivery.

## Community turkey is killed by vehicle

**IN** NEW CASTLE — A wild turkey that had become the talk of an eastern Indiana community died after being struck by a motor vehicle.

The New Castle mayor's office told The (Muncie) Star Press the turkey that was strutting its stuff in the city died in a "hit-and-run" collision Friday morning.

The turkey had been seen walking around Indiana 3 in the center of town and chasing down vehicles in a 45 mph speed zone for the past few weeks. Local residents called the turkey "Free Bird."

## Researchers work to free entangled whale

**MA** PROVINCETOWN — Researchers off the coast of Provincetown are trying to free an entangled North Atlantic right whale from fishing line wrapped around her jaw.

The Cape Cod Times reported the whale, dubbed "Kleenex," has had the fishing line wrapped around her jaw for three years. Researchers and scientists are working in the

Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary to remove it.

## Argument over dog leads to custody fight

**FL** MADEIRA BEACH — A rift between two former neighbors has resulted in them sharing custody of a Labrador retriever mix.

The Tampa Bay Times reported Tina Marie Walker and David Somerville lived next to each other in a Florida apartment complex when he drove her in 2016 to an animal shelter, where she adopted Elario.

When she worked, Somerville would take the dog for walks and to the dog park. He said he paid the dog's vet bills. That led to a rift over who really was the dog's owner, and Somerville sued Walker. A judge ruled recently that they are to share custody.

## Judge disparages defendants in court

**CA** PALM SPRINGS — A California judge who sentenced two men to life in prison for murder was secretly recorded during the trial calling them "a--holes" and "clowns" and saying he planned to make a ruling that would help the prosecution, a newspaper reported.

Riverside County Superior Court Judge David B. Downing made the statements in 2012, according to The Desert Sun of Palm Springs.

The comments were recorded on a defendant's laptop during a break in proceedings during jury selection for the trial of Kaushal Niroula and Daniel Garcia. They were among six men who pleaded guilty or were convicted in the death of Clifford Lambert, 74, a Palm Springs retired art dealer.

From wire reports

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# James still the man to beat in playoffs

Associated Press

LeBron James emerged from a chaotic, complex season unscathed — better than ever.

Still the NBA's undisputed king.

Despite no longer having Kyrie Irving at his side. Despite an injury-riddled season in which the Cavaliers' roster morphed twice and despite being surrounded by a supporting cast that included rookies and just three holdovers from Cleveland teams he dragged to three straight NBA Finals, James played every game and powered through his 15th pro season like it was another helpless defender in the lane.

By investing millions into maintaining his body and with a work ethic that has pushed him since childhood, James seems intent on challenging basketball's natural cycle of aging.

At 33, and on the eve of making a run at his eighth straight Finals, James is not slowing down. He remains the game's best all-around player, most dominant force. Still, the one to beat. Still, the player most capable of carrying a team to playoff victories. Still, the most likely player — sorry Messrs. Westbrook, Harden, Curry and

Durant — to make a play that wins a game or a series.

"It doesn't seem like he gets old," said Philadelphia 76ers coach Brett Brown. "He just doesn't go away."

While Cleveland's season was highly irregular, James had another brilliant one.

He averaged 27.5 points — his highest total since 2010 — and established career-highs in assists (9.1), rebounds (8.6) and played the full slate of games for the first time. He led the league in total points, minutes played, surpassed 30,000 career points, recorded 18 triple-doubles and was the league's second-leading scorer in the fourth quarter (7.5 points).

The three-time champion also extended his record of scoring at least 10 points to 873 games, a mark once owned by Michael Jordan (862), the player James has spent his entire adulthood being compared to and the one he has equaled on many measures.

Jordan was not done at 33, winning three more titles. But his game aged differently. Jordan relied more on jumpers as he got older and ceded tough defensive assignments to other Bulls. James continues to take

over games physically, particularly late, and he never hesitates to defend the opponents' toughest scorers. And the Bulls never counted on their general to rebound or dish out assists as the Cavs lean on James.

James has done it all amid a strange, soap-opera-like season for Cleveland, which endured injuries, illnesses, trades and tribulations from late last summer until early spring.

"As the Land Turns is what I call it," said Cavs coach Tyrone Lue, who returned from an illness just last week.

Following Wednesday's regular-season finale, James stamped this as-yet-unfinished season a personal triumph.

"It's the best I've felt all season and I've got the numbers to back it up and I've got the wins to back it up as well," he said. "I've just tried to be available to my teammates every single night and do everything that I could to win ball games. Either by scoring, by rebounding, by defending, by assisting, taking charges, whatever the case may be. Statistically it all speaks for itself."

While amassing those numbers, James has seemingly paused the aging process. Of

course, it helps that he has a nutritionist, personal trainer, masseuse, cryogenic chamber and 21st century technology to keep him one step ahead of Father Time.

James isn't done, not even close, and earlier this season he described re-writing the narrative that players in their early 30s have reached their prime.

As far as Brown's concerned, James is the new standard.

"I don't see any decline athletically and then watch it, the trend that he's now shooting and making 3s, so you feel that he just keeps getting better," Brown said before James scored 44 with 11 rebounds and 11 assists against the Sixers. "The fact that he can play that many minutes, that many games, seemingly not missing a beat. He is amazing."

"In my opinion, he is the best player to have ever played our sport. And he just keeps getting better. And I say that with tremendous respect to lots of other people. That's a hell of a comment that I don't throw out recklessly. And I just feel like his body of work makes me feel very confident and comfortable saying that. He's playing arguably his best basketball."

## Sixers roll past Heat without hurt Embiid

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Joel Embiid used some body english as he scampered down the baseline and tried to will Marco Belinelli's off-balance three-pointer through the net.

Belinelli buried it, because of course he would. Even the wild ones go in of late for the Sixers.

With their injured Embiid on the bench, the 76ers proved one more time in their biggest game in six years they can romp without their All-Star. Embiid wore a white mask as he rang a miniature Liberty Bell — then the Miami Heat got their bell rung in Game 1 of the first-round series.

Ben Simmons had 17 points, 14 assists and nine rebounds in his playoff debut, and the Sixers rolled to a 130-103 victory on Saturday night for their 17th straight win.

"I feel this group has something special

in it," coach Brett Brown said.

Led by four each from JJ Redick and Belinelli, the 76ers hit a team playoff-record 18 three-pointers (on 28 attempts).

The Sixers have stormed through the NBA since mid-March and the Heat were just another victim in a winning streak that includes nine straight without Embiid.

He was a spectator because of a broken orbital bone around his left eye and has remained hopeful from the outset he can return early in the series. The Sixers could end this one in a hurry with Embiid back in the lineup.

Simmons helped compensate for his absence and dished and dazzled in the paint.

The Heat also had no answer for Sixers super subs Ersan Ilyasova and Belinelli; the duo combined to hit four three-pointers in the third quarter that helped shift the tone from physical and foul-filled to a long-distance game that allowed the Sixers

to put away this one. They used a 15-0 run in the third in their first postseason game in five seasons under Brown to get the rout rolling.

Brown, who won championships as an assistant in San Antonio, won 47 games his first three seasons as the Sixers underwent the Process — and 52, plus Game 1 this season.

"The NBA playoffs is the greatest professor you've ever had," he said.

The 76ers aced their first test.

Redick, who said he briefly lost vision in his left eye following a hard fall early in the game, scored 28 points to lead the Sixers, who host Game 2 on Monday. Belinelli had 25 and Ilyasova 17.

Embiid ditched the black mask he's been wearing in light shooting drills for a white "Phantom of the Opera" mask to ring the ceremonial Liberty Bell before tipoff.



## NBA roundup

# Pelicans seize home-court advantage from Blazers

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — Anthony Davis stole the show and the New Orleans Pelicans stole home-court advantage from the Portland Trail Blazers.

Davis had 35 points, 14 rebounds and four blocks, Jrue Holiday and Rajon Rondo won the backcourt battle, and the Pelicans held on for a 97-95 victory on Saturday night in Game 1 of their Western Conference first-round series.

Holiday added 21 points, outplaying both Damian Lillard and CJ McCollum, and had a big blocked shot in the closing seconds as New Orleans escaped after Portland erased almost all of a 19-point deficit.

Rondo finished with 17 assists, eight rebounds and six points.

**Warriors 113, Spurs 92:** At Oakland, Calif., Kevin Durant helped the defending champions get defensive in a hurry, finishing with 24 points, eight rebounds and seven assists as Golden State returned to form at playoff time to beat cold-shooting San Antonio.

Durant, Draymond Green and Klay Thompson took charge in Game 1 of the first-round series to elevate the Warriors' intensity at last playing without fellow All-Star and injured two-time MVP Stephen Curry, sidelined since March 23 with a sprained left knee.

**Raptors 114, Wizards 106:** Serge Ibaka had 23 points and 12 rebounds, Delon Wright scored 11 of his 18 points in the fourth quarter, and host Toronto snapped a 10-game losing streak in playoff series openers by beating Washington.

DeMar DeRozan added 17 points, and Kyle Lowry had 11 points and nine assists for the Raptors, whose only previous victory in the opening game of a playoff series came in the second round against Philadelphia in 2001.

## NHL roundup

# Pastrnak, Bruins rout Leafs

Associated Press

BOSTON — David Pastrnak's first goal required a 180-degree spin as he settled down a bouncing puck, shifted it from his forehand to his backhand and flipped it into the net.

By the time he scored his second he had already added three assists.

And when the Bruins forward completed the hat trick, faking out a second goalie with a forehand deke before sliding the puck between his legs, it was just one more chance for the Boston fans to celebrate his playoff coming-out party.

"Six points in a Stanley Cup playoff game with a hat trick," coach Bruce Cassidy said Saturday night after the Bruins beat the Toronto Maple Leafs 7-3 to take a 2-0 lead in their best-of-seven, first-round series. "That's special."

Pastrnak shattered his previous career high of four points, scoring his third goal with 1:36 left to bring two trash cans full of caps and winter hats fluttering down to the ice. Only Wayne Gretzky (three times), Mario Lemieux and Patrick Sundstrom have recorded more than six points in an NHL playoff game.

"A lot of people in Boston already know how good he is," linemate Patrice Bergeron said. "I think people on the outside are getting to know."

Bergeron and Brad Marchand had four assists apiece, Torey Krug had three, and Tuukka Rask stopped 30 shots for Boston. David Krejci, Rick Nash, Jake DeBrusk and Kevan Miller also scored — the second straight game the Bruins had five different players with goals.

"It's not going to happen every night," Cassidy said. "At the end of the day, our guys do believe — from one to 12, I do believe our guys believe they can score."

Two nights after Frederik Andersen allowed five goals

in the series opener, he gave up three more on five shots in the first 12:13 before he was replaced by backup Curtis McElhinney. The Bruins added another power-play goal — their second of the night and fifth of the series — to make it 4-0 after one.

Mitch Marner, Tyler Bozak and James Van Riemsdyk scored for the Maple Leafs, who never got closer than three goals down after that. McElhinney stopped 19 of the 23 shots he faced.

The series moves to Toronto for Games 3 and 4 on Monday and Thursday.

**Predators 5, Avalanche 4:** Ryan Hartman's empty-net goal with 1:09 left wound up the winner as host Nashville held off Colorado for a 2-0 lead in the first-round Western Conference series.

After Hartman gave the Predators a 5-3 lead, Alexander Kerfoot pulled Colorado to 5-4 with 35.8 seconds left. But the Avalanche couldn't get another puck past goalie Pekka Rinne.

The Presidents' Trophy winners started slowly, giving up a goal on Colorado's first shot for a second straight game. Yet the Predators rallied again to take their first 2-0 lead when starting a best-of-seven series in their own building.

Kevin Fiala had a goal and an assist, and Viktor Arvidsson, Ryan Johansen and Austin Watson scored a goal apiece. P.K. Subban and Mattias Ekholm each had two assists for Nashville, which has won 12 straight over the Avalanche. Rinne made 26 saves. Nathan MacKinnon had a goal and an assist, and Gabriel Bourque and Gabriel Landeskog each added a goal for Colorado.

**Lightning 5, Devils 3:** Alex Killorn scored twice during a four-goal second period, helping host Tampa Bay to a 2-0 lead in the Eastern Conference series.

The Lightning scored three

times in a 2:47 span in the second period, and the reeling Devils pulled goalie Keith Kinkaid after Killorn's third goal in two games made it 5-1 with 6:48 remaining in the period. Kinkaid, whose stellar play since January helped New Jersey finish strong and claim its first playoff berth since 2012, yielded five goals on 15 shots.

Nikita Kucherov, Brayden Point and Tyler Johnson also scored for Tampa Bay, which is up 2-0 in the series after going 0-2-1 against the Devils during the regular season.

Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 41 shots, limiting the Devils to rookie Nico Hischier's unassisted goal in the opening period, Sami Vatanen's sixth career playoff goal late in the second, Blake Coleman's third-period tally that trimmed Tampa Bay's lead to 5-3 with eight minutes left.

**Sharks 3, Ducks 2:** Logan Couture had a goal and an assist, Martin Jones made 28 saves and San Jose excelled on the road again to take a 2-0 lead in their first-round playoff series.

Marcus Sorensen and Tomas Hertl also scored for the Sharks, who gave another disciplined, organized performance while moving halfway to their first playoff series victory since their Stanley Cup Final run in 2016. The Sharks also are halfway to their first playoff series victory over Anaheim, their longtime downstate rivals.

Hampus Lindholm had a goal and an assist for the Ducks, who are leaving Honda Center with an 0-2 series deficit for the third time in their last five playoff series.

Jakob Silfverberg scored in the opening minute and John Gibson stopped 32 shots as Anaheim dropped to 3-6 in its last nine home playoff games overall.



# Red Sox off to best start in 118 years

Associated Press

BOSTON — Red Sox rookie manager Alex Cora cracked a smile when asked how he felt when he learned it was the best start in team history.

“I just heard it for the first time,” Cora said after Boston beat the Baltimore Orioles 10-3 on Saturday to get to 12-2.

In 118 years, the Red Sox had never reached 10 games over .500 that soon. Only once — in 1918 — had Boston started 11-2.

“I’ve been saying it for a while — we’ve been playing good baseball for a while, regardless of spring training,” Cora said. “We’re playing clean and fast and pitching. We’re proud of what they’re doing.”

Hanley Ramirez hit a two-run homer and drove in three runs, Andrew Benintendi had a two-run single and an RBI double, and J.D. Martinez homered for the Red Sox.

“Our offense is doing what it’s doing, and our pitching and our defense is consistent. We’re dangerous,” Benintendi said.

Alex Cobb (0-1) was roughed up in his Orioles debut, giving up eight runs — seven earned — in 3<sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> innings. He signed a \$57-million, 4-year deal as a free agent on March 21 after spending all 11 years of his professional career in Tampa Bay’s organization.

“Just a little rusty,” Orioles manager Buck Showalter said. “Physically, he’s in good shape. He’s only going to get better. Tough conditions and a really good-hitting club swinging the bat well right now.”

Pedro Alvarez had a two-run homer for Baltimore, which has lost four of five.

Cobb felt he was ready and gave credit to Boston’s hitters.

“We did all we could do,” he said. “There is no replicating this. This is the best team in the world hitting right now, and you’re never going to get ready for that.”

Hector Velazquez (2-0) gave up two runs in five innings. Marcus Walden pitched the final three innings for his first big-league save.

The Red Sox started fast as they’ve done

frequently this season. They scored three in the first before making an out.

Mookie Betts opened with a walk and raced around to score on Benintendi’s double off the Green Monster, sliding ahead of a relay throw.

Ramirez then followed with his homer into the Monster seats, making it 3-0.

Martinez homered into Baltimore’s bullpen in the third.

Boston broke it open and chased Cobb with four more, making it 8-0 in the fourth. Benintendi hit his two-run single. Ramirez added an RBI double and scored on shortstop Manny Machado’s throwing error — his second of the game.

“We’re doing everything right and having fun,” Ramirez said.

**Eager to go:** Ramirez was back in the lineup after missing Friday’s game with a bruised right wrist from getting hit by a pitch a night earlier.

“He actually beat me to the ballpark. That’s a good sign,” Cora joked.

## MLB roundup

# Brewers put end to Mets’ nine-game streak

Associated Press

NEW YORK — After rolling along for nearly two weeks, the New York Mets met their match on the mound.

Chase Anderson breezed into the seventh inning on a windy Fireworks Night at Citi Field, and the Milwaukee Brewers stopped New York’s nine-game winning streak with a 5-1 win Saturday.

“Chase was outstanding,” Brewers manager Craig Counsell said. “He pitched a beautiful game.”

Jonathan Villar sliced a three-run homer inside the foul pole and Jett Bandy also went deep against Matt Harvey as Milwaukee finally cooled off the Mets (11-2) and improved to 6-2 away from home. Slumping shortstop Orlando Arcia came off the bench and homered in the ninth inning.

The only bad news for the banged-up Brewers: Ryan Braun was removed as a precaution in the fifth with back tightness.

“It was locked up the whole game,” Braun explained.

Asked if the cold weather was a factor, the slugger said: “Everybody deals with it, so it’s just part of April baseball.”

**Diamondbacks 9, Dodgers 1:** A.J. Pollock homered twice while Paul Goldschmidt and Alex Avila also went deep and visiting Arizona beat Los Angeles.

Arizona has beaten the Dodgers five times this season and in 11 consecutive regular-season games dating to August 2017.

**Pirates 1, Marlins 0:** Corey Dickerson’s bunt single in the ninth inning scored the only run and visiting Pittsburgh edged Miami.

**Phillies 9, Rays 4:** Jake Arrieta won his first game for Philadelphia and rookies J.P. Crawford and Scott Kingery drove in two runs each against host Tampa Bay.

It was the fifth straight win for the Phillies.

**Cardinals 6, Reds 1:** Cincinnati sunk to its worst start since 1931, losing its seventh in a row

when Greg Garcia hit two home runs to lead visiting St. Louis.

The Reds fell to a major league-worst 2-12. The Cardinals have won three in a row.

**Cubs 14, Braves 10:** Javy Baez had a three-run double as Chicago scored nine times in the eighth inning on just three hits in cold, wet and windy conditions at Wrigley Field.

The Cubs trailed 9-1 in the third inning, were still down 10-2 in the sixth and went into the eighth behind 10-5. Chicago then used five walks, two hit batters, an error and a wild pitch to come back against four Atlanta relievers — all nine runs scored after there were two outs.

**Rangers 6, Astros 5 (10):** Ronald Guzman’s first career homer tied the game in the eighth inning, and he put visiting Texas ahead with an infield single in the 10th as the Rangers rallied from five runs down to beat Houston.

**Padres 5, Giants 4:** Hunter Renfroe hit a go-ahead, two-run homer in the seventh, an

inning after his outfield assist prevented a run from scoring, and host San Diego beat San Francisco.

**Nationals 6, Rockies 2:** Max Scherzer dominated after an early hiccup, striking out 11 and retiring his final 20 batters as host Washington stopped a three-game skid.

Scherzer (3-1) issued a one-out walk in the first and Charlie Blackmon followed with a home run. That was all the Rockies managed in seven innings against Scherzer.

**Angels 5, Royals 3:** Mike Trout, Justin Upton and Luis Valbuena homered as visiting Los Angeles won its seventh straight, beating Kansas City as snow fell during the final innings.

**Mariners 10, Athletics 8:** Jean Segura hit a three-run homer, Mitch Haniger, Kyle Seager and Daniel Vogelbach all added solo shots, and Seattle battered Oakland pitching for 17 hits in the host Mariners’ win over the Athletics.