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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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North Korean leader showing lighter side

BY KIM GAMEL

Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — He joked about missile tests and expressed embarrassment about the state of his country's transit infrastructure.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un also hugged South Korean President Moon Jae-in and joined him in shoveling dirt to plant a pine tree during their historic summit Friday.

With nearly every move broadcast live on screens worldwide, Kim, 34, projected an image that was in sharp contrast to his reputation as a ruthless leader who presides over a regime that human rights groups say is one of the most repressive in the world.

South Korean presidential adviser Moon Chung-in, who attended the banquet that followed the formal talks, described Kim as "extremely friendly."

"He's just ordinary and normal. He has a charisma," the senior adviser said in an interview with CNN. "It's a new face of the current North Korean leadership. He is being very frank and honest."

The inter-Korean summit capped what skeptics have called a "charm offensive" by the North as it maneuvers for leverage in negotiations with the U.S. over its nuclear weapons program.

The stakes were high as the talks set the stage for a summit between Kim and President Donald Trump that's expected in coming weeks.

"I think Kim has a lot riding on this," said Ken Gause, who wrote a book about North Korean leadership dynamics. "I think that part of his personality syncs very well with President Moon. It will be interesting to see how well it jives with President Trump."

Analysts say Kim, who took power after his father died of

S. Korea's Moon says Trump deserves Nobel Peace Prize

BY KIM GAMEL

Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — President Donald Trump deserves a Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to end the crisis over North Korea's nuclear weapons, his South Korean counterpart said Monday.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in made his suggestion during a Cabinet meeting three days after his momentous summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

"President Trump should win the Nobel Peace Prize. The only thing we need is peace," he said in remarks confirmed by the presidential office.

The deadline for peace prize nominations was Feb. 1, and it's unclear whether Trump was among the candidates. The Norwegian Nobel Committee, which selects the winners, said last month that it had uncovered what appeared to be a forged

nomination for Trump. The matter was referred to Oslo police for investigation, according to media reports.

Trump is planning to hold his own summit with Kim in coming weeks.

One of Moon's mentors, former President Kim Dae-jung, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2000 for his so-called Sunshine Policy that led to the first inter-Korean summit that year with Kim's father.

Moon was responding Monday to a congratulatory message from Kim Dae-jung's widow, Lee Hee-ho, who said she believed Moon should get the peace prize. Instead, he said it should go to Trump, according to Reuters.

The winner of the annual Nobel Peace Prize recipient is announced in October. The opulent award ceremony is held Dec. 10, the anniversary of the 1896 death of the Swedish industrialist who created the prizes.

a heart attack in 2011, wants to present himself as a rational leader who should be treated as an equal on the global stage.

"He's really, really changing his tune," said Daniel Davis, a senior fellow with the Washington-based think tank Defense Priorities. "I think his intent is to show people around the world that, 'Hey, we're no longer the Hermit Kingdom. We want to engage.'"

The third-generation leader, whose family has ruled the North since it was founded in 1948, was all smiles Friday as

he shook hands with Moon, 65, at the border in the truce village of Panmunjom.

Moon said he had never been to the North, so Kim led him briefly across the concrete slab that marks the line that divides the peninsula. Kim also displayed a dark sense of humor. Alluding to last year's frequent early-morning missile tests, he said he understood that Moon had problems sleeping.

Moon replied that Kim's recent commitment to a testing moratorium meant he could now sleep well. The North Korean

leader replied, "I'll make sure that you can sleep soundly."

As the leaders posed in front of a painting of North Korean mountains, Moon expressed his desire to visit the location.

Kim responded that he "might experience some inconvenience or embarrassment due to the lack of transportation in the North compared to the South, but we'll do our best so that you can travel in comfort."

That was a rare admission of a problem in the communist state, where the Kim family dynasty is surrounded by a cult of personality that portrays it as godlike, and criticism can mean severe punishments.

Gause said people who have met Kim have long described him as highly intelligent and engaging, with a self-deprecating sense of humor. But he took over at about the age of 28 and had to fight to consolidate power, leading to a series of purges, including the execution of his influential uncle.

North Korean agents are suspected of masterminding the assassination of Kim's half brother last year in a Malaysian airport by having a nerve agent smeared on his face. Pyongyang has denied involvement.

Kim also has clamped down on individual liberties and freedom of movement in the country to prevent the flow of defectors.

Gause said the young leader was willing to employ brutal tactics to hold onto power, but his ultimate aim is to implement economic reforms and overcome the biting effects of international sanctions.

Kim, one of the world's most powerful millennials, has surrounded himself with likeminded officials to help pursue the dual policy known as "byungjin," which seeks military advances and economic growth.

ISIS claims twin bombings in Kabul

BY PHILLIP WALTER
WELLMAN

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Twin suicide bombings in Kabul on Monday killed more than 20 people, including nine journalists, while a separate attack in southern Kandahar province killed nearly a dozen children and injured eight NATO servicemembers.

The local Islamic State affiliate claimed responsibility for the Kabul blasts, the first of which occurred just before 8 a.m. just outside the Green Zone, near the National Directorate of Security, Afghanistan's top intelligence agency.

Pentagon: US troop killed in combat in Afghanistan

KABUL, Afghanistan — A U.S. servicemember was killed in combat in Afghanistan on Monday, the U.S. military said in a statement.

Another American troop was wounded in the same operation in the east of the country and taken for treatment to Bagram Airfield's hospital, where he is said to be in stable condition.

Several Afghan troops were also killed or wounded, the statement said.

The name of the U.S. servicemember killed is being withheld until 24 hours after the next of kin is notified, in accordance with Defense Department protocol.

— Phillip Walter Wellman

"It was a suicide attacker riding a motor bike," Interior Ministry spokesman Najib Danish told Stars and Stripes. "A half-

hour later there was a second attack nearby, where a number of journalists and some civilians had gathered to help the

victims."

Danish said the second attacker was disguised as a journalist and caused most of the casualties.

Shortly after the ISIS attack, the Taliban detonated a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device in Kandahar's Daman district.

Deputy police spokesman Matiullah Helal said the blast killed 11 children who were studying in a nearby mosque and that Romanian soldiers were among the injured.

All the wounded troops were in stable condition and taken to Kandahar Airfield's hospital for treatment, NATO said in a statement.

Australian ban on 'death symbols' is controversial

BY LEON COOK

Stars and Stripes

The U.S. military doesn't appear to be following Australia's lead in banning so-called "death symbols" such as the Jolly Roger, the Punisher, the Phantom, Spartans and the Grim Reaper.

Soldiers Down Under can no longer use such imagery on things such as informal patches and badges because of an order issued recently by Lt. Gen. Angus Campbell, the incoming Australian Defense Force chief who now heads the nation's

army.

Titled "Use of Symbols in Army," the directive is aimed at symbols that are "at odds with the Army's values and the ethical force we seek to build and sustain."

The skull and crossbones is linked with "maritime outlaws and murderers"; the comic book characters the Phantom and the Punisher promote "vigilantes"; Spartans encouraged "extreme militarism"; and the Grim Reaper is "the bringer of death," according to the order.

The order asked commanders

to "take immediate action to explain and remove such symbolology/iconography in any and all formal or informal use within our Army."

Campbell amended the directive Wednesday to allow commanders to seek exemptions to the ban.

The Pentagon, which didn't respond to inquiries about the issue, hasn't stated an intention to follow suit with a similar ban.

Army official emblems and nicknames are generally reserved for battalion-sized or larger units and don't usually in-

clude the sort of symbols targeted by the Australians. In smaller units, however, unofficial symbols that would fall under Australia's ban are commonplace.

In other services, so-called death symbols are featured on some official emblems. Marine reconnaissance battalions incorporate the skull and crossbones in their unit symbols, as do many aviation squadrons in the Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps.

Navy submarines have also been known to fly the Jolly Roger when pulling into port.

Top Navy NCO tells transgender troops he supports them

BY MARCUS FICHTL

Stars and Stripes

CHINHAE NAVAL BASE, South Korea — The Navy's top enlisted sailor expressed support for transgender servicemembers during a visit to South Korea last week.

"We are honored and blessed to have you on our team, and you will continue to have my support," Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Steven Giordano told Stars and Stripes in a comment directed toward

transgender troops following an all-hands call Friday at Chinhae.

Giordano's comment came a day after Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis went before lawmakers and defended a proposed Pentagon policy that would bar most transgender people from military service. The policy — approved by President Donald Trump in March — has not been enacted, pending the outcome of a series of lawsuits opposing it.

Mattis has recommended that the mili-

tary disqualify transgender people with histories or diagnoses of gender dysphoria, with some exceptions, as well as those who require or have undergone gender transition.

Giordano's sentiments echo similar comments the Army's top enlisted soldier made to Pentagon reporters in early April.

"We haven't heard any issues or concerns, and I personally have not had any issues or concerns," Sergeant Major of the Army Daniel Dailey said of transgender soldiers.

Marines wrap up largest US-led exercise in Africa

By MARTIN EGNASH
Stars and Stripes

The Marines wrapped up the largest annual U.S.-led exercise in Africa this past weekend in Morocco and Tunisia, where they trained with soldiers from around the continent on war games.

More than 1,000 servicemembers from 15 countries took part in the African Lion exercise, which began in mid-April. Among African nations participating were Morocco, Tunisia, Chad, Senegal, Egypt, Mauritania, Burkina Faso and Mali.

This year, the exercise focused on kinetic fighting and anti-terrorism techniques rather than peacekeeping, which was the focus in the past.

The change in the exercise's approach, several years in the making, stemmed from a desire by participating nations to get better training in countering violent extremists, said Marine Lt. Col. Winston Tierney, the lead exercise planner.

"Collectively, I think there was a shift in interest, as we've been doing peace and stability operations pretty consistently, and I think folks just wanted to look to see how well can we grow and expand the exercise and keep it relevant with the kinds of things that are going on in the world," Tierney said.

The Marines and international partners carried out mock battles across the region in the air and on land and sea. A counter-terrorism contingent of U.S. Marines based in Spain led much of the fighting on land, while U.S. aircraft mock-battled Moroccan pilots above. During a portion of the training, Moroccan mortars fired on targets on land to help identify enemy positions for U.S. naval and air support.

The exercise's new focus on war fighting did not deter participants from providing real-world humanitarian aid to many of those in need. As part of the exercise's humanitarian training, Utah National Guardsmen joined with Moroccan and Tunisian doctors to help more than 5,000 civilians with various medical conditions. The multinational medical staff provided glasses to many people with poor eyesight and even performed limited surgeries for people in dire need.

The exercise, co-sponsored by the United States and Morocco, has been going on in some form for the past 15 years.

"It was amazingly refreshing to see how people who have never met each other before, from all over the world, can work together so efficiently," Tierney said. "What an extraordinary representation of teamwork. In my opinion, it was the epitome of it."

Sex assault reports rise, yet fewer courts-martial

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Reports of sexual assaults made by servicemembers increased 10 percent in fiscal year 2017 from the previous year, but fewer troops faced courts-martial, as commanders often opted to punish offenders outside the court system, Pentagon data released Monday showed.

Of the 6,769 sexual assault cases reported last year, commanders found sufficient evidence to pursue disciplinary action in 2,218, according to the Pentagon's annual sexual assault report. Of the total cases reported, about 1,200 were outside Defense Department jurisdiction, according to the report.

Commanders referred charges to courts-martial in 774 cases, down from nearly 790 courts-martial in fiscal year 2016, when 6,172 sexual assaults were reported.

Meanwhile, commanders often chose other forms of punishment to reprimand servicemembers found to have committed sexual assaults or other crimes uncovered during sexual assault investigations, ac-

ording to the report. In 2017, 378 servicemembers faced administrative actions or discharges related to sexual assault investigations, up from about 260 in 2016. More so, 294 faced nonjudicial punishment in 2017, about the same as the previous year.

Nonjudicial punishment includes penalties outside the military justice system, which can include loss of rank and has the potential to end servicemembers' careers.

Pentagon officials said Monday that the decrease in cases prosecuted as courts-martial was not necessarily a negative sign. They insisted the increase in sexual assault reports reflected increasing willingness of servicemembers to come forward after assaults, and did not necessarily mean more assaults were occurring. Nathan Galbreath, the deputy director of the Pentagon's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, said many sexual assault cases in 2017 did not go to courts-martial because victims chose not to testify, opting to allow commanders to use the other forms of punishment if evidence showed the accused was guilty.

Panel seeks study of THAAD for Hawaii

Honolulu Star-Advertiser

A congressional subcommittee wants the Pentagon to look at the feasibility of permanently assigning a Navy warship to defend Hawaii against North Korean and other long-range missile threats along with moving a missile defense system here known as THAAD.

The steps, a first for Hawaii, come with optimism but also caution over North and South Korea's declared goal of "complete denuclearization" of the peninsula.

Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD, systems are already in Guam and South Korea and are capable of intercepting ballistic missiles inside or outside the atmosphere in their final, or terminal, phase of flight.

Rep. Tulsi Gabbard requested similar legislative language for what would amount to extra defenses for Hawaii in addition to ground-based missile interceptors in Alaska and California.

"Given the threat we face from North Korea, it's critical that we evaluate all available options to provide Hawaii with a multilayered defense," Gabbard said.

Fellow Hawaii Democrat Rep. Colleen Hanabusa noted the proposed legislative language requires congressional briefings

only on the feasibility of using THAAD and ship-based SM-3 missiles.

"Due in large part to the false missile alert which the people of Hawaii suffered through, I support these briefings so our residents and visitors can be assured our state is properly defended," Hanabusa said. "It is through these briefings that the public will be able to learn more about the capabilities of both the SM-3 and THAAD."

Hanabusa added that, to her knowledge, THAAD is not effective against an intercontinental-range ballistic missile.

"I have stated in the past that the protection of Hawaii from ICBMs is through the ground-based interceptors located in Fort Greely, Alaska, and Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif. I continue to believe this to be true," Hanabusa said.

She added she continues to support a new, powerful radar planned for the state.

The House Strategic Forces Subcommittee said Wednesday it wants the Pentagon to examine permanently assigning a Navy ship with ballistic missile shoot-down capability to the defense of Hawaii.

The report would be due by Sept. 15 and should address the technical capability and feasibility of the defensive approach, the subcommittee said.

Trump to speak at NRA event in Dallas

The Dallas Morning News

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump will speak Friday at the NRA convention in Dallas, a senior White House aide confirmed Sunday night.

Vice President Mike Pence had already agreed to appear at the annual gathering of the gun rights group.

Guns have been banned for Pence's appearance and will be banned for Trump's as well. It's routine for the Secret Service to ban weapons at events attended by the president, though gun control advocates have mocked the ban, calling it hypocritical in light of the gun lobby's push to allow guns in schools

and to expand the rights of gun owners.

The late addition of the NRA convention to Trump's schedule means the president plans two visits to Dallas in May. On May 14, he'll headline a fundraising dinner after a donor lunch in Houston earlier in the day.

On Thursday, the president will meet at the White House with members of the church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, where a gunman killed 26 people in a rampage in November.

This will be Trump's third straight appearance at the NRA's annual gathering. He has projected strong support for gun rights and enjoyed

backing from the NRA and its members.

But he alarmed gun rights advocates two months ago during a White House meeting on school safety when he called for confiscating guns from people with mental illness without waiting for a court order.

"I don't want mentally ill people to be having guns," he said. "Take the guns first, go through due process second."

Trump has ordered the Justice Department to ban bump stocks, the accessory used in the Las Vegas massacre last year that allows near-automatic rates of fire. Some gun enthusiasts have taken issue

with that proposal, calling it an infringement on their rights and an unfair and potentially unconstitutional move to deprive them of a device they'd paid hundreds of dollars for.

The shooter at the church in Sutherland Springs had been court-martialed, but the Air Force had neglected to report his records to the federal background database.

Trump supports legislation crafted by Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, to beef up reporting requirements to block gun sales to people disqualified by mental illness or criminal background — a move generally supported by gun rights groups.

US: No space for migrants seeking asylum at border

Associated Press

TIJUANA, Mexico — After traveling through Mexico with great fanfare for a month under the Trump administration's watchful eye, nearly 200 Central American migrants attempting to seek asylum in the United States were stopped in their tracks when border inspectors said a crossing facility didn't have enough space to accommodate them.

President Donald Trump vowed last week to "stop" the caravan, while Cabinet members said they would deliver a swift response. The asylum-seekers held firm, setting up a possible showdown.

In an anticlimactic twist, about 50 asylum-seekers were allowed past a gate controlled by Mexican officials to walk across a long bridge but were stopped at the entrance to the U.S. inspection facility at the other end. They were allowed to wait outside the building, technically on Mexican soil, without word of when U.S. officials would let them claim asylum.

Another 50 or so camped on blankets and backpacks in Tijuana outside the Mexican side of the crossing.

The asylum-seekers began the day with anticipation, traveling in red-and-white school buses under police escort to a beachfront rally in Tijuana, where a steel fence juts out into the Pacific Ocean. They sang the Honduran national anthem, and supporters on the San Diego side of the fence waved a Honduran flag.

After a final briefing from lawyers and minutes before the asylum-seekers were to begin a short walk to the border crossing, U.S. Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Kevin McAleenan announced that the San Ysidro border crossing, the nation's busiest, had "reached capacity" for people without legal documents and that asylum-seekers may need to wait in Mexico temporarily.

Trump has commented frequently on the caravan since it started in Mexico on March 25 near the Guatemala border and headed north to Tijuana. His broadsides came as his administration vowed to end what officials call "legal loopholes" and "catch-and-release" policies that allow people requesting asylum to be released from custody into the U.S. while their claims make their way through the courts, which can take years.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions has called the caravan "a deliberate attempt to undermine our laws and overwhelm our system."

The administration's stern warnings left organizers in disbelief that border inspectors were not ready for them.

"They have been well aware that a caravan is going to arrive at the border," Nicole Ramos, an attorney working on behalf of caravan members, said at a news conference. "The failure to prepare and failure to get sufficient agents and resources is not the fault of the most vulnerable among us. We can build a base in Iraq in under a week. We can't process 200 refugees. I don't believe it."

Jackson won't return as Trump's doctor

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Ronny Jackson, a Navy rear admiral whom President Donald Trump unsuccessfully nominated to lead the Department of Veterans Affairs, will not return to his role as the president's personal physician, a White House official said Sunday.

Jackson, who withdrew as Trump's VA pick last week, will remain on as part of the White House medical unit, the official added. Sean Conley, a Navy veteran who took over Jackson's responsibilities, will remain as Trump's personal doctor.

Jackson, a former combat physician who faced criticism that he was not qualified to oversee the VA, withdrew his nomination Thursday, after the office of Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., released allegations Jackson drank on the job, overprescribed medication and presided over a toxic work environment.

Jackson has denied the allegations against him, which have proved difficult to verify or disprove. Tester's staff has yet to release documentation supporting the accusations, and a Secret Service statement on Friday said the agency had found no evidence to support one of the specific allegations.

On Saturday, Trump called on Tester to resign. In a tweet, the president declared the allegations against Jackson "not true."

Tester is facing a tough Senate re-election campaign ahead of November's midterms, and the president made clear that he hopes to use the Jackson incident against Tester in the race.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Hangar tapped for airmail museum

IN FORT WAYNE — The U.S. House approved legislation designating a large aircraft hangar in Fort Wayne as the site of a proposed National Airmail Museum.

The legislation reauthorizes the Federal Aviation Administration for six years, but it also includes a provision from Republican Rep. Jim Banks, of Indiana, that designates the hangar at Fort Wayne's Smith Field as the National Airmail Museum.

The (Fort Wayne) Journal Gazette reported that Banks' amendment would prohibit using federal funds for development of the museum, which would be privately financed.

The National Airmail Museum would include aircraft displays, interactive exhibits, photography displays, a gift shop and a cafe.

5 injured as stolen big rig rams cars

CO DENVER — Authorities said the driver of a stolen tractor-trailer in northeastern Colorado rammed several occupied vehicles including two police cars and caused numerous injuries before being taken into custody.

Morgan County Sheriff Jim Crone said in a statement Sunday that five people including a Fort Morgan police officer were injured as the tractor-trailer careened through streets.

The events began Saturday night when the rig was stolen around Sterling and pursued by law enforcement through the communities of Brush and Fort Morgan. Authorities said the suspect eventually jumped from the moving tractor-trailer and ran into a house where he was taken into custody.

Town plans statue of a laughing Abe Lincoln

IL NAPERVILLE — A Naperville public art group plans on celebrating Illinois' bicentennial with a life-size statue of a laughing Abraham Lincoln in the Chicago suburb's Central Park.

Naperville Century Walk President Brand Bobosky told The Naperville Sun that the jovial, knee-slapping version of Lincoln is meant to show a different side of the 16th president.

The group has about \$50,000 for the statue and installation, about half the amount needed. Fundraising will continue through September.

Cat caught at airport after week on the lam

NY NEW YORK — A frisky cat that got loose at New York's Kennedy Airport was captured after more than a week on the lam.

WABC-TV reported that Pepper the cat was lured out of hiding early Saturday.

Pepper bolted from her owner on April 20 as they were preparing to board a flight to China. The owner was moving to China for a new job and had to leave without Pepper.

Pepper was spotted several times in nonpublic areas of the airport but eluded capture until Saturday.

Man mistakes wife for burglar, shoots her

FL WINTER GARDEN — Authorities in Florida said a man shot his wife twice when she went to the bathroom, saying he mistook her for a burglar.

Winter Garden police said the couple thought they heard

an intruder in the house, but after checking their suburban Orlando home, they both went to bed.

Local media reported the wife, Allison Simmons, got up to go to the bathroom and used her phone's light to find her way. When she got out of bed, she woke her husband, Nathan Simmons, who shot at her two times fearing it was the intruder they were seeking.

Allison was taken to a nearby hospital for treatment of non-life-threatening injuries.

Cops corral coyote after 2-hour pursuit

PA PHILADELPHIA — Philadelphia police captured a coyote after a two-hour chase.

The coyote was first spotted early Thursday in the city near Penn's Landing, along the Delaware River. Police and animal control officers eventually cornered and trapped the animal about 3 miles away in South Philadelphia under a large metal trash bin near a city school.

Officials will check on the animal's well-being. It eventually will be moved to a more suitable environment.

Woman is accused of faking cancer

NC RALEIGH — A North Carolina woman was arrested and charged with insurance fraud for falsely saying she had cancer and collecting more than \$230,000 from an insurance company.

The North Carolina Department of Insurance said in a news release that Susan Leigh Huebotter, 60, of Deep Run in Lenoir County, filed nearly 300 insurance claims for the disease she did not have.

Endangered sea turtles are released

MA BOSTON — Several sea turtles are back in the warm Florida surf following a long stay in Massachusetts.

Biologists from the New England Aquarium released 14 endangered and threatened sea turtles into the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Florida last week. The animals spent the winter near Boston recovering from illnesses.

The large loggerhead and Kemp's ridley sea turtles became stranded on Cape Cod beaches last November and December due to hypothermia in a failed attempt to migrate south.

They suffered life-threatening medical conditions that required months of rehab at the aquarium's turtle hospital in Quincy, just south of Boston.

Firm fined for selling lead-tainted jewelry

CA LOS ANGELES — A Los Angeles company that sold jewelry for children that contained dangerous levels of toxic lead and cadmium was fined \$1.6 million.

State officials said a judge approved the judgment in March against Luxy Accessory and its owner, Hyun Sook Kim.

The Department of Toxic Substances said Luxy sold jewelry, including some for children, with excessive lead and cadmium levels. One pendant was found to be 80 percent lead.

Luxy was one of several companies sued by the state attorney general's office six years ago for selling tainted jewelry. Authorities said repeated inspections showed Luxy continued to sell tainted jewelry until it was quarantined last year.

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LeBron, Cavaliers advance over Pacers

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — LeBron James walked sluggishly down a corridor inside Quicken Loans Arena following Game 7 surrounded by the usual squadron of security personnel, some business associates and his publicist.

Each step seemed a challenge. His eyes were heavy. He ached from head to toe. He wanted to lie down.

James was moving on to the second round of the NBA playoffs — almost on his hands and knees.

“I don’t think he’s appreciated enough for just how much energy he puts into every single game to do what he does,” Cavaliers forward Kyle Korver said of James. “It’s just unbelievable.”

Pushed to his physical limits by the Indiana Pacers, and barely helped by Cleveland teammates until they finally showed up when it mattered most Sunday in a 105-101 win, James willed the Cavs into the next round, where they’ll face the top-seeded Toronto Raptors for the third straight postseason.

If the Indiana series was any indication, James might have to do it again.

James scored 45 points — his third game over 40 in the series — and the 33-year-old added nine rebounds and seven assists in 43 exhausting minutes as the Cavs closed out the Pacers, a team they swept in the first round a year ago. James, who improved to 13-0 in the first round, would have played all 48, but he succumbed to leg cramps in the third quarter and had to go to the locker room for treatment and fluids.

But while he was out at the start of the fourth quarter, something unexpected happened. The Cavs didn’t collapse, and just maybe showed that they’re going to be a much different team when they face the Raptors.

As James caught his breath, Cleveland went on a 10-2 run. Kevin Love, who may have nightmares about Indiana’s big men for some time, hit a three-pointer, and George Hill, in the rotation after missing three games with back spasms, attacked the rim. By the time James checked back in, the Cavs had pushed their lead to 10 and only had to withstand one more charge to silence the Pacers.

For Cavs coach Tyronn Lue, the 3:35 stretch was vital. Not only did the Cavs survive without James, they thrived and potentially gained some confidence.

“That was big,” he said.

Even bigger was Lue’s decision to change his starting lineup once again. For the fourth time in the series, and 34th time this season, Lue used a different starting five. But unlike all the other combinations, this was one he could trust as he played the steady Korver along with James, Love, J.R. Smith and Tristan Thompson, the four players left from the 2016 championship team.

Lue, who has had to mix and match for months because of injuries and a roster revamped by trades, returned to a proven group, and the move paid off.

Thompson, who had played 24 total minutes in the first six games, made his first start since March 28 and scored 15 points

with 10 rebounds in a season-high 35 minutes. His presence made the Cavs better at both ends, and he brought an interior toughness that had been missing against the Pacers. He picked up two early fouls on Indiana’s Myles Turner, who fouled out.

“That’s the Tristan that we know,” James said. “That’s how he’s made his name in this league, by just being high motor and being able to outwork who’s ever across from him.”

Thompson could have an even larger role against the Raptors and their massive front line anchored by 7-foot center Jonas Valanciunas.

Hill’s return was critical for the Cavs, not only in Game 7 but going forward. With playoff first-timers Jordan Clarkson and Larry Nance struggling and Rodney Hood still not playing the way Cleveland needs, the 31-year-old Hill, who was on a minutes’ restriction in the series finale, gives Lue another dependable veteran. He was sorely missed for three games against Indiana.

Fortunately for the Cavs, James has been indestructible.

He averaged 34.4 points on 55.3 percent shooting, 10.1 rebounds, 7.7 assists and 1.4 steals during a series in which he played 41.4 minutes per game. With speculation rampant about where he’ll play next season, James made sure this one will continue.

“We’re a team and he goes to war for us every night,” said Thompson. “We’ve got to do the same thing.”

James could use the help.

Jazz defense no match for Harden, Rockets

Associated Press

HOUSTON — James Harden proved once again that Utah’s vaunted defense was no match for him.

Harden scored 41 points and the Houston Rockets raced out to a huge lead and sailed to a 110-96 win over the Jazz in Game 1 of the Western Conference semifinals on Sunday.

Houston was up by 25 at halftime behind 34 points combined from Harden and Chris Paul. The Jazz, who didn’t wrap up their first-round series with Oklahoma City until late Friday night, looked sluggish and struggled to keep pace with the top-seeded Rockets, who hadn’t

played since eliminating Minnesota on Wednesday.

The Jazz tied for second in the NBA in the regular season by allowing just 99.8 points, but failed to stop Harden in any of their meetings. Harden, who also had seven assists and eight rebounds, picked up where he left off in the regular season against the Jazz when he averaged 34.3 points, led by a 56-point performance in a 137-110 win in November.

“Their defense is really good — their defense is super,” Houston coach Mike D’Antoni said. “But James is James.”

Utah coach Quin Snyder seemed at a loss as to how to limit the MVP front-runner,

who had the sixth 40-point playoff game of his career.

“He’s a special player,” he said. “It’s hard to give credit to all the things that he does. He just impacts the game in so many ways.”

It was Houston’s fourth straight win by 10 or more points this postseason, and the Rockets have won their five games against the Jazz by an average of 16.8 points.

“We’re different,” Harden said. “We’ve seen so many different defenses throughout this year that have prepared us for this moment.”

Utah got 21 points each from rookie Donovan Mitchell and

Jae Crowder while playing without starting point guard Ricky Rubio, who sat with a strained left hamstring. It was a significant blow after he averaged 14 points, 7.3 rebounds and seven assists in the first round.

The Jazz haven’t said how long Rubio will be out, but multiple reports have indicated that it could be as many as 10 days.

Both the Rockets and the fifth-seeded Jazz are in the semifinals for the second straight year. The Rockets, who beat the Timberwolves in five games to advance, lost to the Spurs last season, and Utah was eliminated by Golden State.

Predators need 2OT to get past Jets

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — The Nashville Predators and Winnipeg Jets put on a fast-paced, thrilling playoff show that reminded everyone why they finished ahead of everybody else in the NHL's regular season.

Thanks to Kevin Fiala, the Presidents' Trophy winners go to Winnipeg breathing a little easier.

Fiala scored off a 2-on-1 5:37 into double overtime to give the Predators a 5-4 victory over the Jets on Sunday night in Game 2, tying the Western Conference semifinal series.

"Very happy that we won," Fiala said. "That's all that matters. It was a huge game for us to tie it up 1-1. It was very big for us."

Nashville had the NHL's best road record during the regular season, but the Predators got the split they needed before Game 3 on Tuesday night in Winnipeg where the Jets posted the league's best home record.

"It's huge, a big difference being 2-0 or 1-1," said Predators goalie Pekka Rinne, who had a

career playoff-best 46 saves. "Obviously, we'll take this. It was an emotional game, and now it's time to go on the road and we need to steal a couple of wins in their building."

Craig Smith and Fiala skated up on a 2-on-1, and Jets defenseman Dustin Byflugien failed to block Smith's cross-ice pass to Fiala who beat goalie Connor Hellebuyck with a backhander.

Ryan Johansen scored twice, Viktor Arvidsson had a goal and two assists, and P.K. Subban had a goal and an assist as Nashville won both its 100th postseason game as a franchise and coach Peter Laviolette's 50th with the team. Filip Forsberg also had three primary assists for the first time in the postseason in his career.

Laviolette said at one point in the second period the game looked like a track meet both teams were skating so fast. He noted the Jets finished just three points behind Nashville.

"They're a good team as well," Laviolette said.

Mark Scheifele scored twice and had an assist. Byflugien

had a goal and an assist, and Brandon Tanev had a goal for Winnipeg, which lost its first multiple-overtime game for a franchise that just won its first playoff series in the first round.

"It's a sucky way to lose, but we played a better game tonight than we did on Friday," Scheifele said. "That's a positive. We can be upset for 10 minutes and then after that, we've got to get our rest and then get ready for Tuesday."

Tanev tied it at 3, putting the puck past Pekka Rinne's right skate at 5:11 of the third. Johansen answered 34 seconds later, skating around Jets defenseman Toby Enstrom and beating Hellebuyck top shelf.

But Scheifele forced overtime with his fourth goal in this series and eighth this postseason with 1:05 left in regulation and Hellebuyck pulled for the extra attacker.

The Predators brought star Carrie Underwood in for the U.S. anthem as a "proud hockey wife" of Nashville center Mike Fisher, and Marcus Mariota brought the NFL's Tennessee

Titans offensive linemen to wave the rally towels. Pro Bowl left tackle Taylor Lewan held up a huge catfish before they chugged beers — Lewan using the catfish as a funnel.

After throwing up a postseason-high 48 shots in losing Game 1 on Friday night, the Predators wasted no time getting on the board this time. Johansen scored 27 seconds in on Nashville's first shot and a 1-0 lead, snapping Winnipeg's streak of 10 straight games scoring the first goal with the Jets going 9-1-0 in that stretch dating back to the regular season.

The Jets made up for that by scoring twice 29 seconds apart to grab the lead. Byflugien scored between Rinne's pads on a 4-on-4 at 12:47, and Scheifele made it 2-1 with a power-play goal at 13:16 of the period.

Subban tied it with a slap shot for Nashville's first power-play goal of the series and the Norris Trophy finalist's first goal this postseason at 5:04 of the second.

Capitals hold off Penguins to even series

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Braden Holtby spun around and saw the puck on the goal line. Maybe it was in. Maybe it wasn't.

But after mounting another two-goal lead and this time building on it instead of blowing it, the Washington Capitals made sure it wasn't close enough for one questionable call either way to make a difference. With fresh memories of coughing up that same lead in Game 1, this time they took it to the Pittsburgh Penguins and emerged with a 4-1 victory in Game 2 to tie the second-round series.

"You can see what happen last game when we get the lead 2-0 and they come back and win the game," said Alex Ovechkin, who scored his seventh goal of the playoffs. "They're experienced team, they're not going to give up and they're not gonna give easy play for us. We have to earn it. Today I think we play a solid game, everybody was in and we get the result."

It was a result that came with controversy and a potentially significant aftermath as

the two-time defending Stanley Cup champion-Penguins came out on the wrong side of a coach's challenge, the NHL's video review on what would have been their second goal and lost defenseman Brian Dumoulin after a hit to the head by Tom Wilson.

Holtby stopped 32 of the 33 shots he faced to frustrate the Penguins, robbing captain Sidney Crosby and linemate Jake Guentzel with sliding pad saves to continue his strong play in the postseason.

The Penguins thought he should've allowed one more goal to Patric Hornqvist in the third period. No definitive replays showing the puck over the goal line and Wilson's hit that injured Dumoulin left them steaming but also kicking themselves for starting slow and falling behind again.

"They won the game in the first period," Hornqvist said. "I don't think we played our best game. ... They were all over us."

After blowing three two-goal leads through the first seven games of the playoffs, Washington at least temporarily solved that problem. Ovechkin beat Matt Murray 1:26 in, Jakub Vrana scored on the

power play later in the first period and, unlike Game 1, the Capitals made it 3-0 when Brett Connolly scored on a breakaway early in the second.

"Game 1 it was tough, we played a really good game I think and they just kind of found a way to get some breaks and score some timely goals," Connolly said. "We learned from that this time around."

The Capitals are learning some about Murray, having now scored all five of their goals against him in this series. He made 18 of his 28 saves in the first period.

Murray was not the least bit happy when the league ruled Connolly's push on him moments before Vrana's goal was not enough to keep him from being able to make the save.

Pittsburgh had an even bigger reason to be angry when Wilson wasn't penalized for checking Dumoulin in the head with his left shoulder in the second. Dumoulin never returned and could potentially miss Game 3 on Tuesday.

A person with direct knowledge of the decision said there would not be a disciplinary hearing for Wilson.

MLB roundup

Kingham flirts with perfection

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Nick Kingham waited a long, long time to make it to a major league mound. When he finally got there, the moment was nearly perfect.

Kingham started out better than any pitcher in more than a half-century, taking a perfect game into the seventh inning of his big league debut and leading the Pittsburgh Pirates over the St. Louis Cardinals 5-0 Sunday.

Kingham retired the first 20 batters before Paul DeJong singled down the left-field line with two outs in the seventh.

“That’s how you plan it up, not to let anybody on,” Kingham said. “It’s incredible how it happened. Just kind of starting from the get-go, it went well. ... It’s corny, but it took everybody. I’m really fortunate and really happy about it.”

The Elias Sports Bureau said no pitcher in the Expansion Era — since 1961 — had taken a perfect game bid so far in his debut. Wayne Simpson of the Reds in 1970 and Ken Cloude of the Mariners in 1997 each set down their first 16 batters.

“I was like, ‘You know what, it was a good run, man. It was fun while it lasted,’” Kingham said.

Kingham was taken out after seven innings. He fanned nine and threw 98 pitches, 72 for strikes.

Giants 4, Dodgers 2: Cody Bellinger was Los Angeles’ best young player in 2017, a slugger who won Rookie of the Year honors, set a franchise record for newbies with 39 homers and drove in 97 runs.

On Sunday in San Francisco, Bellinger became the poster boy for what is wrong with the slumping NL champions.

Manager Dave Roberts benched him for what he called a lack of hustle after Bellinger pulled up while legging out a double in the fifth inning of the Dodgers’ loss to the Giants.

According to Roberts, Bellinger should have tried to go for third base on a ball that landed on the warning track in an area of AT&T Park known as Triples Alley.

“For me, he’s too talented of a player to do that,” Roberts said. “For Cody not to take third base, I would do no service to the team or him by not acting upon it. We’ve had discussions about it. If guys aren’t doing that, it’s on me.”

Bellinger, the only Dodgers player to have more than one hit in the game, disputed Roberts’ assessment but wasn’t upset.

“I’m always hustling,” Bellinger said. “It just didn’t make sense to me, but I get it as well. He’s trying to prove a point. I don’t think anyone can tell me how to play. I’ve always played hard.”

Yankees 2, Angels 1: Gary Sanchez hit a two-run homer, CC Sabathia pitched seven effective innings and visiting New York won its ninth straight game.

Red Sox 4, Rays 3: Sandy Leon hit a go-ahead RBI single with two outs in the eighth inning against Tampa Bay closer Alex Colome (2-3), helping the Red Sox snap the visiting Rays’ eight-game winning streak.

Cubs 2, Brewers 0: Tyler Chatwood pitched seven sparkling innings and helped himself with an RBI single, leading the host Cubs to a sweep of the four-game series between NL Central rivals.

Orioles 5, Tigers 3: Substitute starter Pedro Alvarez hit two home runs, Trey Mancini had a solo shot and the host Orioles beat Detroit for their first home series win of the season.

Blue Jays 7, Rangers 2: Kevin Pillar homered for the third time in two games, J.A. Happ (4-1) pitched seven innings to win his fourth straight decision and the host Blue Jays beat Texas to avoid a three-game sweep.

Mariners 10, Indians 4: Ryon Healy hit two home runs and had four RBIs, Robinson Cano and Mitch Haniger also homered for visiting Seattle.

Marlins 3, Rockies 0: Caleb Smith allowed two hits in seven innings for his first career victory, and the host Marlins took the rubber game of their low-scoring series against Colorado.

Braves 10, Phillies 1: Ronald Acuna Jr. doubled twice and reached base four times to cap a successful first week in the majors, and visiting Atlanta cruised with a new lineup.

Nationals 3, Diamondbacks 1: Gio Gonzalez struck out eight in seven strong innings, Matt Wieters and Michael A. Taylor homered and host Washington beat Arizona.

Astros 8, Athletics 4: Gerrit Cole struck out 12 while working into the seventh inning, George Springer and Jose Altuve each drove in two runs for host Houston.

Reds 8, Twins 2: Tyler Mahle pitched into the seventh inning in another impressive start, Jose Peraza had three hits and Adam Duvall homered, leading visiting Cincinnati past Minnesota.

Royals 5, White Sox 4: Cheslor Cuthbert homered twice and drove in four runs as the visiting Royals won consecutive games for the first time this season.

Mets 14, Padres 2: Adrian Gonzalez homered, doubled and drove in five runs against his former team, and Zack Wheeler struck out nine in five innings for visiting New York.

Logano snaps losing streak

Associated Press

TALLADEGA, Ala. — Joey Logano had a clear race track in his windshield and a pack of fellow Ford drivers on his bumper. That combination helped the Team Penske driver snap a nearly yearlong losing streak.

Logano won Sunday at Talladega Superspeedway to snap a streak that dated to April 30 of last year. That win at Richmond was later disqualified because his car failed inspection, so the benefits from the victory were stripped and it cost him a spot in the playoffs.

Out front at Talladega, which is usually the worst place to be in the closing laps, Logano couldn’t be caught. His Ford teammates were committed to getting a Ford the win, and they waited patiently in line until the closing laps to make their attempt at snatching the victory away from Logano.

Only Kurt Busch was bold enough to make an early move, and he wrongly thought defending race winner Ricky Stenhouse Jr. would go with him. Stenhouse didn’t get to Busch in time, Kevin Harvick wasn’t prepared for Busch to go so early, and Busch couldn’t garner enough steam to catch Logano.

Logano sailed to an easy victory at a track where he should have been forced to defend several attempts at a pass on the final lap.

“I really thought (Busch and Harvick) were the cars, no matter where they went, if they got to the outside of me, I was hosed. I knew that. That would have been the end of it for me,” Logano said. “I would have gotten passed by pretty much the whole train. I would have lost so much momentum. I knew they were going to work together, as they should. Once they got picked apart, think that was the game changer.”

It was Logano’s third career win at Talladega. Busch finished second, his career best finish at the track, as Ford drivers went 1-2.

Chase Elliott was third in a Chevrolet for Hendrick Motorsports, while Harvick was fourth in a Stewart-Haas Racing Ford. Stenhouse was fifth, David Ragan sixth and Aric Almirola seventh as Ford drivers took six of the seven spots.

Johnson losing streak: Seven-time NASCAR champion Jimmie Johnson’s losing streak hit 33 races when he finished 12th.

He was part of a 14-car accident late in the race when he slid in front of teammate William Byron to start the melee that knocked out two Team Penske cars — Brad Keselowski and Ryan Blaney — as well as second stage winner Paul Menard.

Johnson thought as he closed in on Byron, the air was taken off his Chevrolet.

“I was in the second lane and he came up near my lane and then packed air underneath us and around it went,” Johnson said.