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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Navy again defies China's claims on reefs

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The Navy sent two destroyers Monday to challenge China's claims to two reefs it has militarized without internationally recognized authority to do so, according to the Navy.

The USS Preble and USS Chung Hoon sailed within 12 nautical miles of the Gaven and Johnson reefs in the Spratly Islands “to challenge excessive maritime claims and preserve access to the waterways as governed by international law,” said Lt. Joe Keiley, a 7th Fleet spokesman.

China first took possession of the reefs in 1988 and has built military infrastructure on them since 2014, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative.

A United Nations panel in 2016, ruling in a case brought by the Philippines, rejected China's claims to sovereignty over

the Spratly Islands. Parts of the same territory are also claimed by the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam and Taiwan.

The Spratlys, a cluster of more than 100 small islands and reefs, together measure less than 3.1 square miles. They encompass desirable fishing grounds and oil and gas deposits, according to the Council on Foreign Relations, a nonpartisan think tank.

The region has become an arena for displays of power projection.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang at a Monday press conference said the Chinese Navy “warned off” the Preble and Chung Hoon as they sailed by the reefs, according to a transcript of the briefing.

“The trespass of US warships is a violation of China's sovereignty,” he said. “It undermines peace, security and good order in the relevant waters. China deplores and firmly opposes such moves.”

Geng called the so-called freedom-of-

navigation operations “provocations” during the press briefing, urging the U.S. to end them and “respect China's sovereignty and security interests and regional countries' efforts to safeguard peace and stability in the South China Sea.

“China will continue to take all necessary measures to defend national sovereignty and security, and safeguard peace and stability in the South China Sea,” he said, according to the transcript.

The Monday mission was the third of its kind and seventh overall freedom-of-navigation operation challenging Chinese claims this year.

The USS McCampbell destroyer sailed within 12 nautical miles of the Paracel Islands in January, and the Preble and destroyer USS Spruance passed within 12 nautical miles of the Spratlys in February.

The Navy has also sent ships on freedom-of-navigation operations through the Taiwan Strait four times this year, most recently on April 28.

Gulf carrier moves precede anniversary of nuke deal withdrawal

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — A sudden White House announcement that a U.S. aircraft carrier and a bomber wing would be deployed in the Persian Gulf to counter Iran comes just days ahead of the anniversary of President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw America from Tehran's nuclear deal.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani is said to be planning a speech Wednesday on the anniversary to discuss the next steps Tehran will take in confronting the U.S. Officials in the Islamic Republic previously warned that Iran might increase its uranium enrichment, potentially pulling away from a deal it has sought to salvage for months.

The military has almost always had an aircraft carrier in the Persian Gulf as part of its

sprawling military presence in the strategic region, but had begun to scale back its presence as the air campaign against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria wound down.

Sunday night's statement from national security adviser John Bolton said the USS Abraham Lincoln, other ships in the carrier's strike group and a bomber wing would deploy to the Mideast. The Washington Post reported Tuesday that the Air Force bombers heading there are B-52s.

Bolton blamed “a number of troubling and escalatory indications and warnings,” without elaborating.

In Iran, the semiofficial ISNA news agency on Monday quoted an anonymous official as saying that Rouhani planned a broadcast address Wednesday and may discuss the “counteractions” Tehran will take over

America's withdrawal from the nuclear deal. It said Iranian officials have informed their European counterparts — with whom Iran has been trying to salvage the agreement — of the planned speech.

A spokesman for Iran's Supreme National Security Council, Keivan Khosravi, also dismissed Bolton's comments as “psychological warfare.”

Iran's hard-line Javad newspaper, associated with the Revolutionary Guard, said Wednesday would “ignite the matchstick for burning the deal.” It suggested in its Tuesday edition that Iran may install advanced centrifuges at its Natanz facility and begin enrichment at its Fordo facility, activities prohibited under the nuclear deal.

The United Nations' nuclear watchdog says Iran has continued to comply with the terms

of the 2015 nuclear deal, which saw it limit its enrichment of uranium in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions. But American sanctions have wreaked havoc on Iran's already anemic economy, while promised help from European partners in the deal haven't alleviated the pain.

It's unclear what specific threat American officials perceive coming from Iran.

The USS Abraham Lincoln had been in the Mediterranean Sea conducting operations alongside the USS John C. Stennis, another aircraft carrier that has twice been in the Persian Gulf in recent months.

However, American military officials have stopped the near-continuous presence of aircraft carriers in the Persian Gulf, a pattern set following the 1991 Gulf War.

Lost in translation

No, Australian soldiers aren't banned from using slang around US Marines

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

Reports of a ban on Australian slang might have had some Bruces and Sheilas whinging about watching their gobs around U.S. Marines this summer, but officials say the media accounts weren't fair dinkum, mate.

Aussie troops will be allowed to speak English colloquially, although officials have cautioned that it could cause confusion among their American counterparts, hundreds of whom began arriving last month in the Northern Territory for the eighth and largest annual summer rotation since 2012.

The Marines and sailors, who by July are expected to number 2,500, are slated to take part in several exercises before heading home in October. It's a chance to hone skills and to strengthen ties while working through possible differences in lingo.

"We have lost-in-translation moments more than you would

realize," Australian Air Force Group Capt. Stewart Dowrie told the country's 10 Daily last week. "The time to figure that out is not on the battlefield when the bullets are flying."

For example, the phrase "lucked out" can mean someone benefited from fortune to the Americans or exactly the opposite to the Australians.

Dowrie, deputy commander of Australia's Northern Command, said military training scenarios call for "very prescriptive means of communication."

But something about his comments got tangled when local media reported that the military had forbidden Australian Defense Forces members from using slang during training with the Americans.

"Soldiers have not been banned from using colloquialisms around United States Marines," an ADF spokesman said via email Tuesday. "In the quote ... Group Captain Dowrie uses the potential to misinterpret each nation's everyday language as an example to

highlight how training together improves understanding and interoperability."

Denizens of the Down Under take special pride in their patois, and from time to time have expressed anxiety about its erasure, Amanda Laugesen, director of the Australian National Dictionary Center and associate professor at the Australian National University, said in a phone interview.

"It's become part of the Australian identity," she said. There is "a self-perception that we use slang more. ... We certainly kind of celebrate it."

Some phrases can mean both one thing and its opposite. "Good oil," for example, can refer to information that's helpful and true, but in another context it can mean something that's false.

Other terms that might confuse the Americans include "dag," a reference to a socially awkward person, or "bludger," a slacker who depends on others, she said. "She'll be right" isn't about girl power, it means everything will work out fine,

so don't "crack the sh-ts" or get angry.

Australian military slang also has a proud tradition.

The informal term "diggers," for example, born during the World War I Gallipoli Campaign to refer to members of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, has become "very entrenched" as part of the ANZAC mythology, she said. It's now commonly used to refer to all Australian servicemembers.

Laugesen has researched the issue of cross-cultural communication, with special attention on the experiences of the country's servicemembers during the world wars.

Sometimes, ANZAC members confounded other English-speaking troops with their language, she said. During World War I, a story was published about a pair of blokes speaking in long strings of aboriginal place names, claiming they were speaking a local tongue, just to mess with British troops.

Trump pardons ex-soldier convicted of murdering Iraqi

The Washington Post

President Donald Trump has pardoned Michael Behenna, a former Army lieutenant who served five years in prison for the murder of an Iraqi prisoner in 2008.

Behenna, who was an Army Ranger in the 101st Airborne Division, was convicted of unpremeditated murder in a combat zone and was sentenced to 25 years after killing Ali Mansur, a detainee and suspected al-Qaida member. Behenna, who stripped Mansur naked, interrogated him without authorization and then shot him twice, has claimed repeatedly that he was acting in self-defense.

In a Monday evening statement, the White House announced Trump's decision

to sign an executive grant of clemency, which amounts to a full pardon, citing support from the military community and Oklahoma elected officials, some of whom had recently renewed a public campaign for the president's order. Behenna, the statement said, was "entirely deserving."

The former soldier, now 35, fought to overturn his conviction on the grounds that the prosecution had hid evidence that would have benefited his case. The judge denied the effort, but Behenna's sentence ultimately was reduced to 15 years, and he was released on parole in 2014. Before Trump's pardon, Behenna faced another five years of parole.

U.S. forces took Mansur into

custody shortly after a roadside bomb struck a convoy traveling north of Baghdad, killing two of Behenna's friends and platoon members. An intelligence report linked Mansur to the attack, but he was freed when the military couldn't find conclusive evidence of his involvement, according to Behenna's pardon application.

Behenna was then ordered to transport Mansur back to his village. Instead, Behenna took him to a secluded railroad culvert and demanded more information from him.

At his 2009 court-martial, Behenna said Mansur had lunged for his weapon during the interrogation.

"I was scared Ali Mansur was going to take my weapon

and use it against me," he said then. "This happened very fast."

Since his conviction, Behenna, an Oklahoma native, has won the support of former Gov. Mary Fallin, a Republican; state Attorney General Mike Hunter, a Republican; and more than 30 retired generals and admirals — among them Trump's former special envoy for the Persian Gulf, retired Gen. Anthony Zinni.

Late Monday, Oklahoma's U.S. senators, Republicans James Lankford and Jim Inhofe, praised Trump's decision.

"I'm grateful that the long road for Michael Behenna and his family has finally come to a joyous end," Lankford said in the joint statement.

DOD review pits Boeing against Lockheed

Bloomberg

The Pentagon is assessing whether Boeing's heavy-lift helicopter for the Army, the CH-47 Chinook, could replace Lockheed Martin's troubled King Stallion chopper for some or all Marine Corps missions, according to officials.

Boeing has provided the Defense Department information on how the Chinook might be adapted for Marine Corps missions, according to two officials, both of whom asked not to be identified because the information isn't public. Analysts from the Pentagon's independent cost analysis and program assessment group met at Boeing's Philadelphia facility April 25 to review the data, the officials said.

A Pentagon decision to direct the Navy to buy maritime versions of the CH-47 — assuming the chopper can be converted for the rugged, corrosive environment of aircraft carriers and amphibious warfare ships — would be a blow to Bethesda, Md.-based Lockheed. The Navy's plans to buy 200 King Stallions, known as the CH-53K, were a prime motivation for the company's \$9 billion acquisition of Sikorsky Aircraft from United Technologies Corp. in 2015.

Bill Falk, the King Stallion's program director, said he was aware of the review and was confident his company's helicopter remains the Navy's best choice.

"There is simply no other helicopter that comes close to the performance of the CH-53K or that can meet Marine Corps re-

quirements," he said.

That view was echoed by Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Steven Rudder, the service's deputy commandant for aviation, who said the King Stallion is the only aircraft with the heavy-lift capability "to meet future operational requirements."

Boeing's Philadelphia plant and its 4,580 workers would receive a major boost if the Pentagon shifted direction given that the Army, in its new five-year budget plan, proposed halting procurement of 28 CH-47 Chinooks and shifting an estimated \$962 million into a separate program.

The Pentagon assessment was begun after an April 4 request from Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman James Inhofe, R-Okla., who cited continuing technical problems and delays with the \$31 billion King Stallion program.

Inhofe's request called for an assessment of the CH-53K's cost, schedule and performance and "an assessment of alternatives for other platforms that might meet the mission," Robert Daigle, director of the cost analysis office, said in an interview last week. The Chinook "is one of those alternatives," he added.

The Pentagon review also comes just before the Navy plans to award a production contract for as many as 14 new King Stallions this month; so far, only two of the planned 200 helicopters are under contract.

"We have a limited amount of time to try

and inform that decision as much as possible — so we have a very short window in which to do the best job we can on this analysis," Daigle said. He added that he wants to complete it in "a handful of weeks."

Still, converting the CH-47 for Marine missions would "absolutely not" involve simple modifications, Daigle said. "The analysis we've done so far doesn't suggest that the '47 is actually going to meet the lift that the '53K will provide, so if you were going to go down the '47 route, our current estimate says there will be an operational impact."

Pentagon officials, the Navy and Marines will have to determine whether that trade off is worthwhile, he added.

Todd Blecher, a spokesman for Chicago-based Boeing, said in statement that the Chinook already "conducts ship-based operations for U.S. Special Forces and international operators, and enjoys a strong reputation among all the U.S. services. We appreciate this opportunity to discuss how it could affordably address missions and requirements beyond those for which it is normally considered."

The Navy acknowledged in the Pentagon's latest Selected Acquisition Report to Congress that the King Stallion won't meet its December target date for initial combat capability. The new tentative date is September 2021, according to the document obtained by Bloomberg News.

Remains of 3 pets recovered from plane in river on Jacksonville NAS

Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — Deceased pets have been recovered from a chartered jet that ran into a river at a Florida military base.

Naval Air Station Jacksonville said in a statement late Sunday that a dog and two cats were recovered in their carriers from the Boeing 737 that skidded into the St. Johns River after landing at Naval Air Station Jacksonville.

None of the 143 human passengers and crew members had serious injuries from the landing Friday night.

Despite trying twice, rescuers were unable to remove the pets from the cargo area immediately after the landing because that section of the plane was underwater. Divers were sent in Sunday to retrieve the animals.

Base officials said another cat that flew in the plane's cabin was safely removed by the cat's owner.

Meanwhile, the operator of the plane on Monday offered \$2,500 to each passenger as a "goodwill gesture."

Miami Air International made the offer to the 136 passengers in an open letter from the airline's CEO expressing regret for what happened. The Boeing 737 was traveling from Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, when it landed at the Florida base, skidding into the river.

Passengers lined up on the plane's wings while they waited for rescuers, who arrived within a few minutes.

"We understand and appreciate the difficult experience you endured," wrote CEO Kurt Kamrad.

Va. police: 3 Navy corpsmen dead in double murder, suicide

PORTSMOUTH, Va. — Authorities in Virginia said they're investigating the shooting deaths of three active-duty sailors in what appears to be a double murder and suicide.

The Virginian-Pilot reported Tuesday that the two women and one man were Navy corpsmen.

The two women were stationed at Naval Medical Center Portsmouth. The man was stationed at Camp Lejeune, N.C.

Police said the two women were shot to death at a 7-Eleven in Portsmouth late Saturday night. The man was found with a self-inflicted gunshot wound in a car parked nearby.

Naval Criminal Investigative Service identified the women who died as Shianne Soles, 19, of Veradale, Wash., and Meaghan Burns, 23, from Massachusetts.

NCIS identified the man as Donavon Moora, 22, of New York.

From The Associated Press

McConnell says 'case closed' on Mueller investigation

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell is declaring “case closed” on the Russia probe and potential obstruction by President Donald Trump.

The Republican leader, in his most significant public comments yet on the investigation, is expected to outline in a Tuesday speech how special counsel Robert Mueller’s “exhaustive” probe went on for two years and is now complete. The remarks are being billed as his final thoughts on the topic.

“It’s finally over,” McConnell is expected to say.

Republicans, taking their cues from Trump, are eager to push past the investigation as Democrats are pressing for further oversight of the White House and the president’s handling of the Mueller probe.

McConnell is expected to question if others are ready to

move on from the “breathless conspiracy theorizing?” The Kentucky senator will suggest he doubts so.

On Tuesday, House Democrats were set to meet with Attorney General William Barr as they negotiate to see a full, unredacted Mueller report.

The House Judiciary Committee is poised to vote to hold Barr in contempt of Congress for the Justice Department’s failure to comply with a subpoena to turn over the report and its underlying documents. That vote could happen as soon as Wednesday.

It’s the opening salvo in what could be a lengthy, acrimonious court battle between House Democrats and the Trump administration over Mueller’s findings.

Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler said late Monday that he hopes to make “concrete progress” toward resolving the dispute over gain-

ing access to the report.

Nadler, D-N.Y., has cited the Justice Department’s failure to provide the full text of Mueller’s report by the Monday morning deadline. He said Barr’s failure to comply with a subpoena left Democrats with “no choice but to initiate contempt proceedings.”

The movement to hold Barr in contempt reflects the deepening rift between Democrats and Barr, whom they accuse of spinning the results of Mueller’s investigation to Trump’s benefit. Barr, in a memo summarizing Mueller’s investigation, said there was insufficient evidence that Trump obstructed justice, a conclusion Democrats fiercely dispute.

The committee said contempt proceedings could be postponed if the attorney general makes a “good faith” effort to comply with the committee.

Ga. governor signs early abortion ban

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Georgia’s Republican Gov. Brian Kemp signed legislation on Tuesday banning abortions once a fetal heartbeat can be detected. That can be as early as six weeks, before many women know they’re pregnant.

Kemp said he was signing the bill “to ensure that all Georgians have the opportunity to live, grow, learn and prosper in our great state.”

The signing caps weeks of tension and protests at the state Capitol, and begins what could be a lengthy and costly legal battle over the law’s constitutionality.

Anti-abortion activists and lawmakers across the country, energized by the new conservative majority on the U.S. Supreme Court that includes President Donald Trump appointees Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh, are pushing abortion bans in an attack on the high court’s 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling, which legalized abortion nationwide until a fetus is developed enough to live outside a woman’s uterus.

Staci Fox, the president and CEO of Planned Parenthood Southeast, said she has “one message for Governor Kemp: We’ll see you in court.”

Fox’s statement says Planned Parenthood also will campaign to unseat the lawmakers who supported the bill: “They will be held accountable for playing politics with women’s health.”

Under current law, women in Georgia can seek an abortion during the first 20 weeks of a pregnancy. If it’s not blocked in court, the new ban would take effect Jan. 1, 2020.

HB 481 makes exceptions in the case of rape and incest — if the woman files a police report first — and to save the life of the mother. It also would allow for abortions when a fetus is determined not to be viable because of serious medical issues.

FBI chief to lawmakers: No evidence agency spied on Trump '16 campaign

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — FBI Director Chris Wray said Tuesday that he does not consider court-approved FBI surveillance to be “spying” and said he has no evidence the FBI illegally monitored President Donald Trump’s campaign during the 2016 election.

His comments at a Senate Appropriations subcommittee hearing broke from Attorney General William Barr, who said last month that he believed the Trump campaign had been spied on during an investigation into potential collusion with Russia. Trump seized on that comment as part of his allegation that the investigation

was tainted by law enforcement bias.

Asked by Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., if he would say the FBI is “spying” when it investigates suspected terrorists and mobsters, Wray replied, “Well, that’s not the term I would use.”

He added: “I believe that the FBI is engaged in investigative activity, and part of investigative activity includes surveillance activity of different shapes and sizes. And to me, the key question is making sure that’s done by the book, consistent with our lawful authorities. That’s the key question. Different people use different colloquial phrases.”

Wray declined to discuss

in detail the FBI’s investigation into the Trump campaign because of an ongoing Justice Department inspector general investigation into the origins of the Russia probe. Barr has said he expects the watchdog report to be done in May or June. But asked whether he was aware of evidence that the FBI had illegally spied on the Trump campaign, Wray said, “I don’t think I personally have any evidence of that sort.”

Barr is also investigating whether there was a proper basis for the FBI to open a counterintelligence probe into ties between the Trump campaign and Russia.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man admits faking death for insurance

MN ST. PAUL — A Minnesota man accused of faking his death eight years ago in Eastern Europe to collect a \$2 million life insurance policy has pleaded guilty.

The St. Paul Pioneer Press reported that Igor Vorotinov, 54, formerly of Maple Grove, is to be sentenced for mail fraud on July 29 in U.S. District Court.

Authorities alleged Vorotinov in 2011 arranged for a corpse to be dressed in his clothes and planted his identification on the body before placing it along a road in the former Soviet republic of Moldova. An insurance company sent his ex-wife a \$2 million check in 2012.

Irina Vorotinov pleaded guilty in 2016 to fraud charges and was sentenced to about three years in prison. Igor Vorotinov was arrested in November 2018.

Newly found mastodon bones now at museum

IN INDIANAPOLIS — The large bones of a mastodon found last month in southern Indiana are becoming part of the Indiana State Museum's collection of the ancient, elephantlike mammals.

Workers found most of a tusk, two limb bones and a jawbone with teeth while installing sewer lines across a farm near Seymour, about 60 miles south of Indianapolis.

State museum officials said the bones are estimated to be between 10,000 and 13,000 years old and from a mastodon standing about 9 feet tall.

The bones will be available for future exhibitions at the downtown Indianapolis museum.

Pesticide suspected in bald eagle deaths

MD BALTIMORE — A once-common farm pesticide may be to blame for dozens of bald eagles poisoned over the past three years in Maryland and Delaware.

The Baltimore Sun reported that U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service data shows pesticides were a suspected or confirmed factor in about 50 deaths of the national bird between 2008 and 2017.

Maryland Natural Resources Police Lt. Roy Rafter said the illegal chemical carbofuran killed some of the birds.

Authorities said they think old stocks of the pesticide are being used to kill foxes and other farm pests, and it harms the eagles that scavenge the dead animal remains.

Police: Man donned wig to evade arrest

FL VIERA — A drug suspect on Florida's Space Coast tried to elude deputies setting up a perimeter around his house for a bust by bicycling away disguised in a woman's blond wig.

The Brevard County Sheriff's Office said the man was wanted by a fugitive task force seeking suspects from a major drug investigation that led to arrest warrants for more than 100 defendants. He faces charges of solicitation to sell a controlled substance and criminal conspiracy.

Boy arrested after video game argument

KS WICHITA — Authorities said a 12-year-old boy was arrested after throwing a knife at a 9-year-old boy when they got into an argument

while playing video games.

The Wichita Eagle reported that the 9-year-old and his 13-year-old brother were in the home of the 12-year-old when the argument erupted Saturday night. Police said the younger boy was taken to a hospital with a minor cut to his back.

Police said the 12-year-old was arrested early Sunday on suspicion of aggravated battery and aggravated assault.

Police: Man stole soap, hit store worker

NY NEW YORK — Police said a man slugged a worker who caught him stuffing a bar of soap down his pants at a New York City pharmacy.

The New York Police Department released a video Saturday of the person in the April 1 incident and asked for the public's help in tracking him down.

Police said the soap swiper fled after punching the worker in the face several times at Rite Choice Pharmacy in the Bronx. The 60-year-old worker refused medical attention.

Change in water flow boosts bugs for fish

AZ FLAGSTAFF — An experiment to change the flow of water from a dam near the Arizona-Utah state line upstream from the Grand Canyon appeared to boost the number of aquatic insects that fish in the Colorado River eat.

Scientists hope to better understand those results with a second bug flow experiment that started this month.

They found that releasing low, steady flows of water from Glen Canyon Dam gives the eggs that bugs lay on rocks, wood or cattails just below the water's surface a better chance of survival.

The bug flows are part of a

larger plan approved in 2016 to manage operations at the dam. It allows for high flows to push sand built up in Colorado River tributaries through the Grand Canyon and other experiments that could help non-native trout.

Collector gives rare comic books to school

SC COLUMBIA — Superman, Wonder Woman, Iron Man and Thor are all together at last.

The University of South Carolina Libraries said it has received a gift of more than 180,000 comic books and related materials from lifelong collector Gary Lee Watson.

Now known as one of the largest comic book collections in the U.S., it contains a variety of materials including 143,000 unique comic books, 20,000 magazines, 15,000 paperbacks and much more. School officials said an exhibit at the library will start on Aug. 29.

Funds sought to fix damaged war statue

MS VICKSBURG — A recent tornado in Mississippi damaged one of the monuments dedicated to Union soldiers who fought in the Civil War.

Now, a group is trying to raise about \$15,000 to repair the 111-year-old Rhode Island Memorial in Vicksburg National Military Park.

"We had a donor come forward to pay half and direct a dollar-per-dollar match for any donor that comes forward and donates specifically for the cause," Bess Averett, director of Friends of the Vicksburg National Military Park and Campaign, told the Vicksburg Post.

From wire reports

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Marlins on pace for worst season yet

Associated Press

MIAMI — Derek Jeter says the Miami Marlins are better than this.

If he's wrong, the woebegone franchise is headed for its worst season yet.

The Marlins began the week with the worst record in the majors at 9-24 (.274), which put them on pace to finish 44-118. That's bad, even for a franchise that hasn't had a winning season since 2009 and hasn't been to the playoffs since 2003.

Manager Don Mattingly said he tells his players to stay positive, but "it's hard to say everything is great when you're 9-and-whatever," he said. "I don't even know what we are. I know it's not very good. It's not a great feeling."

It's a new feeling for Jeter, the perennial postseason presence for two decades as the shortstop for the New York Yankees. In his second season as Marlins CEO, Jeter is rebuilding the franchise from the bottom up.

There are signs of improvement in a farm system bereft of talent when Jeter's group bought the franchise 19 months ago. Trades swung by Jeter and president of baseball operations Michael Hill helped to restock the minors, and the outlook is especially bright regarding young pitching.

But the big league team has backslid since Jeter took over, in part because he traded away All-Stars Christian Yelich, Giancarlo Stanton, Marcell Ozuna, Dee Gordon and J.T. Realmuto.

The Marlins appear headed for their first 100-loss season since 2013 and could eclipse the 1998 team record of 108 defeats.

"You can't let it get to you," reliever Drew Steckenrider said of the team's ugly record. "Obviously it's frustrating, but nobody wants to think about that. You just have to take every day as a new day and a new opportunity."

Heading into a seven-game

trip that began Monday night with a win in Chicago, they had been outscored this year by 73 runs, an average of more than two per game. Their record was 6-15 at home and 3-9 on the road. They had three regulars batting over .250, and while left-hander Caleb Smith was 3-0, the rest of the rotation was 4-16.

"I'm not happy," Jeter said. "Michael Hill is not happy. Donnie is not happy. I'm sure the players are not happy."

The offense is especially abysmal, ranking last in the majors in runs, doubles, triples, home runs, RBIs, walks, slugging and OPS. The Marlins haven't hit a triple, or a homer with more than one man on base.

Jeter, Hill and Mattingly believe the team is underachieving, but that's debatable. The Marlins finished last in the majors in 2018 in runs, home runs, slugging and OPS, and that was with Realmuto. They don't have a player who hit over .278 last year, or hit more than

12 homers.

Miami hoped for improvement from center fielder Lewis Brinson, the centerpiece acquisition in the Yelich trade. But he was batting .197 when demoted last week to the minors.

Curtis Granderson and Neil Walker were signed to provide veteran leadership, which they've done. But Granderson began the week batting .176, and Walker was at .250 with five RBIs.

It's all too familiar for Walker, who played on Pittsburgh Pirates teams that lost 99 and 105 games.

"You learn a lot more from the tough times than from the good times," he said. "You've just got to keep your head up."

The Marlins fired batting coach Mike Pagliarulo, but that didn't help. They scored 13 runs during last week's five-game homestand.

Jeter also fired president of business operations Chip Bowers last week. The Marlins said that attendance wasn't a factor.

Roundup

Yankees surprise Felix, back up Sabathia

Associated Press

NEW YORK — It had been a decade since pitchers with so many combined punchouts started the same game.

In this showdown between Felix Hernandez and CC Sabathia, the New York Yankees landed their haymakers early.

The Yankees pounced on Hernandez, hitting three homers in the first two innings to build a comfortable cushion for Sabathia in a 7-3 victory over the Seattle Mariners on Monday night.

Luke Voit, Brett Gardner and Thairo Estrada homered off Hernandez while New York gave Sabathia a 7-0 lead and held on for its 12th win in 16 games. Hernandez (1-3) settled in after the second, completing five innings of seven-run ball.

Hernandez had allowed just two homers in 12 career starts in the Bronx. He allowed three in seven batters Monday.

Domingo Santana and Dee Gordon homered off Sabathia, but the oversized lefty limited Seattle to three runs over five in-

nings. Sabathia (2-1) struck out five in his first start since becoming the 17th pitcher with 3,000 strikeouts last week.

Rays 12, Diamondbacks 1: Reigning AL Cy Young Award winner Blake Snell took a perfect game into the sixth inning and Tommy Pham hit his first career grand slam, leading host Tampa Bay.

Padres 4, Mets 0: Pumped-up rookie Chris Paddack struck out a career-high 11 to outduel NL Cy Young Award winner Jacob deGrom, and Hunter Renfroe homered for host San Diego against New York.

Dodgers 5, Braves 3: Walker Buehler matched a season high with eight strikeouts while pitching host Los Angeles to victory.

Marlins 6, Cubs 5: Pedro Strop walked three batters in the ninth inning and Miami took advantage, rallying for three runs to halt host Chicago's winning streak at seven.

White Sox 9, Indians 1: Tim Anderson chased Trevor Bauer after the All-Star tweeted a playful message to Anderson earlier in the day, Yoan Moncada had a

two-run homer and four RBIs, and Chicago routed host Cleveland.

Reds 12, Giants 4: Nick Senzel hit a leadoff homer after a swarm of bees finally left home plate, and the rookie connected his next time up, leading host Cincinnati.

Brewers 5, Nationals 3: A long night and day of travel for Washington got even worse when it wasted a pair of leads, made four errors and lost to host Milwaukee.

Twins 8, Blue Jays 0: Martin Perez and two relievers combined on a three-hitter, Eddie Rosario hit his AL-leading 12th home run for visiting Minnesota.

Cardinals 6, Phillies 0: Miles Mikolas pitched seven stellar innings and Yadier Molina hit one of three home runs as host St. Louis beat Philadelphia.

Orioles 4, Red Sox 1: Jonathan Villar hit a grand slam, John Means handcuffed Boston's torrid offense over seven innings and host Baltimore won.

Astros 6, Royals 4: George Springer, Carlos Correa and Robinson Chirinos each homered to lead host Houston.

Derby winner won't run in Preakness

Associated Press

Kentucky Derby winner Country House will not run in the Preakness.

Assistant trainer Riley Mott confirmed to The Associated Press on Tuesday that the long-shot winner of horse racing's biggest event is no longer being considered for the second jewel of the Triple Crown. Country House was elevated to the winner's circle at the Kentucky Derby on Saturday after Maximum Security was disqualified for impeding other horses.

Country House's absence at the Preakness means there

is no chance at a third Triple Crown winner in five years.

The Daily Racing Form was first to report that Country House was not running in the Preakness, citing trainer Bill Mott, who said the horse developed a cough and was "acting like he's going to get sick." Riley Mott, Bill Mott's son, provided no details to the AP about any possible illness.

Country House joins Maximum Security in skipping the Preakness.

The 1¹/₈-mile Preakness is May 18 at Pimlico Race Course in Baltimore. Though shorter

than the Kentucky Derby, the race requires a quick turnaround. Maximum Security owner Gary West didn't want to burden his colt with the Triple Crown off the table.

West on Monday appealed the decision to disqualify the horse from the Derby, which was quickly rejected by the Kentucky Horse Racing Commission because the stewards' decision isn't subject to appeal.

Country House was 65-1 to win the Derby, the second-longest odds in the 145-year history of the race. It was the first time the horse who crossed

the finish line first was not declared the winner.

Country House is the first Kentucky Derby winner not to enter the Preakness since Grindstone in 1996. Grindstone, who was found to have bone chips in one of his knees, was the first Derby winner to be retired immediately after that race since Bubbling Over in 1926.

The third jewel in the Triple Crown is the Belmont Stakes in New York on June 8.

American Pharoah won the Triple Crown in 2015 and Justify did it in 2018.

NBA playoffs roundup

Rockets hold off late rally, even series with Warriors

Associated Press

HOUSTON — James Harden and the Houston Rockets dug out of a 0-2 hole to even their Western Conference semifinals series with the Golden State Warriors after another game where they fought, scrapped and held off a late rally to get a victory.

Harden scored 38 points and the Rockets got a 112-108 win on Monday night to even the best-of-seven series at 2-2.

"When you're dealing with these guys, if you let Klay (Thompson) and Steph (Curry) run around and shoot threes you don't have no chance," Harden said. "The only chance we have is to be in to their bodies and make every shot that they take contested."

The Rockets were up by nine before Golden State scored the next seven points, capped by a three from Stephen Curry, to get within 110-108 with 19 seconds left. Harden made one of two free throws with 11.5 seconds left. Kevin Durant missed a three after that. But the Warriors got the rebound and Curry also missed a three-point attempt before Golden State was forced to foul Chris Paul.

"We got a couple of wide-open looks," Durant said. "They just didn't fall for us."

Paul made one of two free throws with 2.9 seconds left to secure the victory.

Golden State coach Steve Kerr was asked about the physical play of the Rockets, who have several players who are much stockier than his squad.

"They've got a lot of middle linebackers on that team," he said. "They're sturdy and we're like volleyball players, long and lean ... everybody tries to be physical with us because they should. That's the best way to try to beat us."

After losing the first two games of the series on the road, the Rockets head back to Golden State for Game 5 on Wednesday night with momentum on their side after their overtime win in Game 3 before Monday night's victory.

The Warriors got 34 points from Kevin Durant, who had 46 in the Game 3 loss. Curry, who was criticized after shooting 7-for-23 in Game 3, got off to a good start, scoring 11 points in the first quarter. He cooled off after that, but finished with 30 points on 12-for-25 shooting.

"I didn't think we got great

shots for much of the night," Kerr said. "We've got to be more poised and that has to be a focus."

Eric Gordon added 20 points for Houston and P.J. Tucker had 17 points and 10 rebounds.

Despite two straight wins, the Rockets still don't think they've played their best.

"We've got to be better," Tucker said. "We've got to be more aggressive. We've got to pick it up."

Houston made 17 of its 50 three-point attempts, while the Warriors shot just 8-for-33 from downtown with Curry making just 4 of his 14 attempts.

The Rockets were up by nine points after three quarters and used an 8-2 run, with four points from Harden, to open the fourth and extend the lead to 101-86. Golden State used an 8-3 run, with six points from Draymond Green, to cut it to 104-94 midway through the quarter.

Bucks 113, Celtics 101: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 39 points and 16 rebounds to lead his team to a victory over Boston in Game 4 of their second-round playoff series and move visiting Milwaukee within one win from its first trip to

the Eastern Conference finals since 2001.

The Bucks have won three straight since losing the opener of the best-of-seven series at home. They can eliminate the Celtics in Game 5 at home on Wednesday night and reach the East finals for the first time since the '01 team of Ray Allen and Glenn Robinson fell to Philadelphia's Allen Iverson and Dikembe Mutombo in seven games.

One game after Antetokounmpo was two assists shy of a triple-double, he scored 17 points with seven rebounds in the fourth quarter to help the Bucks pull away. Reserves George Hill, who scored 15 points, and Pat Connaughton, who had nine points and 10 rebounds, again led the Bucks bench, which outscored Boston's 32-7.

In what might be his last home game for the Celtics, Kyrie Irving scored 23 points with 10 assists. But he was 7-for-22 from the floor, including 1-for-7 from three-point range; after leading all scorers with 26 points in Boston's Game 1 blowout, he has made 19 of 62 shots and just 4 of 20 from three-point range.

Truex wins his second Monday race

Associated Press

DOVER, Del. — Martin Truex Jr. stood next to the 60-pound metallic gold Monster trophy on the Victory Lane stage and was uncertain about how many fingers he should flash for his celebratory photo.

“Two for the season or three for Dover?” Truex asked.

How about one of each?

Truex solved his snapshot situation about as efficiently as he weaved through traffic from the back of the field to win a Monday race at Dover International Speedway for the second time in his Cup career. Truex won his first career NASCAR Cup race on June 4, 2007, at Dover and 12 years later used another Sunday rainout to take the checkered flag.

“I’m going to lobby for all Dover races to be on Mondays,” Truex said with a laugh.

He knows how to win on Sundays, too. Truex is warm-

ing up in his first season with Joe Gibbs Racing and won in the No. 19 Toyota for the second time in three races. Truex, the 2017 Cup champion, won at Richmond three weeks ago and is hitting his stride as the summer stretch approaches.

“We’ve had some really strong race cars at a lot of race tracks,” Truex said. “For a lot of reasons, we haven’t been able to show it, been having issues that set us back. It’s been tough. The last couple weeks I just feel it’s execution. We’re doing all the little things right.”

Truex and crew chief Cole Pearn didn’t let rain, an inspection failure that dumped the car to the rear or even a maligned race package affect their push toward the finish. Truex, who is from Mayetta, N.J., has long considered Dover his home track, led 132 laps and dominated runner-up Alex Bowman by a breezy 9.5 seconds to win

at Dover for the first time since 2016.

He had no complaints about the new high drag, high downforce, 750-horsepower package that led to track-record speeds posted in qualifying.

Kyle Busch, the 2015 NASCAR champion, peppered his comments on the package with profanity and said his complaints to NASCAR would fall on deaf ears. Kevin Harvick said cars are “hard to race” under the package. Team owner Bob Leavine tweeted he agreed with Busch and wrote “this package sucks.”

Truex brushed off the complaints.

“We all had to deal with the same thing,” Truex said. “Obviously, we dealt with it better than everybody else.”

Bowman finished second for the second straight week in the No. 88 Chevrolet. Kyle

Larson, Harvick and Chase Elliott rounded out the top five. Elliott gave Hendrick Motorsports and Chevrolet their first wins of the season at Talladega last week. Bowman and Elliott made it another solid race for a manufacturer that was in dire need of a boost.

“We at least had a shot at it. It’s really all you can ask for,” Bowman said. “We had a miserable start to the season. We really did a good job resetting in the off week.”

But all the teams are chasing Gibbs.

JGR has seven wins in 11 races this season and has established itself as the team to beat.

“It’s a big deal for us,” Gibbs said. “As everybody knows, in pro sports these things can go and come very quick. The hardest thing to do is to stay up there.”

NHL playoffs roundup

Bruins finish off Blue Jackets; Avalanche force Game 7

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The Boston Bruins got some timely goals in their tight Eastern Conference semifinal series with Columbus, and when the goals weren’t coming, Tuukka Rask stood tall.

The Finn turned in his best playoff performance so far in Monday’s 3-0 win over the Blue Jackets in Game 6 that clinched the series and propelled the Bruins into the conference final against Carolina.

The Blue Jackets played hard and forechecked well enough to win every game, but were 0-for-10 on power-play chances in the final three games of the series, all won by Boston. Much of that was due to Rask, who had 39 saves Monday and did his part to shut down four Columbus power plays.

“We are halfway to our goal,” said forward David Backes,

who scored Boston’s final goal in the third period. “You need to relish the plateaus along the way. We are certainly at one of those to be among the final four teams. We’ve had to sacrifice to win some games against some really good teams.

“Now we can enjoy this for a day then have a happy flight home (Tuesday), then get ready for Carolina, who is well rested and ready for us,” he said.

David Krejci and Marcus Johansson also scored for the Bruins in Game 6. David Pastrnak led the Bruins with four goals in the six games against Columbus.

“It was tight until the end,” Krejci said. “We learned from it and closed it out tonight the way we wanted to.”

Boston won the first game of the series in overtime, then fell to the Blue Jackets in OT in Game 2 and lost Game 3 by a goal before ripping off the final

three victories.

The Bruins are advancing to the Eastern Conference finals for the first time since the 2012-13 season, when they lost in the Stanley Cup final.

Carolina swept the New York Islanders in their second-round series.

“If you’re playing this time of year, you’re doing something right,” Rask said. “You’ve built something great as a team. We’re super happy that we’re in the position. Trying to keep the train rolling.”

Boston coach Bruce Sullivan said Carolina is a mix between hard-hitting Columbus and the quickness of Toronto, which Boston beat in the opening round.

Avalanche 4, Sharks 3 (OT): Gabriel Landeskog scored 2:32 into overtime after his team squandered a late lead in regulation and host Colorado beat San Jose to force a decisive

Game 7 in their Western Conference semifinal series.

Landeskog dumped the puck into the zone, turned in a big hit along the boards, got up in time to take a pass from rookie Cale Makar and knock in the goal past Martin Jones to help the Avalanche escape elimination. J.T. Compher had two goals and an assist, while Tyson Jost added another.

Game 7 is Wednesday in San Jose. The winner will play either Dallas or St. Louis in the conference final.

Philipp Grubauer made 19 saves, including a pad save on Tomas Hertl early in OT.

Marc-Edouard Vlasic scored twice, including the tying goal off the skate of an Avalanche defenseman with 2:28 remaining, and Brent Burns added another for the Sharks, who fell to 22-19 when opponents are facing elimination.