

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

## Report: US-led strikes in Syria, Iraq killed at least 459 civilians

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — U.S.-led airstrikes targeting the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria likely have killed hundreds of civilians, a report by an independent monitoring group said Monday. The coalition had no immediate comment.

The report by Airwars, a project aimed at tracking the international airstrikes targeting the extremists, said it believed 57 specific strikes killed at least 459 civilians and caused 48 suspected “friendly fire” deaths.

While Airwars noted the difficulty of verifying information in territory held by the Islamic State group, which has beheaded journalists and killed activists, other groups have reported similar casualties from the U.S.-led airstrikes.

“Almost all claims of non-combatant deaths from alleged coalition strikes emerge within 24 hours — with graphic images of reported victims often widely disseminated,” the report said. “In this context, the present coalition policy of downplaying or denying all claims of non-combatant fatalities makes little sense, and risks handing [the] Islamic State [group] and other forces a powerful propaganda tool.”

The U.S. launched airstrikes in Iraq on Aug. 8 and in Syria on Sept. 23 to target the Islamic State group. A coalition of countries later joined to help allied ground forces in both countries defeat the extremists. To date, the coalition has launched more than 5,800 airstrikes in both countries.

So far, the U.S. has acknowledged killing only two civilians

in its strikes: two children who were likely killed during an American airstrike targeting al-Qaida-linked militants in Syria last year. That same strike also wounded two adults, according to an investigation released in May by the U.S. military.

That strike is one of at least four subject to ongoing U.S. military investigations into allegations of civilian casualties resulting from the airstrikes. One other probe into an airstrike in Syria and two investigations into airstrikes in Iraq are still pending.

Airwars said it identified the 57 strikes through reporting from “two or more generally credible sources, often with biographical, photographic or video evidence.” The strikes also corresponded to confirmed coalition strikes conducted in the area at that time, it said.

Other groups also have reported major casualties suspected of being caused by the U.S.-led airstrikes. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which documents the Syrian conflict through a network of activists on the ground, said 173 Syrian civilians have been killed since airstrikes began. They include 53 children under age 18. Most of the civilians were killed in airstrikes near oil refineries and oil fields in the northern provinces of Hassakeh, Raqqa, Aleppo and Deir el-Zour.

The deadliest incident was on May 4, when a U.S.-led airstrike on the northern Islamic State-controlled village of Bir Mahli, near Kobani, killed 64 people, including 31 children, the observatory said. A Pentagon spokesman said at the time that there was no information to

indicate there were civilians in the village. The death toll was confirmed by other opposition groups in Syria.

Two videos and several photos purporting to show the aftermath of the strikes in the mixed Arab and Kurdish village showed children allegedly wounded in the airstrikes. A media arm of the Islamic State group released those videos.

In another incident on June 8, an airstrike likely conducted by the U.S.-led coalition on the Islamic State-held village of Dali Hassan, also near Kobani, killed a family of seven, the observatory said.

Turkey also has said it would investigate accusations by the Iraqi Kurdish regional government and activists with the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, or PKK, that its airstrikes were responsible for recent civilian casualties in the northern Iraqi town of Zargel.

Meanwhile, on Monday, the leader of Iraq’s Kurdish region, President Massoud Barzani, said Iraqi Kurds must maintain control of areas in northwestern Iraq, including the city of Sinjar, after they are recaptured from Islamic State militants.

His speech marked the anniversary of the fall of Sinjar to the Islamic State group, which forced tens of thousands of people from Iraq’s Yazidi minority to flee into the mountains. The incident prompted the U.S. to begin the airstrikes targeting the militant group.

Other Kurdish groups, including the PKK, and the People’s Protection Units claim Sinjar as part of their territory. Iraqi, Syrian and Turkish Kurds currently fight alongside each other to reclaim Sinjar.

## US alters Syria policy to protect rebel forces

BY TARA COPP

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Friday’s airstrikes to protect U.S.-trained fighters in Syria reflects a change in policy that expands the forces — including those from the Assad regime — that could be hit in the defense of the New Syrian Forces, the Pentagon said Monday.

While offensive U.S. and coalition airstrikes in Syria will be limited to Islamic State targets, the New Syrian Forces “could potentially face a broader range of threats,” said Pentagon spokesman Navy Capt. Jeff Davis. “For defensive purposes, we will help defend them from other sources of threats.”

Davis said the New Syrian Forces have the ability to call in airstrikes, “and that’s what you saw demonstrated on Friday.”

On Friday, New Syrian Forces and Division 30 forces — many of whom are rebel fighters who had been considered for the U.S. train-and-equip program but did not complete the vetting process — were in the same compound when it came under attack by the Nusra Front, an al-Qaida affiliate.

In a statement provided Friday, the Pentagon said “members of the New Syrian Forces along with members of the 30th Division of the Free Syrian Army were attacked by an unknown force of about 50 personnel. The NSF, alongside 30th [Division] fighters, successfully repelled the unprovoked attack.”

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## HitchBot's journey ends prematurely in Philly

The Washington Post

The team behind hitchBot, the talking, tweeting, hitchhiking robot that tries to traverse continents on the kindness of strangers, had always thought of their project as a social experiment. After all the bad press and postapocalyptic stories that questioned whether humans could ever trust robots, they wanted to pose the opposite problem: Can robots trust humans?

This weekend they got their answer. Robots can't rely on us. Or at least, not Philadelphians.

The endearing droid that had thumbed his way across Germany, vacationed in the Netherlands and made the improbable 3,600-mile trek across Canada without incident survived just over two weeks and 300 miles in the United States. On Saturday, its creators announced that hitchBot had been vandalized beyond repair and abandoned on a street in Philadelphia.

"Sometimes bad things happen to good robots!" hitchBot philosophized on Twitter, peculiarly chipper for a creature that had just been stripped of its arms. "My trip must come to an end for now, but my love for humans will never fade."

According to The Associated Press, the robot's creators were sent a photo of their vandalized robot collapsed among trash and dead leaves on the Philadelphia pavement, its pool noodle arms ripped from its beer bucket torso, its plastic cake saver skull and robot brain nowhere in sight. They decided not to share the image because it might be upsetting to some viewers.

HitchBot's Canadian team can't track down their creation because its battery is dead, they told the AP.

"Sadly, sadly it's come to an end," co-creator Frauke Zeller told the AP.

# US-Turkey deal a gamble for both

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan take a big gamble as they work together against Islamic State militants.

## ANALYSIS

Their goals, while overlapping in some ways, are far different in others, mainly on the question of Kurdish militants battling Islamic State fighters in Syria. Erdogan wants to combat Islamic State militants in his country who have flowed freely across the border with Syria. But his biggest priority is curbing growing Kurdish power along Turkey's southern border. Ankara is worried Kurdish gains in Iraq and Syria will encourage a revival of the Kurdish insurgency in Turkey in pursuit of an independent state.

Erdogan used the start of Turkish airstrikes in Syria to also attack Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) rebels in northern Iraq.

Since the U.S.-Turkey agreement was announced late last month, Turkish warplanes have attacked PKK bases in northern Iraq and its forces in southeastern Turkey on an almost daily basis.

The U.S. has gained access to Turkey's Incirlik Air Base near Syria's northern border, as well as Turkey's participation

## US armed drones fly from Incirlik Air Base

BY COREY DICKSTEIN  
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — U.S. drones flew armed missions out of Turkey's Incirlik Air Base for the first time this weekend, part of an agreement between the NATO allies to work more closely to combat Islamic State forces.

While the U.S. has flown only unmanned aerial systems out of the base in southern Turkey, Pentagon spokesman Navy Capt. Jeff Davis said manned combat aircraft are expected to begin flying from the post in the near future.

As of Monday, the aircraft

had not conducted strikes against the Islamic State group, Davis said.

Additional aircraft — manned and unmanned — and troops could be moved to the base, he said, without releasing specifics.

The Turkish government approved a deal July 29 to allow U.S. aircraft to use the base to mount strikes as part of the U.S.-led Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve. The Pentagon has said it can more quickly and efficiently strike Islamic State positions along the Turkey-Syria boarder from the base.

in airstrikes on Islamic State fighters.

But what the U.S. stands to lose could be greater: Washington's most effective allies and ground forces against the Islamic State group in Syria are the Kurds.

The Kurds have made unprecedented gains since Syria's civil war began, carving out

territory where they declared their own civil administration.

The White House reportedly cautioned the Turks about military action in northern Iraq, where Kurds claim civilian casualties.

But counterattacks by the PKK have escalated violence between Turkish government forces and Kurdish insurgents.

## Greek stocks plunge, banks hammered

Associated Press

ATHENS, Greece—Greece's stock market plunged more than 22 percent as it reopened Monday after a five-week closure, giving investors their first opportunity since late June to react to the country's latest economic crisis.

Bank shares suffered most, hitting or nearing the daily trading limit of a 30 percent loss.

"There's a sense of panic," said Evangelos Sioutis, finan-

cial analyst and head of equities at Guardian Trust. He noted some traders are selling stock merely to raise cash because there is so little liquidity in the Greek economy.

"There are no buyers," he said. "The outlook is not clear."

Markets in the rest of the world, however, were largely unaffected, a sign that investors outside Greece have now largely cut off ties with the country after years of crisis there.

Greece's stock market and

banks were closed June 29, when the government put limits on money withdrawals and transfers to keep a run on the banks from bringing down the financial system. People were panicking over the prospect that the country could fall out of the euro after its talks creditors broke down.

Greece has since then resumed talks with creditors and reopened its banks. Strict limits on cash withdrawals remain, however.

# NFL embracing change in '15

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Bob Dylan sang about them. So did David Bowie.

For 2015, the NFL is embracing the message from those musical giants. Yes, the most successful of American sports leagues is into changes.

Extra-point attempts have been altered. Medical timeouts are the latest player safety measure. A female on-field official has a full-time job.

For all that's new in the NFL, read on.

**Rules changes:** By far the most obvious, if not necessarily the most impactful change, is moving the snap for extra-point kicks to the 15-yard line. The aims are clear: make the placement more difficult after it became virtually automatic, and entice teams to go for the 2-point conversion.

"So our hope is what we've done is we've added skill to the play, and then we will also see some increase in the attempts to go for two," Texans general manager Rick Smith said. "We just felt like (the kick) ... was almost a ceremonial play, the way it has languished here recently."

Adding more intrigue: The defense can return the ball for a pair of points on a turnover or blocked kick.

Other meaningful modifications:

- All peel back blocks (hitting the defensive player from the side as he is running toward his own end zone) are outlawed;

- No blocking a defensive player below the waist when that player is engaged above the waist by another offensive player outside the area originally occupied by the tight end;

- The defensive team on a punt can't push teammates into the offensive formation, and anyone on the line must be outside the snapper's pads;

- Linebackers can now wear numbers in the 40s;

- Ineligible receivers can't line up outside the tackle box.

Enforcing some of these changes will be

line judge Sarah Thomas, the first woman hired as a full-time official.

"I know it may be new for some, but I think being a part of the developmental program and going that way, maybe they'll see me just as an official," the 41-year-old Thomas said. "That's how I want them to see me."

**Medical timeouts:** Spooked by Patriots wide receiver Julian Edelman remaining in the Super Bowl when he appeared disoriented from a hit, the NFL opted to allow a certified trainer at each stadium to serve as a spotter and order a medical timeout if a player appears to have such problems. The spotter would communicate with the side judge in such a situation and play would halt while the player was taken to the sideline and replaced. No timeout would be charged to the team.

**Old faces in new places:** Bring me a roster, now.

And not just for all the big-name players who have switched uniforms.

Rex Ryan already has become an iconic figure in western New York, even though he hasn't coached a scrimmage, let alone a game for the Bills.

John Fox's mutual agreement with the Broncos to leave Denver led to his landing in Chicago, a team in desperate need of a coach with a proven resume.

Joining defensive mastermind Ryan as newcomers in Buffalo are RB LeSean McCoy and WR Percy Harvin to spice up the offense. All-Pro DT Ndamukong Suh (Miami) and RB DeMarco Murray (Philadelphia) moved on for big money.

Long-time fixtures WR Andre Johnson in Houston and RB Frank Gore in San Francisco now reside in Indianapolis. Quarterback Andrew Luck has to be loving that.

The Colts also added veteran Eagles standout DE-LB Trent Cole to their defense.

It also might seem strange seeing Haloti Ngata in Lions blue instead of Ravens purple; A.J. Hawk wearing Bengals colors

instead of Packers green and gold; and Jeremy Maclin in Arrowhead red rather than Eagles green.

The most significant change of address was made by Jimmy Graham, traded to Seattle by New Orleans. The tight end could be the key piece to lift the Seahawks' offense closer to their all-world D.

"It's all about having an opportunity and a chance at winning a championship and that's all I care about," Graham said. "If a team needs me to catch 100 footballs or a team needs me to catch 30 or a team needs me to catch 15 touchdowns or five touchdowns, I'm going to do it. I'm going to do whatever it takes to win."

**Old faces back in old places:** How fitting that Gary Kubiak is back in Denver, Jack Del Rio in Oakland, and the Darrelle Revis/Antonio Cromartie combo will be patrolling the secondary for the Jets.

Kubiak was drafted 196 spots behind John Elway in 1983 and was Elway's backup for nine seasons. He also spent 11 years as an assistant coach with the Broncos before getting the head job in Houston. Elway hired him away from Baltimore, where Kubiak was offensive coordinator last season, to replace Fox. "This place is special for me" Kubiak said.

As is the East Bay to Del Rio, who grew up in the Oakland area rooting for the Raiders. He never played nor coached for them — until now.

"Yes, it's coming home; yes, I'm from this area; and, yes, I'm a lifelong Raider," Del Rio said when he got the job. "I've been a Raider fan all my life. My dad took me and I sat in the stands way back when."

**The Eagles nest:** There isn't anything coach Chip Kelly won't try, even going so far as to bring in Tim Tebow, perhaps as a short-yardage and 2-point specialist. Kelly dealt QB Nick Foles for the oft-injured Sam Bradford, and outbid everyone for Murray. No training camp will be more intriguing than Philadelphia's.

## 'Skins GM: Galette vetting process was 'thorough'

RICHMOND, Va. — General manager Scot McCloughan says a "thorough, thorough, thorough" vetting of Junior Galette left the Washington Redskins "very comfortable bringing him on board," despite off-field problems that led the New Orleans Saints to cut the outside linebacker.

"He has to walk the line, and he knows that," McCloughan said Sunday. "If he doesn't, then he's gone."

McCloughan's first news conference of training camp came two days after Galette signed a one-year, \$745,000 contract. He was released by the Saints last Monday.

Galette was arrested in January after an alleged domestic dispute. Charges were dropped, but the episode remains under review by the NFL, which is also reviewing a video that shows a man resembling Galette in a fight on a beach.

"I did not like the video at all, and as a matter of fact, when I saw the video, it was scary. That's why I wanted to meet with him face-to-face," McCloughan said. "That's why I had to sit down with him and ask him what happened. I got the real story, and I'm fine with that."

McCloughan would not explain what he meant by "the real story."

He said the Redskins spoke to more than 20 people around the league, including players, about Galette, beginning their inquiry as soon as word emerged that New Orleans was prepared to let the player go.

"I did too much research, to tell you the truth," McCloughan said with a chuckle. "I got tired of it."

McCloughan said team president Bruce Allen and coach Jay Gruden were involved in the decision to offer Galette a contract, but the GM noted: "When it's all said and done, it's on my shoulders. I felt really, really strong about it."

"This guy," McCloughan said, "we feel very comfortable bringing him on board. Very comfortable."

The Redskins also contacted the NFL about its investigation of Galette, and McCloughan said he knows "there's still a chance" the league will suspend the player.

"But we were definitely more willing to take a chance with that," McCloughan said, "knowing that he's going to be a Redskin and knowing he's going to give us a lot of games."

## Bills suspend OL coach Kromer for six games

PITTSFORD, N.Y. — The Buffalo Bills suspended offensive line coach Aaron Kromer without pay for the first six games of the regular season for violating the NFL's personal conduct policy.

Bills President Russ Brandon announced the suspension Sunday night. The disciplinary action comes two days after prosecutors in Florida dropped a battery charge for causing bodily harm against Kromer for allegedly confronting two boys for using his beach chairs, pushing one to the ground and punching him in the face last month.

An arrest report released by the Walton County Sheriff's Office said Kromer threatened to kill one of the boy's families if he reported the incident.

The Bills placed Kromer on paid leave July 14, two days after he was arrested. Kromer will rejoin the team at training camp.

— Associated Press

## Cowboys' WR Bryant scuffles at camp

Associated Press

OXNARD, Calif. — Dez Bryant kept going after Dallas cornerback Tyler Patmon in a heated training camp skirmish that didn't end until quarterback Tony Romo finally stepped in and calmed his star receiver.

Bryant, who has a history of sideline antics that include screaming at coaches and teammates, threw something at Patmon and later appeared to take a swing at him after the two tangled during a play in 11-on-11 work late in the practice Sunday.

The incident started when Patmon jarred Bryant's helmet loose during a play and Bryant responded by yanking off Patmon's helmet. Patmon threw a punch and backed away, and Bryant came back with a wild left hook before teammates separated them. The Cowboys posted video of the exchange on their website.

Tight end Jason Witten was among those who couldn't get Bryant to walk

away. Romo eventually came over and got Bryant to move to a different part of the sideline, while Patmon stood with players and other team personnel nearby.

Bryant, the biggest star in this camp because he recently signed a five-year, \$70 million contract that ended his threat not to show up, said he and Patmon exchanged words for several plays before the skirmish that had several teammates trying to separate them.

When practice ended a few minutes later, coach Jason Garrett spoke briefly to Bryant, who then walked over to Patmon and hugged him while fans nearby cheered.

"I got a little bit overheated," Bryant said. "At the end of the day, that's something that you really need for a team, on a team. I'm just trying to win ballgames."

Patmon is an undrafted second-year player still fighting for a roster spot a year after making the team with a strong

camp and preseason. He played in 11 games and both of Dallas' playoff games.

Both players went to Oklahoma State.

"Oh, man, it's just brothers," Patmon said. "Brothers fight. That happens sometimes. We go at it. After that we squash it and it's over."

Bryant said Garrett told him "he wasn't going to get in between it and all of that."

"Because he knows the kind of guy I am," Bryant said. "This kind of stuff happens. I just hate the fact that when it's me, I know that I can get kind of animated with everything. That's why a lot of focus is on me. It's really good for the team."

And Bryant, a first-round draft pick in 2010, also acknowledged that Patmon is an unsung player battling for attention.

"You don't want somebody weak on your team," Bryant said. "He's fighting his way and he's fighting for respect. And he's got mine then. You can go to war with a guy like that any day of the week."



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# Kenseth wins a wild Pocono

Associated Press

LONG POND, Pa. — Joey Logano was the first leader to fade, his tank empty with three laps left.

Martin Truex Jr. struck E with two laps to go.

Kyle Busch knew his Toyota was about out, too, his shot at a fourth straight win tapped out on the last lap.

One by one, fuel woes cost the contenders. But the pain at the pump for drivers pushing toward the finish line was the break Matt Kenseth needed to coast past them all in the final thrilling laps Sunday to win the NASCAR Sprint Cup race at Pocono Raceway.

The 400-mile race came down to fuel and which cars had it — and which ones didn't.

"I couldn't catch them anyway but I just wanted to get as close as I could in case they ran out," Kenseth said.

Once they ran out, Kenseth not only had enough left in the tank to win, he pulled off a celebratory burnout.

Kenseth's win continued the sensational summer run for Joe Gibbs Racing, making it five wins in the last six races. Busch, who had the other victories, failed in his bid to become the ninth driver since 1972 and the first since Jimmie Johnson in 2007 to win four straight Cup races.

Busch had won three straight Cup races and four of five, swept the Xfinity and Cup races last weekend at Indianapolis and won the Truck Series event Saturday at Pocono. Busch remained outside the top 30 in points, the second marker he needs to hit to qualify for the Chase.

With a win, Busch would have had the points needed to at least crack the top

30, though he'd have to stay there for the final five races before the 16-driver field is set for the Chase for the Sprint Cup championship.

Truex was 19th, Logano 20th, and Busch 21st.

"I was saving fuel just to cushion it," Logano said. "I thought I was going to be good and then I started running out and knew we weren't going to make it. We were so close. You are counting down the laps in your head thinking you are going to make it but just didn't do it."

Brad Keselowski was second, followed by Jeff Gordon, Dale Earnhardt Jr. and Greg Biffle.

Kenseth had the only position that mattered, winning for the second time this season and for the first time at Pocono.

"I never thought I'd win at Pocono," he said.

Kenseth won the fuel gamble and survived a race that resembled a demolition derby: Cars, crews, walls, equipment, all took beatings over 400 miles.

Kasey Kahne kicked off a race stuffed with carnage when his No. 5 got loose, found the opening to pit road and slammed the inside pit road wall. Kahne's hit buckled the wall, sent helmets flying and crew members scurrying for safety.

The race was red-flagged for about 15 minutes while the wall was repaired. No one was hurt.

Pit road proved a dangerous place.

Keselowski slid through his pit stall and took out three members of his crew. His tire changer and tire carrier both jumped on the hood and the team jackman was clipped by the left side of No. 2 Ford. One tire got free and rolled down pit road before it came to a dead stop.

Gordon's farewell to Pocono has him the track's career leader in wins with six and laps led. He had his 32nd top-10 finish in 46 races at the track.

He's still looking for the elusive win that will clinch a Chase berth instead of hoping he can make the field on points.

**IndyCar:** Racing in his home state — and only a few laps from tightening the IndyCar standings with a big victory — Graham Rahal still had one more big restart to sweat out.

On lap 84 of 90, he and Justin Wilson battled for position, with Rahal eventually staying in front.

Rahal had an easy time from there, winning Sunday's race at Mid-Ohio and pulling to within nine points of series leader Juan Pablo Montoya. There are two events remaining in the season, and Montoya's lead has shrunk thanks to back-to-back finishes outside the top 10.

Wilson finished second, 3.4 seconds behind. Simon Pagenaud was third, followed by pole winner Scott Dixon. Montoya, who came into the race with a 42-point lead over Rahal, finished 11th.

The final two races of the season are at Pocono on Aug. 23 and Sonoma on Aug. 30, with the latter worth double points. With Montoya leading comfortably coming into this race, contenders such as Rahal, Dixon, Helio Castroneves and Will Power were under pressure to gain ground Sunday.

It was a missed opportunity for everyone but Rahal. Dixon did move a bit closer to the top, but he had won five times at Mid-Ohio, so his fourth-place showing was a bit of a letdown.

Power, the defending series champion, finished 14th, one spot ahead of Castroneves.

# Ledecky breaks own swim record

Associated Press

KAZAN, Russia — Katie Ledecky touched the wall, turned around, spit out some water, curled her mouth into a big smile and began waving her finger.

The American teenager improved her own mark in the 1,500-meter freestyle at the world championships Monday in morning heats.

The 18-year-old Ledecky completed the marathon-like race in 15 minutes, 27.71 seconds — shaving 0.65 seconds off the mark she set at last year's Pan Pacific championships in Australia.

Ledecky also holds world marks in the 400 and 800 free. She was just off her record pace in winning the 400 free Sunday.

Sarah Sjöström of Sweden lowered her own world record in the 100-meter butterfly to win gold Monday night, after first breaking the mark set by American Dana Vollmer at the 2012 London Olympics in the semifinals on Sunday.

Hungary's Katinka Hosszu, otherwise known as the "Iron Lady," led the 200 individual medley all the way and touched in 2 minutes, 6.12 seconds to win gold and set a world record Monday night.

It was the fourth world record set in two days at Kazan Arena — all of them by women.

Adam Peaty gave Britain its first gold medal in the temporary pool with a comeback victory in the 100 breaststroke.

Aiming for his second gold of the championships, China's Sun Yang topped the 200 free heats in 1:46.00. James Guy was second, Paul Biedermann of Germany qualified third and Australia's Cameron McEvoy was fourth. American standout Ryan Lochte only barely advanced to the semifinals in 13th.

# Mets sweep Nats, tied for NL East lead

Associated Press

NEW YORK — As the clock ticked past 11 p.m. and "Moondance" by Van Morrison practically wafted through the ballpark, young children ran around the bases as part of a family-friendly promotion normally reserved for Sunday afternoons.

For the first time in years, the New York Mets are a late show worth watching.

Curtis Granderson, Daniel Murphy and streaking Lucas Duda homered in a span of five pitches, a sudden power strike that charged up Citi Field and sent the Mets past the Washington Nationals 5-2 Sunday night for a three-game sweep.

"I've never been in a playoff atmosphere, but tonight sure felt like one," Duda said.

Noah Syndergaard (6-5) struck out nine in eight innings, and New York pulled within percentage points of the first-place Nationals in the NL East. Boosted by a trio of lively crowds, the Mets completed their first three-game sweep of Washington since May 2009 and boldly pronounced themselves legitimate contenders.

"It's so much fun to be a Met right now," Syndergaard said. "Just an unbelievable night, and I'm looking forward to the days to come."

Coming into the series, the Nationals had won 18 of their last 21 at Citi Field. The teams meet six more times this year, Sept. 7-9 at Washington and Oct. 2-4 in New York during the final series of the regular season.

**Pirates 3, Reds 0:** Charlie Morton pitched five-hit ball for seven innings, Neil Walker hit a review-aided home run and visiting Pittsburgh beat Cincinnati in a testy game in which benches cleared

after stars Andrew McCutchen and Brandon Phillips were hit by pitches.

Pushing and shoving ensued in the eighth after the Reds' Phillips was hit by a pitch by Pittsburgh left-hander Tony Watson. Cincinnati's Pedro Villareal hit McCutchen in the top of the inning.

**Rangers 2, Giants 1:** Josh Hamilton hit a two-run homer and Martin Perez allowed only two hits to earn his first win in his comeback from Tommy John surgery as host Texas edged San Francisco.

**Cardinals 3, Rockies 2:** Brandon Moss had his first big hit with St. Louis, a game-ending single in the ninth inning, and Randal Grichuk had a two-run homer to lead the host Cardinals.

Closer Trevor Rosenthal (2-2) pitched a perfect inning to help the Cardinals win for the ninth time in 12 games and improve to a major league-best 40-16 at home.

**Yankees 12, White Sox 3:** Jacoby Ellsbury and Mark Teixeira homered against Jeff Samardzija, and visiting New York pounded Chicago.

**Cubs 4, Brewers 3:** Closer Hector Rondon nearly squandered a three-run lead, and rookie Kris Bryant got hurt in visiting Chicago's that completed a four-game sweep.

**Athletics 2, Indians 1 (10):** Mark Canha hit a two-out double in the 10th inning to drive in Sam Fuld and lift host Oakland past Cleveland.

**Dodgers 5, Angels (10):** Andre Ethier hit his second dramatic home run in three innings, a two-run shot in the 10th, and Howie Kendrick also homered to lead the host Dodgers to a three-game Freeway Series sweep of the sputtering Angels.

**Mariners 4, Twins 1 (11):** Logan Morrison's RBI double in the 11th inning

put Seattle ahead and Austin Jackson added a two-run double to help the Mariners outlast host Minnesota.

**Astros 4, Diamondbacks 1:** Collin McHugh threw seven solid innings, and Carlos Gomez delivered a two-run, go-ahead single to lead host Houston.

**Rays 4, Red Sox 3:** Asdrubal Cabrera had a game-tying RBI double and scored on James Loney's single in the eighth inning, helping visiting Tampa Bay avoid a three-game sweep.

**Braves 6, Phillies 2:** Jace Peterson had three hits, including a three-run home run, and Julio Teheran pitched seven strong innings as visiting Atlanta snapped a season-worst six-game losing streak.

**Blue Jays 5, Royals 2:** Chris Colabello hit a two-run home run, R.A. Dickey threw seven shutout innings and Toronto beat host Kansas City in a testy matchup while taking three of four from the AL's top team.

Both benches and bullpens emptied after Toronto reliever Aaron Sanchez was ejected for throwing at Kansas City's Alcides Escobar in the eighth. It was the climax of a game-long spat that began when Royals starter Edinson Volquez hit Josh Donaldson on the left arm in the first.

**Marlins 5, Padres 2:** Adeiny Hechavarria hit a three-run home run off Brandon Maurer with one out in the ninth inning to lift host Miami past San Diego.

**Tigers 6, Orioles 1:** Daniel Norris took a three-hitter into the eighth inning in his Detroit debut. J.D. Martinez hit a three-run homer and the visiting Tigers earned a split of the four-game series.

## American Pharoah wins in return

OCEANPORT, N.J. — American Pharoah flashed his speed in the stretch and easily won the \$1.75 million Haskell Invitational on Sunday in his first race since sweeping the Triple Crown.

With a record crowd of 60,983 cheering him on at Monmouth Park, American Pharoah came out of the final turn with a clear lead and cruised to a 2¼-length victory without any urging from jockey Victor Espinoza.

American Pharoah won the Kentucky Derby, Preakness and Belmont Stakes to become the 12th Triple Crown winner, and first in 37 years. Following a 57-day break after the Belmont, the 3-year-old colt looked better than ever in winning his eighth consecutive race.

Keen Ice rallied for second at 18-1 odds, followed by Upstart, Competitive Edge, Top Clearance, Dontbetwithbruno and Mr. Jordan. The winning time for the 1¼-mile race was 1:47.95 — 95th hundreds of a second off the Haskell record.

If all goes according to plan, American Pharoah will run his final race in the \$5 million Breeders' Cup Classic at Keeneland in Lexington, Ky., on Oct. 31.

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