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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Kabul reels from a deadly day

BY JOSH SMITH

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — One international soldier and eight contractors were killed late Friday night in an attack on a coalition special operations base that capped a day marred by violence in the Afghan capital, coalition officials said Saturday.

They bring Friday's death toll to as high as 50. The base's casualties are the greatest loss of life for the coalition since it ended its combat mission in December, bringing 2015's total to 16 deaths.

The servicemember and the contractors weren't identified, but the base, Camp Integrity, hosts the Special Operations Joint Task Force-Afghanistan.

The task force combines the various American special operations units and works with elite

NATO and Afghan units.

The camp, next to the Kabul airport, came under attack at about 10:15 p.m. Friday night, said spokesman Col. Brian Tribus. An explosion was followed by an assault in which two attackers were killed, he said.

Reports indicated as many as three American special operators might have been wounded, but coalition officials would only confirm the single death.

The attack on the base was part of a deadly day in Kabul.

Early in the morning a truck bomb struck a residential and shopping area near a military base, killing at least 15 people and wounding 240.

Then on Friday evening, a suicide attack at a police training academy left as many as 26 cadets dead and 25 wounded.

The attacks occurred amid

upheaval in the Taliban following public confirmation their leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar, died at least two years ago. Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour has reportedly taken the reins, but his ascendancy has been disputed.

Observers said it was hard not to link Friday's attacks to the power struggle in the Taliban, which comes as the group was beginning initial peace talks with the Afghan government.

The attacks could also be a move by the new Taliban leadership to prove their power, observed Graeme Smith, a researcher with the International Crisis Group in Kabul.

"I think it's clear that the new leaders are struggling to exert their authority, and that the leadership is not a done deal," he said. "So if you want to show

that you're strong, blowing stuff up is one way to do that."

Afghan and U.S. officials condemned the attacks, but said they did not deter them from seeking a settlement with the Taliban and other groups.

"The fact is, in recent years the Afghan people have endured much, but they are resilient and are resilient, even in the face of a brutal insurgency," White House spokesman Josh Earnest said Friday. "We continue to believe and continue to urge the Taliban to heed President Ghani's call for reconciliation and make genuine peace with the Afghan government."

Friday's death is only the third for coalition servicemembers so far this year. Five coalition civilians or contractors have died in Afghanistan in 2015, of various combat and noncombat causes.

smith.josh@stripes.com

Thousands protest Iraqi government

The Washington Post

BAGHDAD — Tens of thousands of Iraqis took to the streets to demand changes to their government Friday in a challenge to Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi from his Shiite constituency.

Crowds thronged Baghdad's central Tahrir Square and jammed the main streets around it, some calling on Abadi to fire corrupt ministers and others urging more sweeping changes to the system of governance.

The protest was the biggest in a surge of demonstrations that erupted across the country over the past week as Iraqis vent frustration with their government, which can't provide basic

services 12 years after the 2003 U.S. invasion.

The numbers far exceeded a smaller demonstration a week earlier that was organized by secular activist groups to protest the lack of electricity during the heatwave.

Friday's had the backing of the Shiite factions whose militias are fighting against the Islamic State group and influential religious leader Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, regarded as the voice of Shiite moderation.

In a statement Friday, one of al-Sistani's top aides called on al-Abadi to combat widespread corruption in his government.

Al-Abadi vowed to heed the protesters' demands.

Similarly large protests were held across the Shiite south, including in the cities of Basra, Najaf, Karbala and Nasiriyah, underscoring the growing challenge to al-Abadi, who was appointed a year ago at the urging of the United States to bring new impetus to the fight against the Islamic State group.

Some of the demonstrators called for Abadi's resignation.

Though all the demonstrators complained about corruption and the lack of services, there were noticeable differences in their demands, reflecting rifts among Iraqi Shiites.

Supporters of Qais al-Khazali, who heads the Iranian-backed Asaib Ahl al-Haq

militia, echoed his demand for the abolition of Iraq's elected parliament and replacing it with a presidential system of government.

The protesters also included a number of supporters of former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, who has not attempted to hide his hopes of returning to power.

Many demonstrators said they had turned out only to demand what Lamia Fadhil, 29, called "a decent life."

"For more than 10 years, the government didn't provide anything for us. No electricity, no services and no jobs," she said. "That's it. We've had enough."

VA blamed for overdose death

BY HEATH DRUZIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — An inspector general's report faults a Wisconsin Veterans Affairs hospital for the accidental overdose death of a Marine Corps veteran that sparked outrage and legislation aimed at strengthening guidelines for prescribing painkillers.

The Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General found that Jason Simcakoski's death at a Tomah, Wis., VA center in August 2014 was tied to a toxic mix of prescribed

drugs and also faulted VA staff for botching resuscitation efforts once he was found. The Tomah VA has been dubbed "Candyland" for what some say was wanton overprescription of opiates.

Simcakoski, 35, served in the Marines from 1998-2002 and suffered a head injury. He sought care for anxiety attacks at the Tomah VA, where his family said he struggled for years with no improvement despite a long list of medications. He was found unresponsive Aug. 30, and the report found that the two psychiatrists who

prescribed drugs to Simcakoski did not talk to him or his family about risks associated with the drugs.

The report also criticized hospital staff for a chaotic resuscitation response and failing to have the proper drugs on hand to counteract Simcakoski's overdose.

In response to the report, Sen. Tammy Baldwin, D-Wis., who requested the investigation, released a statement saying "the sacred trust we have with those who faithfully serve our country has been broken and it needs to be fixed."

Colo. theater shooter gets life sentence

Associated Press

CENTENNIAL, Colo. — It didn't take jurors long to swiftly convict James Holmes of murder last month for his assault on a Colorado movie theater. Then they spent less than three hours deliberating before finding that his mental illness did not outweigh the heinousness of his crimes.

But when it came time to decide whether to sentence him to death on Friday, at least one juror balked.

As a result, James Holmes will be sentenced to life in prison for the 2012 attack that killed 12 and injured 70 during the midnight screening of a "Batman" movie. Nine jurors wanted to execute Holmes, but one was steadfastly opposed and two others were wavering, a juror told reporters after the verdict was announced.

"Mental illness played into the decision more than anything else," said the woman, who would not give her name.

The verdict shocked the courtroom. Holmes' mother, Arlene, who had begged jurors to spare his life, leaned her head against her husband's shoulder and began sobbing. In the back, Aurora police officers who responded to the bloody scene of Holmes' attacks began crying.

Sandy Phillips, whose daughter, Jessica Ghawi, was killed by Holmes, shook her head no and then held it in her hands. Ashley Moser, whose 6-year-old daughter died in the attack and who was herself paralyzed by Holmes' bullets, also shook her head and then slowly leaned it against the wheelchair of another paralyzed victim, Caleb Medley.

Families of victims began to leave the courtroom as Judge Carlos Samour Jr. continued reading the verdict. Their wails were audible through the closed courtroom doors.

As in previous proceedings, Holmes, who is on anti-psychotic medication that dulls his responses, showed no reaction.

Military's elite forces lack diversity

USA Today

WASHINGTON — Many of the Pentagon's elite commando units — including the Navy SEALs — are overwhelmingly led and manned by white officers and enlisted troops, a concern at the highest levels of the military where officials have stressed the need to create more diverse forces to handle future threats.

Black officers and enlisted troops are scarce in some special operations units in highest demand, according to data provided by the Pentagon to USA Today. For instance, eight of 753 SEAL officers are black, or 1 percent.

An expert at the Pentagon on the diversity of commando forces said the lack of minorities robs the military of skills it needs to win.

"We don't know where we will find ourselves in the future," said Army Col. Michael Copenhaver, who has published a paper on diversity in special operating forces. "One thing is for sure: We will find ourselves around the globe. And around the globe, you have different cultural backgrounds everywhere. Having that kind of a diverse force can only increase your operational capability."

Special operations forces, including SEALs and the Army's

Green Berets, are often the face of the American military in foreign hot spots where they rescue hostages, raid terrorist camps and train local troops. As the military sheds conventional forces, special operators' ranks continue to be filled as demand for their unique capabilities remains high.

The diversity of special operating forces is closely held information. U.S. Special Operations Command, which oversees all the services' commandos, declined to provide data on the racial makeup of its forces. USA Today had to obtain that data from each service individually, a process that took months.

2 women among Ranger students in homestretch

The Washington Post

EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. — As the sun beat down on Ranger students traversing the Yellow River here Tuesday, a handful of them in one inflatable Zodiac boat wondered if they'd really just passed a poisonous snake.

"I think I just saw a water moccasin," said one soldier, paddling on the back left side of the boat.

"Where?" another asked, pulling his left leg a little farther away from the river.

"It was on the left side," the soldier in the back said. "He went back below the water."

The phantom serpent — perhaps real, perhaps imagined — illustrates some of the dangers and challenges that students face in the swamps of Florida during the third and final phase of Ranger School. The Army has used the Florida

Panhandle's wet terrain as part of Ranger School since 1951, but has incorporated women into it for the first time this past week as the service continues to assess how it can better integrate female soldiers in more units.

Two women who completed the previous phase in the mountains of northern Georgia arrived with about 125 men last weekend, reaching the homestretch of the famously grueling Ranger course.

Phelps dominates at nationals

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — Michael Phelps held up one finger, leaving no doubt he's No. 1.

Then he pounded the water defiantly — first with one hand, then with both. Yep, he's back.

Removing any uncertainty about how ready he'll be for the Rio Olympics, Phelps turned in his fastest time in the 200-meter butterfly since setting the world record in a high-tech suit six years ago.

Phelps' stunner — 1 minute, 52.94 seconds at the U.S. national championships Friday night — came after months of lackluster performances and serious problems away from the pool.

"This next year is going to be pretty damn fun," said Phelps, who unleashed one of the biggest celebrations of his career when he saw the time.

It would have been good enough for gold at the 2012 London Olympics, where he finished second behind Chad le Clos' time of 1:52.96. It would have been good enough to win at this year's world championships in Kazan, Russia, where Hungary's Laszlo Cseh took the title in 1:53.48.

"I think it just shows you anything is possible if you want something bad enough," Phelps said. "I can do whatever I put my mind to."

No question about that.

Not after a performance that no one saw coming — not even his longtime coach, Bob Bowman.

"That was one of his best swims," Bowman said, high praise indeed considering Phelps is the most decorated athlete in Olympic history with 18 golds and 22 medals overall.

Phelps should have been in Kazan this week — he easily qualified for the U.S. team — but he lost his spot as part of his punishment for a second drunken-driving arrest last fall. So he came to San Antonio for what is essentially a junior-varsity meet for swimmers who didn't earn a spot at the biggest swimming event outside the Olympics.

It was the middle of the night in Russia when he finished, but the time was sure to send plenty of ripples halfway around the world by Saturday morning.

"I wish I was there," Phelps said, "but I'm glad I'm here."

With the stands nearly full — despite another 100-degree day in south Texas — and fans packed around the railings at one end of the pool, Phelps seized the moment. He went out in 25.14 seconds, significantly faster than his opening pace in the morning preliminaries, and was clearly racing more than just the seven other swimmers in the "A" final.

He kept up the blistering pace right to the end, breaking 30 seconds on his final lap and touching the wall a full body-length ahead of runner-up Jack Conger (1:54.54).

"I had no clue," Phelps said. "Going into the 100 wall, I said, 'Please just make it feel this easy for one more 25.' Then I would just go to my legs as much as I can the last 75. When I hit 150 wall, I was like, 'I better get at least seven or eight kicks off this wall and just hammer it.'"

That he did.

It was Phelps' best performance in one of his signature events since he set the world record of 1:51.51 at the 2009 world championships in Rome — a meet remembered for its assault on the record book with nearly everyone wearing rubberized suits that were soon banned by FINA for making a mockery of the sport.

This time, Phelps was wearing a black textile jammer with his "MP" logo on the right leg, one of the suits he helped design as part of a new sponsorship deal.

"I guess the suit is pretty good," he quipped.

Before the race, Phelps wasn't his usual stoic self. He actually smiled and joked around with the swimmer in the lane next to him, Pace Clark, who recently did some training with Phelps in the high altitude of Colorado and was given a couple of the new suits by him.

Clark decided to wear the suit at nation-

als, and both swimmers seemed amused to be in matching attire as they climbed on the blocks.

"I'm just so relaxed right now," Phelps said. "I think that's the big thing about me in my everyday life."

Not so long ago, Phelps wasn't in such a good place. After that second DUI arrest, he underwent six weeks of inpatient therapy in Arizona, a stint that gave him a chance to re-examine his entire life. He has enrolled in Alcoholics Anonymous and vowed not to drink any alcohol at least through the Rio Olympics.

"I went through a lot," he said, pausing to consider his words. "A lot."

Once he completed therapy and had his legal issues resolved, Phelps threw himself totally into training. Bowman said the 30-year-old hasn't missed a day of practice since returning to the pool, a level of dedication he hasn't shown since the lead-up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics, where he broke Mark Spitz's iconic record with eight gold medals.

Phelps arrived in San Antonio looking more muscular and defined than he has at perhaps anytime in his career.

That work paid off, showing Phelps is fully committed to his second Olympics farewell. He initially retired after the London Games, only to change his mind just over a year later.

There were some who doubted he could ever regain his dominating form.

Even Bowman was a bit skeptical.

Not anymore.

"It's been a long, hard road to get here," Bowman said. "You never know if you're going to get back to (this) level. That's the real level."

In other events Friday night, Olympic gold medalist Allison Schmitt bounced back from a disappointing sixth-place finish in the 400 freestyle to win the 200 free. Mazime Rooney took the men's 200 free, Claire Adams captured the women's 100 backstroke, and Japan's Junya Koga claimed the men's 100 back.

Blackhawks' star Kane hires lawyer

Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Chicago Blackhawks star Patrick Kane has hired an attorney and will spend Saturday with the Stanley Cup while he is under police investigation over something that may have happened at his home last weekend.

Without providing any details, lawyer Paul Cambria confirmed in a text message to The Associated Press on Saturday that he's been hired to represent Kane. Cambria represented Kane in 2009, when he pleaded guilty to a noncriminal charge of disorderly conduct after being accused of assaulting a Buffalo cab driver over 20 cents.

In the meantime, Blackhawks spokesman Brandon Faber said Kane will spend Saturday with the Stanley Cup privately with his family in Buffalo.

The developments come a day after Hamburg police confirmed Kane is under investigation for an "incident that allegedly occurred" at the player's offseason home in suburban Buffalo. Hamburg Police Chief Gregory Wickett did not discuss the nature of the investigation. He said police are gathering information and awaiting forensic tests.

The investigation has forced Kane to change plans during his turn to host the Cup and celebrate the Blackhawks' third championship in six years. Kane had paraded the trophy around Buffalo the previous two times he hosted it.

This year, tentative plans called for Kane to bring the Cup to Buffalo Women's and Children's Hospital during what was supposed to be a private visit. Those plans fell through once reports of the police investigation surfaced.

Kane also was preparing to bring the Cup to his favorite pizza place in his old neighborhood in south Buffalo, and hold a celebration at a downtown bar. Kane, who wears No. 88, picked Saturday to host the Cup because it is the eighth day of the eighth month.

Cambria is a high-profile attorney who specializes in First Amendment issues. He has represented Hustler publisher Larry Flynt and music artists Marilyn Manson and DMX.

In other NHL news:

■ Right wing Jakob Silfverberg agreed to a four-year, \$15 million contract with the Anaheim Ducks on Friday.

Silfverberg was a restricted free agent after he set career highs with 13 goals and 26 assists last season, playing frequently on the second line for the Pacific Division champions. The 24-year-old Swedish Olympian broke out in the postseason with four goals and 14 assists in 16 games as Anaheim fell one victory short of the Stanley Cup final.

Although his new contract took several weeks to complete, Silfverberg said he was confident about his future in Orange County.

"I'm super excited," Silfverberg told reporters in a phone interview from Sweden. "... We were on the same page throughout the whole negotiation."

Sisters win gold, bronze at swim championship

Associated Press

KAZAN, Russia — The sisters of speed are keeping the 100-meter freestyle title all in the family.

Bronte Campbell led all the way against a strong field at the world swimming championships Friday, winning in 52.52 seconds to take the title away from older sister and defending champion Cate Campbell.

"I still can't believe that," Bronte said.

The 21-year-old Australian sprinter was under world-record pace at the turn, with Cate in second.

Bronte held on for gold and Cate settled for bronze.

"It's a fantastic night for the Campbell family and it's a fantastic night for Australia," Cate said. "I couldn't be more proud of my little sister."

Sarah Sjöström of Sweden took silver in 52.70, a repeat of her finish two years ago in Barcelona.

Bronte earned the biggest international victory of her young career with the fastest time in the world this year, knocking her sister and Femke Heemskerk of the Netherlands out of the top spot they shared.

Olympic champion Ranomi Kromowidjojo of the Netherlands was fourth. Heemskerk was fifth, followed by Simone Manuel and her U.S. teammate Missy Franklin.

The Aussies earned a second gold on the night when Mitchell Larkin rallied to win the 200 backstroke, completing a sweep of the backstroke events in Kazan.

"The Campbell sisters getting first and third was amazing, and that sort of inspired me and really motivated me," Larkin said.

He trailed Ryosuke Irie after two laps before surging to the lead on the third lap. Larkin won in 1 minute, 53.58 seconds to go with his title in the 100 back.

Radoslaw Kawecki of Poland finished second in 1:54.55. Evgeny Rylov of Russia

was third at 1:54.60.

Irie, the Olympic silver medalist, faded to sixth. Olympic champion Tyler Clary of the United States was seventh in an event the Americans have dominated for years.

"I might have (ticked) off a few people this week," Larkin said. "They'll be training really hard for the next 12 months. But it's a new challenge for me and I look forward to it."

James Guy rallied Britain to victory over the United States on the last lap of the 4x200 freestyle relay, an event the Americans had won at every worlds since 2005. Britain had never won gold in a men's relay at worlds.

The Americans settled for silver in 7:04.75. Australia was third at 7:05.34, earning its fourth medal of the night.

"We're going to definitely remember this," swimmer Ryan Lochte said. "Hopefully we're going to train our butts off all next year and hopefully not let that happen again in Rio."



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Niners move on without Smith

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Aldon Smith's teammates, coaches and everybody else around the San Francisco 49ers kept hoping the star linebacker had matured and moved forward from all the legal issues that overshadowed his young career as one of the NFL's most talented defenders.

Just when things were looking bright for Smith under a new and familiar head coach, with a potential new contract being discussed, and a positive fresh start after a tough year that ended without a playoff berth, his career derailed once more.

He lost his livelihood. This time, it's unclear when and if he can recover.

"We're not worried about football," an emotional coach Jim Tomsula said, "It has nothing to do with football."

The Niners released Smith on Friday, a day after his arrest by Santa Clara police on suspicion of drunken driving, hit and run and vandalism for his fifth run-in with the law since he arrived in the Bay Area as a first-round draft pick in 2011. He was

dismissed only three days after general manager Trent Baalke praised Smith's growth and spoke of re-signing him for next season with his contract year approaching.

Early in training camp, the 49ers took yet another tough blow following the departures and early retirements of several prominent players during a tumultuous offseason — fellow linebackers Patrick Willis and Chris Borland walked away from football.

"It's tough," safety Antoine Bethea said. "We've got to keep rolling. Next man up, whoever that may be, they've got to come in, they've got to step in, they've got to play well. Aldon, as we all know, when he's on the field he's something to reckon with."

Baalke and Tomsula informed Smith of the decision at team headquarters Friday after he left jail.

"It's a sad day," Tomsula said. "Guys care about him, we care about that guy, deeply."

Smith was arrested Thursday night on a day off from practice for players.

Smith had said when camp began he

was healthy and in great shape, "ready to go." While he is free to sign with any team, not needing to go through waivers, he likely would first face another lengthy NFL suspension.

He missed the first nine games of 2014 serving an NFL suspension for violations of the league's substance-abuse and personal-conduct policies.

Police said Friday that at 8:46 p.m., Smith collided with a parked vehicle while parking his car, then caused further damage to the parked vehicle with his car door. The scene was only a couple of miles from team headquarters, at or on the street of Smith's luxury apartment complex.

Authorities said Smith left without reporting the collision or providing any identifying information. He later returned and was contacted by officers. Smith displayed "objective symptoms of being under the influence of an alcoholic beverage" and officers conducted a field sobriety test, police said.

"Although he won't be playing football for the San Francisco 49ers, he will be supported and helped, and he will not have to walk this path alone," Tomsula said.

Miami staying positive

Associated Press

CORAL GABLES, Fla. — Braxton Berrios' story could serve as the ultimate example of what Miami is trying to accomplish this year.

He told people for years that his dream was to play for the Hurricanes. More often than not, they wouldn't believe. In fairness, he doesn't exactly fit the mold of the prototype Miami wide receiver — he stands only at 5-foot-9 and he's not a South Florida native like many great Hurricanes at that position in the past, hailing instead from Raleigh, N.C.

Look at him now. After 21 catches last season as a freshman, Berrios is already considered a leader and one of the keys to Miami's success in 2015.

"I know I got the last laugh," Berrios said. "They can turn on the TV and see it. I know I got the last laugh on all those people who laughed in my face."

He's thinking the Hurricanes might get some collective last laughs this season as well.

It's an annual rite in college football. Dozens of preseason publications come out and predict how the year ahead will play out, and it's no secret around Miami that the external expectations for the Hurricanes this season aren't exactly overwhelming. The consensus seems to be that the Hurricanes will basically be a middle-of-the-pack team in the Atlantic Coast Conference, and that coach Al Golden's hold on his job is tenuous at best.

Somehow, the Hurricanes have convinced themselves not to care about what's being said on the outside.

"We don't listen to it," Berrios said. "We're not worried about that ... we're not. We're going to be good. We know we're going to be good and that's really all that matters to us. We can't stop them from saying anything, we can't sway their opinion. We don't care."

After a freefall ended last season — a four-game losing streak, to be precise — Miami doesn't need much in the way of motivation these days. The Hurricanes finished 6-7, the program's worst mark since 2007 and that came in a year where they were supposed to contend for the ACC's Coastal title. Now, only a few of the preseason predictors see Miami as a legit candidate to win the Coastal.

The Hurricanes disagree. They're also not looking back.

"I'm excited. That's it," Golden said Friday at the team's annual media day luncheon, seeming exasperated over a question about the 2014 season.

Everyone knows that these have not been glory years for Miami.

The Hurricanes haven't won a national title since the 2001 season, are still waiting for their first ACC crown, plus haven't won a bowl game since escaping with a 21-20 win over Nevada on a frigid New Year's Eve night at Boise State in 2006.

And of course, there was that NCAA investigation that started in 2011 over the actions of a rogue former booster who's now serving time in federal prison for masterminding a \$930 million Ponzi scheme.

Golden may be in a make-or-break year, even though he's under contract through the 2019 season. He said Friday that he doesn't let that notion bother him.

Mets beat Rays for 7th straight victory

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Michael Conforto hit a tying double and Wilmer Flores had a go-ahead single in the ninth inning to help the surging New York Mets beat the Tampa Bay Rays 4-3 on Friday night for their seventh consecutive victory.

Juan Uribe and Daniel Murphy homered late for the NL East leaders. They improved to 4-0 on a six-game road trip and moved 2½ games ahead of second-place Washington.

Lucas Duda reached first base to start the ninth on a throwing error by reliever Brad Boxberger (4-8). Duda went to second on a wild pitch and came home on Conforto's liner to left-center. The rookie scored to make it 4-3 when Flores blooped a two-out single to right.

Tyler Clippard (1-0) was the winner, and Jeurys Familia got three outs for his 30th save. The Mets said it was the first time in franchise history they overcame three different deficits in each of the last three innings to win.

Evan Longoria, James Loney and Grady Sizemore homered for the Rays

Blue Jays 2, Yankees 1 (10): Jose Bautista homered with one out in the 10th inning after two of the top slugging teams in the major leagues engaged in a pitchers' duel, lifting surging Toronto past host New York for its sixth straight victory.

Bautista connected off Brandon Pinder (0-1) to pull Toronto within 3½ games of the AL East-leading Yankees.

Rockies 5, Nationals 4: Drew Storen (2-1) allowed Carlos Gonzalez's eighth-inning grand slam, and host Washington blew a four-run lead in the loss to Colorado.

When Storen entered with six outs to go and the score 4-0, Washington appeared well on its way recording a second straight win for only the second time since the All-Star break. Everything changed during a rare ineffective performance by the Nationals' former closer, who lost his job when Jonathan Papelbon was obtained in a July 28 trade with Philadelphia.

Angels 8, Orioles 4: Mike Trout homered on his birthday for the third time in his career, and Chris Iannetta delivered a go-ahead, two-run double in host Los Angeles' victory over Baltimore.

After Trout was serenaded with a birth-

day song from the Angel Stadium outfield crowd in the first inning, the reigning AL MVP celebrated his 24th birthday by drilling his major league-leading 33rd homer in the bottom half.

Pirates 5, Dodgers 4 (10): Pinch-hitter Pedro Alvarez lined a bases-loaded single over a five-man infield in the 10th inning to lift host Pittsburgh past Los Angeles.

The Pirates loaded the bases with no outs against Jim Johnson (2-4). Jung Ho Kang walked, Francisco Cervelli singled and Sean Rodriguez had a bunt single.

Cardinals 6, Brewers 0: Randal Grichuk hit a three-run homer to cap a six-run fifth inning, and Lance Lynn (9-6) pitched visiting St. Louis past Milwaukee.

Lynn stranded nine runners in six innings as the NL Central leaders became the first major league team to reach 70 wins this season. He allowed six hits and four walks while throwing 109 pitches.

Cubs 7, Giants 3: Rookie Kyle Schwarber had two hits and two RBIs to back Jon Lester, and host Chicago beat San Francisco for its eighth victory in nine games.

Schwarber, who homered the previous two games, also scored two runs to help put the Cubs 1½ games ahead of San Francisco for the second wild card. They also moved 12 games over .500 for the first time since the 2008 NL Central championship season.

Red Sox 7, Tigers 2: David Ortiz homered and Hanley Ramirez and Xander Bogaerts added two-run doubles to lead visiting Boston past Detroit.

J.D. Martinez hit his 30th homer for the Tigers.

Daniel Norris (2-2) gave up three hits in a 39-pitch first inning, including Ramirez's double that staked Joe Kelly (4-6) to an early lead.

Royals 3, White Sox 2: Edinson Volquez (11-6) pitched seven strong innings and Lorenzo Cain doubled home the go-ahead run in the sixth to help host Kansas City beat Chicago.

Volquez limited the White Sox to one run and four hits and has allowed three or less runs in seven straight starts, lowering his ERA to 3.11.

Diamondbacks 2, Reds 0: Chase Anderson (5-4) pitched seven innings of

four-hit ball in his return from the disabled list, and Wellington Castillo homered again in host Arizona's victory over Cincinnati.

Anderson struck out seven and walked two in his first win since June 28. He was activated before the game after missing almost three weeks with right triceps inflammation. Brad Ziegler pitched the ninth for his 20th save.

Braves 6, Marlins 3: Nick Markakis had three hits, including a tie-breaking two-run double in the seventh inning, and host Atlanta beat Miami.

Markakis extended his hitting streak to 14 games, finishing 3 for 4 with two RBIs.

Athletics 3, Astros 1: Josh Phegley had two hits and drove in a run, Danny Valencia hit a home run and Sonny Gray (12-4) won a pitching duel with Dallas Keuchel (13-6) in host Oakland's victory over Houston.

Gray improved to 5-1 over his last 11 starts by giving up one run and five hits. He struck out five and did not walk a batter in his third complete game, all within his last six starts.

Twins 10, Indians 9: Torii Hunter hit a ninth-inning homer to help visiting Minnesota beat Cleveland to end a five-game losing streak.

Hunter connected against Bryan Shaw (1-2) to complete a comeback for the Twins, who couldn't hold an early 6-0 lead. Hunter also drove in two runs in the Twins' six-run third.

Mariners 4, Rangers 3: Nelson Cruz and Robinson Cano hit consecutive home runs off Cole Hamels (0-1) to start the sixth inning, rallying host Seattle past Texas.

Hisashi Iwakuma (3-2) pitched seven effective innings and Mark Trumbo also went deep for the Mariners, who ended Texas' four-game winning streak.

Phillies 4, Padres 3 (12): Cameron Rupp hit his team's fourth home run of the game, a leadoff shot in the 12th inning that lifted visiting Philadelphia over skidding San Diego.

Rupp drove a fastball from Kevin Quackenbush (1-2) to straightaway center field for his third homer of the season. Domonic Brown, Ryan Howard and Cody Asche hit long home runs off Padres starter James Shields.