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GAO: Plan to retire A-10s falls short

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Air Force does not have a clear plan for retiring and replacing the A-10 Thunderbolt II aircraft — nor reliable estimates of how much money the move could save, according to a federal audit released Wednesday.

The Government Accountability Office found the service plans to fill the air power gaps left by the A-10, which is known as a close-air-support stalwart, but has not said what it plans to do about the aircraft's role in combat search and rescue missions.

Meanwhile, the Air Force claim that retirement could save up to \$4.2 billion is unreliable and the actual savings could be higher or lower, if A-10 upkeep and the need for replacement aircraft are properly calculated.

The audit was ordered by Congress in the 2015 defense budget after the Air Force kicked up a political storm by first proposing the retirement as a cost-sav-

ing measure. The service has said it disagrees with the federal watchdog's findings.

"The Air Force has not established clear requirements for the missions the A-10 performs, and in the absence of these requirements, has not fully identified the capacity or capability gaps that could result from the A-10 divestment," according to the audit.

The findings Wednesday could provide more ammunition for lawmakers who are blocking the service's effort and argue the aircraft saves lives on the battlefield.

Rep. Martha McSally, R-Ariz., a former A-10 pilot, said the GAO report confirmed her concerns that "the Air Force's flawed and shifting plan to prematurely retire the A-10 is dangerous and would put lives in danger."

Any retirement plan should be based on conditions that the A-10 be replaced after other aircraft are shown to fill its combat roles and not based on a timetable, McSally said in a released statement.

Navy rips interception of USS Nitze by Iran

BY CHRIS CHURCH
Stars and Stripes

MANAMA, Bahrain — Four Iranian gunboats sped close to a U.S. guided-missile destroyer in the Strait of Hormuz in what the U.S. Navy called an "unsafe and unprofessional" encounter. Iran warned that its forces would respond to any foreign vessel entering its territorial waters.

The USS Nitze, which was sailing with another guided-missile destroyer, the USS Mason, fired 10 warning flares, sounded its ship whistles and tried unsuccessfully to communicate with the Iranian boats a dozen times during Tuesday's incident, U.S. defense officials said.

Nitze changed course away from the Iranian vessels to de-escalate the situation and to avoid collision despite being near offshore oil rigs, the Navy said.

The boats from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard navy

eventually left the scene after coming within 300 yards of the Nitze. A U.S. Navy spokesman, Cmdr. Bill Urban, criticized the Iranian actions as "unsafe and unprofessional" and could "lead to escalation and miscalculation."

"Commanding officers have an inherent obligation for self-defense," Urban said.

"We absolutely expect all maritime nations to act in a professional manner in accordance with international law," Urban added. "The U.S. Navy continues to remain vigilant, and is trained to respond in a professional manner for all interactions."

In response, Iran's defense minister warned that Iranian forces would respond to any foreign ships entering its territorial waters.

"If any foreign vessel enters our waters, we will give them a warning, and if it is an act of aggression, we will confront them," Gen. Hosein Dehghan told Iranian media Thursday.

N. Korean leader: SLBM test was 'greatest success'

BY KIM GAMEL
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea's ruler on Thursday hailed a submarine-launched missile test as "the greatest success" and said it put the U.S. mainland within striking distance.

Kim Jong Un's comments were full of North Korea's trademark hyperbole, but the facts on the ground are increasingly giving the erratic leader something to brag about.

The Pukguksong, or Polaris, ballistic missile fired Wednesday traveled 310 miles from the eastern port city of Sinpo before crashing into the sea. It reportedly could have flown at least twice as far, but the North Koreans fired it at a high angle to avoid getting too close to Japan.

The technical success comes at a time of heightened tensions on the divided peninsula, with a new round of joint U.S.-South Korean war games that began on Monday.

The North Korean leader, who watched the launch from an observation deck, called it the "greatest success and victory," and said the North had "joined the front rank of the military powers fully equipped with nuclear attack capability," according to the state-run Korean Central News Agency.

KCNA confirmed the missile was fired at a high angle and used solid fuel. Several photos in North Korea's official Rodong Sinmun newspaper showed the missile soaring into

the sky and Kim smiling and embracing officials who were with him.

"The U.S. mainland and the operational theater in the Pacific are now within the striking range of the [Korean People's Army], no matter how hard the U.S. tries to deny it," it said.

North Korea has test-fired nearly 20 missiles since the U.N. Security Council tightened sanctions March 2 to punish it for conducting its fourth nuclear test and a long-range rocket launch earlier in the year.

General's career brought down by love life

USA Today

WASHINGTON — Maj. Gen. David Haight, Army Ranger, combat veteran and family man, held a key post in Europe this past spring and a future with three, maybe four stars.

He also led a double life: an 11-year affair and a “swinger lifestyle” of swapping sexual partners that put him at risk of blackmail and espionage, according to interviews and documents. Jennifer Armstrong, 49, a government employee, said she and Haight had been involved in the torrid love affair that began more than 10 years ago in Baghdad and ended last spring.

Badly.

His secret discovered, Haight was investigated by the Army inspector general — who issued a report in April — and was fired in May from his job running operations and plans at U.S. European Command, the Pentagon's front-line bulwark against Russia. The Army hauled him back to Washington, reprimanded him based on an internal investigation and put him into a placeholder job awaiting retirement. A board will determine the rank that he last served honorably. A demotion to colonel or lower would cost him tens of thousands of dollars per year.

Haight's removal from European Command was not disclosed. It was first revealed in July by USA Today, which received the Army inspector general's report Wednesday after a Freedom of Information Act request.

Armstrong, who told USA Today in interviews that the relationship began with a flirty email and ended after assignments with multiple partners at swingers' clubs, hotels and her home, said Haight had promised a future together.

“I gave him the best years of my life,” she said.

In a statement issued after news of his reprimand broke, Haight vowed to work with Army investigators untangling his dark, off-duty life.

“I am truly sorry for the pain I have caused my wife and family,” Haight said in a statement Wednesday. “On their behalf, I ask that their privacy be respected during this difficult time.”

How Haight, the married father of four adult children who has held a succession of increasingly influential jobs, maintained his intimate secret is unclear. His superiors promoted him three times since his affair with Armstrong began. Screeners of officials for security clearances — particularly those trusted with access to the nation's most sensitive information like Haight — scrutinize financial and family stability to guard against vulnerability to bribes or blackmail.

If an adversary such as Russia had learned of Haight's affair and sexual adventures, he would have been a prime target to blackmail, said four senior government officials, who were not authorized to speak publicly about the matter.

Russia, one of the officials said, aggressively intercepts telephone calls. An investigative report showed that from June to November 2015 Haight used his government cellphone to make 84 private calls for more than 1,400 minutes of conversation. Further, testimony showed that Haight frequently left his office in Stuttgart, Germany, because it was in a building designed for secure communication, a Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility, or SCIF.

“When MG Haight disappeared and someone needed to get ahold of him, (name redacted) knew to check the hallway, outside of the SCIF, where he was usually on his cellphone,” the report notes.

Haight, in his job overseeing operations at European Command and previously as a top aide to Adm. Mike Mullen, the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, would have had access to the most sensitive national security information. Indeed, Haight was a key adviser to Mullen at the time of the 2011 raid that killed Osama bin Laden and during the peak of the U.S. involvement in Afghanistan.

The inspector general's report dates the affair to Feb. 12, 2005, when Armstrong was working as a contractor in Iraq handling the remains of combat fatalities. Smitten after seeing Haight at a base, she emailed every David Haight in the Army directory, saying that he had a “terrific smile.”

Eventually, she found the right Haight — Lt. Col. David B. Haight, commander of the 2nd Ranger Battalion, elite troops who accompanied commandos on sensitive, dangerous raids.

Haight eventually responded to Armstrong's email, and they hit it off.

Armstrong's account of their affair is backed up by emails she said the two shared, indicating trysts involving other women, other couples and encounters with strangers at swingers' clubs.

Armstrong's name is redacted in the Army inspector general's report about Haight. But she identified herself to USA Today as his longtime girlfriend and swinging companion.

Armstrong provided copies of emails from Haight's official military account that show their relationship continued into 2015. One of the emails in December 2010 has explicit sexual chatter, and shows him asking about the availability of another woman for a tryst. The report also shows that Haight and Armstrong exchanged other emails

with references to types of sexual activity.

Their affair continued through his postings, including at the Pentagon. The two lived not far from each other in Northern Virginia, and Haight stopped at her house most nights after work before going to his own home, she said.

Armstrong found partners for the couple, and email on his military account shows that he asked about them and their availability. These encounters took place for about a year when Haight asked Armstrong whether she wanted to involve men.

Soon, a friend suggested that they should go to a club where members engage in sex with strangers. They went to clubs in Baltimore and near the Army War College in Carlisle Barracks, Pa., Armstrong said. They visited others when he traveled, including Tampa and Atlanta, where they were almost recognized by another soldier when Haight was the Army's Chief of Infantry, she said. Armstrong has also recognized other swingers at the Pentagon when her job took her there, she said.

The inspector general's report refers to testimony that indicates Armstrong and Haight “visited swingers' clubs while he was stationed at Fort Benning, Ga.” Haight was assigned to Benning from July 2012 to October 2013.

They also had “parties” at Armstrong's house. Some of the sex parties were arranged with partners through emails pinged back and forth to find convenient times. She described the sex as “nonemotional intimacy.” There were no drugs or alcohol involved, she said.

Haight's trajectory in the Army had been ever upward after graduating from the Army ROTC program at Brigham Young University and commissioning as a second lieutenant in 1986, according to his EUCOM biography. He graduated from the Army's Ranger school and would go on to command its elite platoons and battalions in combat in Panama, Iraq and Afghanistan.

His last post, as a two-star officer, saw him heading plans and operations for U.S. European Command. EUCOM has responsibility for key Middle East allies Israel and Turkey.

In 2015, anonymous tips about Haight's extramarital affairs were brought to the Pentagon's inspector general. Ultimately, the Army's inspector general took the case.

The Army ordered Haight to sever contact with Armstrong. Investigators interviewed her and others and substantiated allegations that he had “had an affair and lived a ‘swinger lifestyle.’”

The letter of reprimand effectively ended his 30-year career. A board will determine his retirement rank.

American University in Kabul still closed after deadly attack

BY CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — At least 13 people were killed and dozens more were wounded in an overnight raid on the American University of Afghanistan in Kabul, officials said Thursday.

The seizure of the university, which began Wednesday night and lasted until early Thursday, was described by one educator as an attack on the country's future that has robbed Afghan students of their hope.

"We are terrorized, and we are really scared about the future," said Homayoun Azizi, who has taught for seven years at a high school for blind children that is adjacent to the university. Afghan students had hoped to learn and to build a future, but "now their hope is gone."

No one has claimed responsibility for the attack. The assault was launched about 7 p.m. Wednesday at the high school, which shares the university's southern wall.

The attackers rammed a metal security gate on Darul Aman Road, killed a guard and detonated a car bomb next to the shared security wall.

The blast blew out window casings and shattered glass hundreds of feet away, including the roof of a university greenhouse

and other buildings. Shrapnel and flames destroyed a trailer outside the high school containing medical supplies, and the pressure wave toppled and bent the brick-and-steel wall behind it, an apparent weak spot in the university's otherwise heavily fortified exterior.

Two gunmen then breached the wall and holed up in the campus for nine hours until security forces killed them about 4 a.m. Thursday.

Hours later, both the high school and the university remained closed and armed guards restricted access to the university. Azizi, who teaches computer skills, English and Dari literature at the high school, was with other officials assessing the damage in the high school, which was empty at the time of the attack.

"There should have been normal activities here now ... but everything has stopped," he said. None of the roughly 300 students was injured, but their education has been stalled indefinitely, he said.

The dead included at least seven university students or faculty members, a high school watchman, two university security guards and three police officers, said Basir Mujahid, a Kabul police spokesman. At least 35 were injured. Police helped evacuate about 700 students.

Green Beret killed as he aided Afghan forces

BY TARA COPP
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Army Staff Sgt. Matthew V. Thompson was helping Afghan special forces clear a Taliban stronghold in southern Afghanistan when he was killed, a spokesman for the NATO-led mission said Thursday.

Thompson, 28, a Green Beret, died Tuesday from injuries he sustained when the Afghan unit that he was advising hit an improvised explosive device.

The unit, which was operating in Helmand province near its capital of Lashkar Gah, was "clearing some areas so it could be followed along by conventional forces," when the incident occurred, said Brig. Gen. Charles Cleveland, spokesman for Resolute Support.

A second U.S. soldier and six Afghan soldiers were injured by the IED. The U.S. soldier injured is stable and remains in Afghanistan, Cleveland said.

Thompson was one of about 700 U.S. personnel in Helmand who are helping the Afghan army and police forces repel new advances by the Taliban to take key cities in the region, Cleveland said.

Thompson was part of Company A, 3rd Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) based out of Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., the Army said Wednesday in the announce-

ment of his death. He and the U.S. Special Forces with which he was deployed were operating out of Camp Shorab, Afghanistan, based alongside the Afghan Army's 215th Corps.

Thompson was killed providing "tactical level" advising and assisting, part of the expanded authorities that President Barack Obama approved in June to increase U.S. involvement in assisting Afghan forces as they fight a resurgent Taliban. The expanded authorities also extended to U.S. air power, and U.S. warplanes have conducted 80 airstrikes in Helmand since June, Cleveland said.

Cleveland said missions that take U.S. Special Forces outside the wire to assist Afghan special forces only make up about 10 percent of all Afghan special forces operations. However, he said that percentage still means U.S. forces, who are assisting the NATO "train advise and assist" mission, are frequently off base.

"On average, we probably have somebody out every night or every other night," Cleveland said.

He said when they are assisting the Afghan forces on a mission, the U.S. or NATO forces will stop at "the last safe location."

"The Afghans go conduct the operation and then they come back," Cleveland said.

Anguish mounts as Italy earthquake death toll rises

Associated Press

AMATRICE, Italy — Rescue crews aided by sniffer dogs dug through crumbled homes Thursday looking for earthquake survivors as Italy again anguished over how to secure its ancient towns and modern cities from the country's highly seismic terrain.

After a night of uninterrupted, floodlit search efforts, firefighters and rescue crews worked in teams around the hard-

hit area in central Italy, pulling chunks of concrete, rock and metal from mounds of rubble where homes once stood, searching for signs of life.

Authorities said at least 241 people were killed and hundreds were injured in the quake that struck at 3:36 a.m. Wednesday. At least 470 aftershocks have rattled the area — one as strong as magnitude 5.1.

One rescue effort focused on the Hotel Roma in Amatrice, famous for the Amatriciana bacon and tomato pasta sauce that

brings food lovers to this medieval hilltop town each August for its food festival.

Amatrice's mayor had initially said 70 guests were in the crumbled hotel ahead of this weekend's festival, but rescue workers later halved that estimate and the owner said most guests had managed to escape.

Firefighters' spokesman Luca Cari said one body had been pulled out of the hotel rubble just before dawn after five were extracted earlier, but searches continued there and elsewhere.

Symbol of Katrina returns to La.: front-yard mobile homes

Associated Press

BATON ROUGE, La. — Mobile homes will fill front yards across southern Louisiana again, just like after Hurricane Katrina, as federal authorities bring in temporary housing for thousands of people displaced by catastrophic flooding.

These houses, though, will be on blocks and strapped down — not on wheels like the travel trailers of a decade ago.

As he announced the disaster housing plans Wednesday, Gov. John Bel Edwards described a “shelter at home” program as the more desirable option. Homeowners will be able to receive grants of up to \$15,000 aimed at making houses habitable quickly so people can live inside while doing more extensive repairs.

“That’s where our people

want to be. They want their kids back going to their schools. They want to live in their neighborhoods, their communities. And they want to attend their church,” the Democratic governor said.

Registration for the program begins Monday, but the grants can help only homeowners with less catastrophic damage. Those with more severe destruction will have access to mobile homes not unlike the trailers used for Katrina victims.

Edwards underscored that “this is not the preferred option,” but he drew a contrast to the old Federal Emergency Management Agency travel trailers used a decade ago. He said the mobile homes meet higher regulatory standards, are already owned by FEMA and are manufactured by one

company rather than the myriad vendors that built the travel trailers.

“These are not the same as FEMA trailers that have been used in the past,” Edwards said. “Hopefully, they will hold up better and offer a safer place for people to live.”

The much-maligned travel trailer that dotted front yards and miles of vacant property in south Louisiana and Mississippi became a symbol of everything that had gone wrong with the federal disaster response to the destructive 2005 hurricane. Families were crammed into tiny trailers that drew health worries after toxic levels of formaldehyde were found.

It wasn’t immediately clear when the first mobile homes would be set up or how many people would need them.

Dallas officers’ killer showed PTSD symptoms

Associated Press

The Army reservist who killed five Dallas police officers last month showed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder after returning home from Afghanistan in 2014, but doctors concluded that he presented no serious risk to himself or others, according to newly released documents from the Veterans Health Administration.

Micah Johnson had sought treatment for anxiety, depression and hallucinations, telling doctors that he experienced nightmares after witnessing fellow soldiers getting blown in half. He also said he heard voices and mortars exploding, according to the documents obtained by The Associated Press under the Freedom of Information Act.

“I try to block those out, but it is kinda hard to forget,” Johnson told his care provider, according to the documents.

Johnson, 25, was the sniper who targeted the officers at the conclusion of a peaceful march July 7 in downtown Dallas, where demonstrators were protesting fatal police shootings in Minnesota and Louisiana. Armed with an assault rifle, he took multiple positions as he fired. Hours later, authorities used a bomb-carrying robot to kill him.

During his deployment, Johnson was largely confined to base in an area of Afghanistan that had seen heavy combat but that was relatively quiet when his unit arrived in November 2013, according to his former squad leader.

Upon his return to the U.S. nine months later, Johnson told doctors he was experiencing panic attacks a few times per week, including once while at Wal-Mart, where there was an unspecified conflict that required a police response, the records said.

The records do not show that Johnson was formally diagnosed with PTSD.

Tornadoes cause severe damage in Ind. but no serious injuries

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Tornadoes that touched down in central Indiana tore roofs off apartment buildings, sent air conditioners falling onto parked cars and cut power to thousands of people but left no one seriously injured.

About a dozen people suffered minor injuries as the twisters moved through the area Wednesday, Indiana State Police Capt. David Bursten said. Most of those injuries were in Howard County and included a resident who was trapped in a home by one of the storms.

A 5-month-old child who suffered a laceration in Montgomery County was among the injured, Bursten said. He added that residents took the approaching storms seriously, which he thinks prevented

more injuries from occurring.

Kokomo Mayor Greg Goodnight said there was “substantial damage to property” in his city and that “a lot of trees are down.”

Authorities said eight funnel clouds were spotted throughout the afternoon Wednesday. It was unclear how many touched down.

A preliminary survey showed an EF3 tornado with maximum winds of 165 mph struck Kokomo, about 40 miles north of Indianapolis, National Weather Service meteorologist Brad Herold said.

At the Park Place Apartments in Kokomo, maintenance technician Mitchell Carlson described the scene as “a madhouse.” He said the complex has 16 buildings and “probably eight of them don’t have a

roof” after the storm. Falling tree limbs and air conditioners damaged 20 to 30 cars, he said.

But no one was injured at the apartments, he said, adding, “So, I guess we’re all blessed at the Park Place.”

Indiana Gov. Mike Pence said he planned to tour Howard and Montgomery counties on Thursday to assess the damage. The Republican vice presidential candidate returned to his home state Wednesday evening. He was campaigning in North Carolina when the Indiana twisters touched down.

He said he had a “grateful heart” that there were no reports of deaths or serious injuries, and that he would remain in the state “as long as we need” to make sure people affected by the storms have the necessary support.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man fondles lingerie shoppers, rams police

PA HARRISBURG — Police say a man fondled two customers at a Victoria's Secret store in Pennsylvania before ramming a police car when officers tried to prevent him from getting away.

Christopher Novitzke, 37, of Harrisburg is charged with indecent assault for his alleged actions in the lingerie store at Colonial Park Mall on Aug. 22.

He's also charged with aggravated assault and attempted homicide for the police chase afterward. Police say he made a U-turn and rammed a cruiser head-on. The responding officer was treated at a hospital for his injuries.

Laundry detergent is stolen from home

MA NEW BEDFORD — Thieves who stole 15 bottles of laundry detergent from a Massachusetts home last weekend made a clean getaway.

New Bedford police Lt. Amos Melo said the homeowner called police Saturday night after returning home and finding that someone had used the stairs leading to the room where the laundry detergent was stored.

Melo told The Standard-Times the detergent was worth about \$250. Nothing else was taken from the home.

He said laundry detergent may seem like an unlikely target for thieves, but it can easily be sold for money, which can be used to buy drugs.

Meth postcards traced back to parolee

WA YAKIMA—A parolee is suspected of mailing inmates postcards soaked with methamphetamine.

The Yakima Herald-Repub-

lic reported he refused a random drug test related to his parole and was arrested at his residence.

A probable cause affidavit says a search uncovered handguns, meth, and postcards similar to those that were found to be laced with the drug at Washington State Penitentiary in Walla Walla.

The affidavit says a test determined there was meth on one of the cards, and two children were in the residence. Other items found include a list of inmate names and grams of meth.

Police investigating virtual kidnap scam

UT SALT LAKE CITY — Park City police are investigating a virtual kidnapping.

Police Capt. Phil Kirk told KSL-TV, of Salt Lake City, that a family received calls Aug. 12 from people claiming to have kidnapped their 15-year-old son.

Kirk said the callers knew information about the teen that led them to believe the threat was real. The callers threatened to harm the boy unless they received a ransom.

Kirk said police located the teen and determined no kidnapping had taken place.

Kirk advised using caution on social media, where scammers likely get personal information.

Guard soldiers assist in school renovation

SD SIOUX FALLS — Soldiers from the South Dakota National Guard teamed up with members of Suriname's armed forces to renovate a school in the South American country.

A team of eight soldiers from the Guard's 155th Engineer Company and 211th Engineer

Company worked alongside about a dozen Suriname Defense Force engineers.

Guard officials said the project is meant to provide training for military construction personnel while also assisting in a worthy community need.

The improvements included tiling, door construction and installation, painting, electrical and lighting installation, sink and toilet installation, waterline plumbing, septic tank venting, drainage installation and installing a boundary fence.

The project began in March, when the group toured 14 schools. Suriname's Ministry of Education chose the Santo Dorp School, which serves approximately 850 students from the area.

Man charged in threat to feed boy to gators

FL DAYTONA BEACH — A Florida man was charged with abuse after he allegedly beat an 8-year-old boy and threatened to feed the child to alligators in a nearby pond.

Dereck Dunn, 28, is accused of slapping the boy in the face, hitting him in the buttocks with a belt and pushing his head into the carpet so that, the boy told police, "he could not move and was unable to breath."

The boy also told authorities that Dunn took him behind the house on the Palm Coast, not far from Daytona Beach, and told the boy he was going to feed him to the alligators in the water.

Dunn, who is not the boy's father, was arrested on a child abuse charge and is being held on a \$7,500 bond, according to online booking records.

Charges are brought in attack on seagull

DE REHOBOTH BEACH — Police

in the Delaware resort of Rehoboth Beach say a Canadian man was charged for allowing his daughter to lure a seagull to a hole in the sand, where she killed it with a plastic shovel.

A police statement says officers were called to the beach about complaints that a girl was trying to hit seagulls with a shovel.

A police statement says the 13-year-old put food in a hole in the sand and killed one seagull, which was later found in a trash can.

Authorities said officers found the girl's father, Christian Lesieur, 48, of Quebec, Canada, drinking alcohol on the beach.

Police said Lesieur was charged with endangering the welfare of a child, a misdemeanor. It's not known if he has a lawyer.

Survey finds 16 acres belong to next county

SC BEAUFORT — Beaufort County is shrinking.

The Island Packet of Hilton Head reported that not only are beaches along the Atlantic eroding but a new survey shows 16 acres in the county really belong to neighboring Jasper County.

South Carolina's Geodetic Survey team has spent a year sorting through historical documents and researching buried landmarks to clarify where the county line is.

Most of the 16 acres belonging to Jasper County are along state Highway 170 and are in a highway department right of way.

Officials say there are no significant impacts from the border change. Such impacts could occur if people living in one county suddenly find themselves living in another.

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Heisman runner-up McCaffrey back, better

Associated Press

STANFORD, Calif. — Now here's a scary thought for defenses facing Stanford this season.

One year after shattering Barry Sanders' 27-year-old record for all-purpose yards in a season, Heisman Trophy runner-up Christian McCaffrey is back for his junior season as a "significantly" better player, according to his coach.

"I'm not trying to say he'll get more yards this year than he did last year. That's not what I'm talking about," coach David Shaw said. "I'm talking about a young man who's maturing. He's a year older. His body is still maturing. He's stronger, he's faster. He knows the offense better. It's been exciting knowing how much easier things are for him and also how hard he works. It's a fun thing to watch."

It will be hard to top what McCaffrey did last season when he ran for 2,019 yards, added 645 yards receiving and 1,200 on returns while scoring 15 touchdowns and setting the NCAA record with 3,864 all-purpose yards — 614 more than Sanders had in his Heisman Trophy-winning 1988 season.

But McCaffrey sees plenty of room for improvement and has spent the offseason becoming bigger, faster and more knowledgeable. He is so well-versed in Stanford's playbook in year three in college that he knows the assignments of all 11 offensive players on almost every play.

"That's something I've tried to harp on," he said. "I'm not perfect on all of them. But

definitely knowing what they're going to do makes my job a lot easier, especially when you're doing a bunch of things on the field. You have to know a lot of things and the more you know, the better you play."

Few players have ever done as much on the football field as McCaffrey did last year. He was a top runner both inside and when he got out in space. He was Stanford's leading receiver as well, beating defenses out of the backfield or when he lined up outside.

He was a dangerous returner who turned mundane special teams plays into must-watch events and he even threw two touchdown passes.

McCaffrey showed no signs of slowing down last season despite more than 400 touches on offense and special teams, gaining 461 yards in the Pac-12 title game against USC and 368 in a Rose Bowl victory against Iowa.

With a new quarterback running the offense and three new starters on the offensive line, McCaffrey may have to carry an even bigger load this season and Shaw believes his body can handle it.

"We're going to find every way humanly possible to get him the ball, similar to what we did a year ago," Shaw said. "I don't worry about stuff like that. This kid is a football player. He does a lot of different things and we'll let him do whatever he can to help us win football games."

McCaffrey came into last season as a bit of an unknown after getting limited opportunities in Stanford's complicated offense as a freshman. That won't be the case this year when defenses will have a target on

his back all season.

McCaffrey has enjoyed the attention that has come from his stardom that allowed him to go the ESPYs, where he got to meet several celebrities.

"He's still the same down to earth guy," receiver Michael Rector said. "He's still a goof ball in the locker room. It's been interesting to see with all the success and all the praise he's been getting he's been getting even more hungry. People can sit back and relax but he chose to get better, take more upon himself and push himself to be a better player. I think that will show this season."

One of the main differences for McCaffrey this season is that he is taking on a bigger leadership role. With four-year starting quarterback Kevin Hogan in the NFL, McCaffrey was the natural player to fill that void.

Before the team's first practice of fall camp, McCaffrey talked to the team about the importance of setting high standards if the team is going to achieve its goal of repeating as Pac-12 champions and possibly make the College Football Playoff.

The message resonated with his teammates.

"Christian is just a born leader," receiver Francis Owusu said. "You see the way he walks, the way he talks. You can just feel an energy that he emits that's so positive for our team. We watch him practice so hard and we all want to do that. The way he walks and talks is the way we want to do it."

West Virginia's Howard desires elite QB status

Associated Press

West Virginia's Skyler Howard is counting on a record 2015 bowl performance to help put to rest all that talk that he wasn't talented enough to be a starting quarterback in the Big 12.

Howard heads into his senior season hoping for much more against teams he watched growing up in Fort Worth, Texas.

"As a kid, you want to be one of the elite quarterbacks," he said. "But if I'm not, that's OK, too. Because I've never been that guy, actually. I've always come from the bottom. It doesn't surprise me that I've got to work my way up. I'm excited to do it. I like being the underdog because it's what I'm used to."

Attaining elite status might

be difficult considering nearly all the starting quarterbacks returning in the Big 12, among them Oklahoma's Baker Mayfield, Baylor's Seth Russell, Texas Tech's Patrick Mahomes and Oklahoma State's Mason Rudolph.

Lightly recruited and often hearing he was too slow and too short, the 6-foot Howard fought for respect in his first full season as a starter in 2015. He was fifth among conference quarterbacks both in passing yards and total offense, and fourth in touchdown passes. He also threw the second-most interceptions.

The math shows Howard needs to improve his accuracy, and he'll get that chance be-

hind a veteran offensive line and a speedy group of returning receivers.

Howard completed just 55 percent of his passes, throwing for 3,145 yards with 26 touchdowns and 14 interceptions. Although his receivers dropped multiple throws, Howard takes the brunt of the blame.

"My completion percentage definitely needs some work," Howard said. "That's one thing that I'm focusing on right now is just putting the ball in play. If I have more completions, then I have more yards."

A confidence boost came in the Cactus Bowl, where Howard threw for a bowl-record 532 yards and five touchdowns in a 43-42 win over Arizona State

as the Mountaineers ended the season 8-5.

That game let Howard and his teammates "establish a mentality that we can go out there and do this every game," he said. "It raised our bar higher to expect good things to happen rather than not. I feel like it carried over into the offseason."

Howard also aims to avoid repeating his mistakes. During losses to ranked teams Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, Baylor and TCU in October, Howard failed to complete half his throws in each game and was intercepted six times. Three of those came against Oklahoma, when he also had two fumbles, one of which was returned for a touchdown.

Garoppolo preps for Panthers

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Jimmy Garoppolo entered training camp last month knowing that for the first time in his two-year career he was preparing for his first NFL regular-season start.

Patriots coach Bill Belichick has repeated throughout the preseason that New England's priority at quarterback is to get Garoppolo ready for it.

As that clock winds, so too does the one ticking toward the start of Tom Brady's four-game "Deflategate" suspension. Brady has yet to see the field during the preseason, but as the Patriots approach Friday's third preseason game at Carolina — a game that traditionally brings extended playing time for starters — it will be the best dry run that Garoppolo will have prior to the Sept. 11 season opener at Arizona.

Whether Brady plays or not this week, the game clearly carries more importance for his understudy the past two seasons.

"This will be a good test," Garoppolo said. "It's pretty

much the closest thing we'll get to Week 1 and we'll see how it goes."

Belichick acknowledged there has been at least some shift toward preparations for the Cardinals.

"We definitely have an eye on them," he said. "We'll tighten the focus going forward, but we're certainly aware that is where we're headed on opening day. I don't think we want to get into a situation early in the season where we're knowingly doing something or dealing with something on a high-percentage basis that we haven't even talked about up until that point."

Brady made his first appearance at practice this week on Tuesday, days after his scheduled preseason debut against the Bears was scrubbed before kickoff when he accidentally cut his right thumb on scissors.

The positive from Brady's mishap was it allowed Garoppolo to get extra snaps, and he showed progress from his first start against New Orleans. He played the entire first half and one series in the second half

against the Bears, finishing 16-for-21 for 181 yards and a touchdown. He was 11-for-18 for 168 yards the week before against the Saints.

Brady said the rapport and dialogue between he and Garoppolo has been good, noting "there's always a good back and forth in our room."

It is a unique situation for Garoppolo. Though he will have the starting reins and be expected to fill the leadership role for the first month of the season, this is Brady's offense.

Garoppolo is approaching it by focusing on his tasks on the field.

"It's a tough situation at times, but you can't worry about that too much," he said. "It's one of those things where if you start worrying about that, then you can't focus on whatever it is: your reads, your checks, whatever it may be. You just have to go about your business the same way you always have. I'm not trying to do something crazy and do something I've never done before, I'm trying to be myself and do what I do."

Chargers pull offer to unsigned pick Bosa

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — Joey Bosa's holdout turned ugly Wednesday when the San Diego Chargers pulled their contract offer to the first-round draft pick and said they'll restructure a new deal that would reflect him playing less than a full season.

Bosa has missed all of training camp as his agents and the team wrangle over how much of his \$17 million signing bonus he'll get up front, as well as offset language in case he gets cut.

The Chargers were counting on the former Ohio State star to help bolster their pass rush and bring some excitement to a season that could be pivotal to their future in San Diego.

It's not clear whether Bosa, the No. 3 pick overall, is willing to sit out the season. Also unclear is how the situation could affect the Chargers' push for \$1.1 billion in a public subsidy for a new downtown stadium, which could be their last chance at remaining in San Diego.

The Chargers said in a statement that they gave Bosa's agents their best offer on Tuesday night, and it was rejected Wednesday.

"The offer that we extended was for Joey to contribute during all 16 games and beyond," the team said. "Joey's ability to contribute for an entire rookie season has now been jeopardized by the valuable time he has missed with his coaches and his teammates. Since Joey will not report at this time, his ability to produce not just early in the season, but throughout the entire season, has been negatively impacted."

One of Bosa's agents, Brian Ayrault, said in a statement that "the Chargers can focus on trying to sway public opinion, but our focus will remain on our client and securing a contract for him that is fair and consistent with his draft position."

Broncos still have many questions

Associated Press

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. — The Denver Broncos face critical decisions two weeks before the Super Bowl champions open the season.

They have more questions than answers heading into the third preseason game, none more glaring than at quarterback. Trevor Siemian was named the starter ahead of veteran Mark Sanchez for the game against the Los Angeles Rams on Saturday, and the full-time job appears to be his to lose.

Siemian, in his second year out of Northwestern, said he isn't looking beyond the Rams.

"I'm not reading too much into it," he said of his second straight start.

Siemian was limited in practice Tuesday because of a bruised right shoulder but

he was throwing Wednesday. Coach Gary Kubiak said Siemian did 80 percent of his usual workload and is still on track to be the starter against the Rams.

Siemian was 10-for-14 for 75 yards and led the Broncos to a touchdown on their first drive of Saturday's game against San Francisco. He dinged his shoulder when he tried to make a tackle on safety Ed Reid, who intercepted him and returned it for a touchdown early in the second quarter.

Sanchez struggled in last Saturday's loss to San Francisco. He was 10-for-17 for 120 yards, fumbled twice and was nearly picked off.

The offensive line is still unsettled, most notably at right guard. Ty Sambrailo was the projected starter but a hyperex-

tended elbow has sidelined him for most of training camp. Darriion Weems was playing well in place of Sambrailo but suffered a concussion against San Francisco.

Sambrailo is still wearing a brace and has not taken part in practice. Weems is in the concussion protocol.

C.J. Anderson is the clear No. 1 running back but veteran Ronnie Hillman's spot on the roster is in jeopardy because of the play of rookie Devontae Booker and second-year back Kapri Bibbs.

Hillman led the Broncos in rushing last year with 863 yards but Anderson was the main back in the postseason.

Anderson rushed for 90 yards and a score in the Super Bowl while Hillman had just five attempts for no gain.

Hill helps Dodgers shut out Giants

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Rich Hill pitched six dominant innings in his first start with Los Angeles and Justin Turner hit his 24th homer, lifting the Dodgers over the San Francisco Giants 1-0 on Wednesday night.

Los Angeles has a three-game lead over the Giants atop the NL West.

Turner homered in the fourth for the first hit against starter Johnny Cueto. Turner has 20 homers since June 10.

Hill (1-0) was on the disabled list with a blister on his left middle finger when the Dodgers acquired him from the Oakland Athletics on Aug. 1 along with outfielder Josh Reddick. He allowed five hits and struck out three while throwing 81 pitches.

Cueto (14-4) allowed a run and four hits over six innings, and San Francisco has lost eight of 10.

Kenley Jansen got his 37th save to complete the six-hitter. He reached 604 career strikeouts, tying Jim Brewer for most career strikeouts as a reliever in franchise history.

Cueto had two wins in three previous starts against the Dodgers this season.

He's still looking for his second win in the second half of the season.

With runners on the corners and two outs in the eighth, Dodgers manager Dave Roberts made a visit to the mound to talk with reliever Joe Blanton. He left Blanton in the game, and then Brandon Crawford flied out to the warning track in right to end the inning. Roberts threw his arms up in celebration.

Cubs 6, Padres 3: Major league ERA leader Kyle Hendricks (12-7) pitched six effective innings and visiting Chicago finished off a three-game sweep.

Yankees 5, Mariners 0: Rookie Gary Sanchez kept up his torrid stretch with his seventh home run in the past nine games, and Masahiro Tanaka (11-4) won his fourth straight start in visiting New York's victory over Seattle.

Rays 4, Red Sox 3 (11): David Ortiz hit his 30th home run in the first inning, but host Tampa Bay came back from

a three-run deficit to prevent Boston from taking sole possession of the AL East lead.

Rangers 6, Reds 5: Yu Darvish hit only the second homer by a Texas pitcher and Adrian Beltre had a tiebreaking double in the eighth inning to beat host Cincinnati.

Angels 8, Blue Jays 2: Albert Pujols moved into sole possession of 10th place on the career home run list with 584, Matt Shoemaker (8-13) pitched six shutout innings and visiting Los Angeles beat Toronto.

Orioles 10, Nationals 8: Baltimore closer Zach Britton saw his remarkable streak of 43 straight games without allowing an earned run end, then shut down host Washington's ninth-inning rally.

Marlins 3, Royals 0: Jose Fernandez (13-7) pitched seven innings and appeared to avoid a serious injury when he tweaked his right leg on his final pitch, helping host Miami snap Kansas City's winning streak at nine.

Cardinals 8, Mets 1: Matt Carpenter, Randal Grichuk and Stephen Piscotty homered off New York starter Jacob de-

Grom (7-7) to power host St. Louis.

Athletics 5, Indians 1: Kendall Graveman (10-8) pitched into the seventh inning to become his team's first 10-game winner this season, and host Oakland beat Cleveland.

Astros 5, Pirates 4: Evan Gattis hit his 20th home run, leading Collin McHugh (8-10) and visiting Houston over Pittsburgh.

Brewers 7, Rockies 1: Ryan Braun hit two home runs and host Milwaukee tied a season high with its fourth straight victory, beating Colorado.

Tigers 9, Twins 4: Miguel Cabrera hit his 28th home run and had four hits, Justin Upton added a three-run homer and visiting Detroit beat Minnesota.

Phillies 5, White Sox 3: Tommy Joseph and Cesar Hernandez homered to back Jerad Eickhoff (9-12), and struggling Philadelphia beat host Chicago.

Diamondbacks 10, Braves 9 (11): Brandon Drury drove in Jake Lamb with a sacrifice fly, giving host Arizona a win over Atlanta.

Marlins acquire Francoeur in three-team trade

Associated Press

MIAMI — The Miami Marlins acquired Jeff Francoeur from the Atlanta Braves in a three-team trade Wednesday night, hoping the well-traveled outfielder can provide a boost toward a playoff spot.

Francoeur was the only major leaguer included in the deal that also involved Texas. Any big league player traded after Aug. 1 had to first be put on waivers.

As part of the trade, the Braves will send the Marlins \$104,959 to help offset Francoeur's contract.

Francoeur hugged his Atlanta teammates and coaches goodbye in the visiting dugout early in Wednesday's game at

Arizona.

"It's hard. He's a great kid. He's one of the finest human beings I've ever been around," Braves interim manager Brian Snitker said. "We'll miss him. He's going to play meaningful games, good for him."

Atlanta got minor league shortstop Dylan Moore from Texas and catcher Matt Foley from Miami and the Rangers obtained two international signing slots from Miami and one from Texas.

Miami is contending for an NL wild-card spot and isn't sure whether star outfielder Giancarlo Stanton will return this season from a severe groin strain.

Francoeur hit .249 with seven home runs and 33 RBIs

in 99 games for the Braves. The 32-year-old plays left field and right field and is known for a strong arm.

The Marlins will be Francoeur's eighth team in the majors. Besides Atlanta, he has played for Kansas City, the New York Mets, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Texas and San Diego.

"He's been great for our young kids and has been great on the field as well," said Braves assistant general manager Billy Ryan. "Unfortunately, the circumstances of where we are as an organization, the Marlins are in contention, they're going for it, so it was an opportunity for him to get some meaningful at-bats and hopefully get in the postseason."

In other baseball news:

■ The Washington Nationals acquired left-handed reliever Marc Rzepczynski from the Oakland Athletics for minor league infielder Max Schrock.

The A's also sent cash to the Nationals as part of the trade announced Thursday: \$500,000 to be paid on Sept. 30.

Rzepczynski gives Washington another lefty out of the bullpen since trading Felipe Rivero to Pittsburgh and putting Sammy Solis on the disabled list. He is 1-0 with a 3.00 ERA in 56 appearances this season for Oakland.

The 32-year-old joins the sixth team of his major league career.

The 21-year-old Schrock was a 13th-round pick in 2015.