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No plans to 'dial back' war games

BY KIM GAMEL
AND YOO KYONG CHANG
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — Gen. Joseph Dunford said Thursday that he has advised U.S. leadership not to “dial back” joint war games with South Korea that are due to begin next week despite threats from North Korea.

The comments came as the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff visits China amid rising tensions over the North’s nuclear weapons progress.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in also vowed Thursday not to allow another war on the peninsula, and President Donald Trump has promised to get permission from Seoul for any military action against the North.

The 10-day command post exercise known as Ulchi Freedom Guardian is to begin

Monday and will involve tens of thousands of U.S. and South Korean servicemembers.

The mainly computer-simulated drills and other joint exercises infuriate Pyongyang, which considers them rehearsals for an invasion despite U.S. insistence that they’re defensive in nature.

That has heightened fears that this year’s exercise may spark a new crisis after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un left open a threat to fire missiles into waters near Guam, saying he would hold off for now while monitoring U.S. behavior.

Dunford, speaking to reporters in Beijing, said a military solution to the growing threat from the North would be “horrific” but “what’s unimaginable is allowing KJU (North Korean leader Kim Jong Un) to develop ballistic missiles with a nuclear warhead that can threaten the United States and continue to

threaten the region.”

He said the military was developing “credible, viable military options” upon orders from Trump.

The annual war games are key to maintaining readiness and alliance defense capabilities and are not on the negotiating table “at any level,” he added, according to Reuters.

“My advice to our leadership is that we not dial back our exercises,” he said. “As long as the threat in North Korea exists, we need to maintain a high state of readiness to respond to that threat.”

Dunford was responding to questions about comments by Trump’s chief strategist Steve Bannon, who was quoted in an interview with *The American Prospect* as saying “there’s no military solution” to the North Korean problem.

Moon, meanwhile, vowed not to allow a new war on the

peninsula, which was devastated by the 1950-53 war, which ended in an armistice instead of a peace treaty.

The United States — which backed Seoul in the war against the Chinese and Soviet-backed North — maintains about 28,500 servicemembers in South Korea.

“The people worked together to rebuild the country from the Korean War and we cannot lose everything again because of a war,” Moon said during a televised news conference to mark his first 100 days in office. “I say with confidence that there will never be another war on the Korean Peninsula.”

The liberal leader has been largely sidelined in recent weeks as Trump and the North engaged in a war of words. All sides moved to tamp down tensions this week and signaled they may be willing to move toward negotiations.

Blast kills US soldier in Afghanistan

BY CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

A Utah Army National Guardsman died and others were wounded by a blast while clearing a building in eastern Afghanistan, Utah Gov. Gary Herbert said Thursday.

The incident occurred Wednesday while a 12-soldier team was on patrol with Afghan troops battling Islamic State, which has established a foothold in the eastern part of the country and has carried out several deadly attacks elsewhere in Afghanistan.

The building was being cleared “for safety reasons,

but it was booby-trapped with explosives, Herbert said in a Thursday morning news conference.

The wounded suffered “various degrees of injuries,” he said, but he could provide no further information.

U.S. Forces-Afghanistan said earlier that the wounded, which also included Afghan troops, had been medically evacuated.

“It’s a tragedy for them and a tragedy for all of us,” Herbert said, adding that he would contact victims’ families to offer condolences. “It also is a reminder to all of us that the war on terror continues.”

Of about 190 Utah National

Guard soldiers and airmen now deployed, about 130 are in the Central Command area of operations. At least three of the wounded are not Utah residents but serve in the state’s guard unit.

In recent months, U.S. forces have been assisting Afghan troops in battling a Central Asian ISIS affiliate, known as ISIS-K, in eastern Afghanistan.

The U.S. has made it a priority to defeat the group in the country this year.

At least six of the nine other U.S. combat deaths this year before Wednesday occurred in Nangarhar province, near the

border with Pakistan.

Wednesday’s death is the first servicemember from Utah killed in action since May 2014, when Pfc. Cody J. Towse, a member of the Army’s 1st Armored Division, was killed by a roadside bomb in southern Kandahar province.

It was the first combat fatality for the Utah National Guard in Afghanistan since 2010, when Sgt. 1st Class James Thode, of the 118th Sapper Company, was killed by a roadside bomb in eastern Khost province, Herbert said.

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Mobile sea base commissioned in Bahrain

BY SCOTT WYLAND
Stars and Stripes

A new floating sea base named after the most decorated Marine in history is being commissioned Thursday in Bahrain.

The USS Lewis B. Puller is an expeditionary sea base with a large deck that will be used to launch helicopters, amphibious assault vehicles and other smaller vessels to support regional maritime operations.

It will replace the USS Ponce, an amphibious transport dock that supported missions in the Persian Gulf and other areas in the 5th Fleet theater.

It is scheduled to be decommissioned next year.

The new vessel is the second ship named after Lt. Gen. Lewis Burwell "Chesty" Puller, a World War II and Korean War

combat veteran who earned five Navy Crosses and the Distinguished Service Cross.

Those awards are second only to the Medal of Honor in recognizing valor.

"His example lives not just in every Marine but in every service member who faithfully serves our nation," Navy Secretary Richard V. Spencer said in a statement.

"Today's commissioning of USS Lewis B. Puller continues that legacy."

Capt. Adan G. Cruz will command the new vessel, whose crew will consist of both sailors and civilian mariners.

It will have two helicopter hangars, storage for four mine-sweeping hydrofoil sleds and cranes that lower vessels into the water instead of lowering the deck until it's submerged.

Puller earned his first two Navy Crosses during combat in Nicaragua in the early 1930s; he earned his third and fourth in fierce battles against the Japanese in World War II. He was awarded his fifth Navy Cross and the Distinguished Service Cross for leading a regiment that fended off enemy forces in Korea, despite being heavily outnumbered.

The first ship named for Puller was a guided-missile frigate used from 1982 to 1998.

It was transferred to the Egyptian navy and renamed the Touthka.

The Puller will work with the USNS Hershel "Woody" Williams, a sea base under construction, to handle less-intensive missions so warships can focus on more demanding operations in the Middle East and Pacific, the Navy said.

Sailors killed in Fitzgerald collision receive promotions

BY TYLER HLAVAC
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The Navy has posthumously promoted the seven USS Fitzgerald sailors who perished in a deadly June 17 collision with a merchant ship off the coast of Japan.

The Navy announced the promotions Wednesday.

■ Dakota Kyle Rigsby, 19, of Palmyra, Va., was advanced to petty officer third class.

■ Shingo Alexander Douglas, 25, of San Diego, Calif., was advanced to petty officer second class.

■ Sonar Technician 3rd Class Ngoc T. Truong Huynh, 25, from Oakville, Conn., was advanced to petty officer second class.

■ Noe Hernandez, 26, of Weslaco, Texas, was advanced to petty officer first class.

■ Carlos Victor Ganzon

Sibayan, 23, of Chula Vista, Calif., was advanced to petty officer first class.

■ Xavier Alec Martin, 24, of Halethorpe, Md., was advanced to chief petty officer.

■ Gary Leo Rehm Jr., 37, of Elyria, Ohio, was advanced to chief petty officer.

The sailors' bodies were recovered June 18 after divers gained access to flooded berthing compartments on the damaged ship, the Navy said in a statement announcing the promotions.

The Fitzgerald, which was placed in dry dock at Yokosuka on July 11, will be taken to the mainland United States on a heavy lift ship to undergo repairs in the fall, the service announced this week.

An investigation into the collision, led by Navy Region Hawaii commander Rear Adm. Brian Fort, is ongoing.

Town rallies for Marine family after moving truck is stolen

The (Santa Rosa, Calif.) Press Democrat

U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Rafael Aldama is a real do-it-yourself kind of guy, so when he moved from his post at Camp Pendleton last month to serve as a Marine recruiter in Santa Rosa, he rented a U-Haul truck and packed his family's belongings himself.

It was late when Aldama arrived at the new apartment the night of July 7 with wife Alexis Aldama-Mireles and daughter MARRISA, 4, so they decided to lock the truck, head to sleep and complete the military's stringent moving checklist in the morning.

But when Aldama walked outside at 8 a.m. the truck — and all their belongings — was gone.

"He came back inside and asked if I moved the truck," Aldama-Mireles said. "And I was like, no, no. And then we were like maybe it got towed."

The truck didn't get towed.

Santa Rosa Police officers found the mostly empty truck in a parking lot near the Aldamas' apartment later that afternoon.

The investigation is ongoing, but leads are scarce, said Santa

Rosa Police Lt. Mike Lazzarini.

"When we finally did get inside and start rummaging through what was left over, we realized not only did they take furniture and electronics, but things of a lot of sentimental value that would have no value to them," Aldama-Mireles said.

Aldama-Mireles' wedding dress. MARRISA's baby photos. All gone.

It took a little more than a month after the theft for James Brown, director of communications for Wine Country Marines in Sonoma, to get word of their situation. But once he did, he got to work.

After getting approval from the Marine Corps, Brown started seeking donations for the family.

The response has been overwhelming: more than \$5,000 in pledged cash and gift cards in less than a week. Close to \$8,000 worth of furniture and clothing. Six dining tables. Twelve couches.

At this point, Brown is asking people interested in helping the Aldamas donate cash or gift cards — he recommended Target, Kohl's, Old Navy or Visa gift cards.

At least 13 die as van rams crowd

By JOSEPH WILSON
Associated Press

BARCELONA, Spain — A white van jumped up onto a sidewalk and sped down a pedestrian zone Thursday in Barcelona's historic Las Ramblas district, swerving from side to side as it plowed into tourists and residents. Police said 13 people were killed and more than 50 wounded in what they called a terror attack.

The afternoon attack in the northeastern Spanish city was the country's deadliest since 2004, when al-Qaida-inspired bombers killed 192 people in coordinated attacks on Madrid's commuter trains.

It left victims sprawled out

in the street, spattered with blood or crippled by broken limbs. Others fled in panic, screaming or carrying young children in their arms. As witnesses and emergency workers tried to help the wounded, police brandishing hand guns launched a search of side streets looking for suspects.

Police immediately cordoned off the city's broad avenue and ordered stores and nearby Metro and train stations to close. They asked people to stay away from the area so as not to get in the way of emergency services. A helicopter hovered over the scene.

A few hours later, Catalan police tweeted: "We have arrested one man and we are

treating him as a terrorist." They said no suspects were holed up in a Barcelona bar, as local media had reported, and began to evacuate stores on the sprawling avenue where scores of people had taken cover.

State-owned broadcaster RTVE reported that investigators think two vans were used — one for the attack and a second as a getaway vehicle.

Las Ramblas, a street of stalls and shops that cuts through the center of Barcelona, is one of the city's top tourist destinations. People walk down a wide, pedestrian path in the center of the street while cars can travel on either side.

A taxi driver who witnessed the attack, Oscar Cano, told

TV3 the van jumped onto the central pedestrian area at a high speed and swerved from side to side.

Tamara Jurgen, a Dutch visitor who had just arrived, said she and a friend were inside a Zara clothing store steps from Placa Catalunya when the attacker drove down Las Ramblas. They were held inside for more than two hours until police cleared that block.

"Everyone was screaming and running. We had to run up to the roof and throw our bags over a wall. We were all together along this (3-meter, 10-foot) wall and we were scared we were going to have to jump," she said.

Helicopter wreckage recovered off Hawaii

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

HALEIWA, Hawaii — Searchers spent Wednesday retrieving wreckage from an Army helicopter that went missing the night before about 5 miles off the coast of northwest Oahu. No trace of the five crewmen had been found by midafternoon.

The Army had contacted family members of the UH-60 Black Hawk's two pilots and three crewmembers, Lt. Col. Curt Kellogg, a 25th Infantry Division spokesman, said during a news conference at the search's command center in Haleiwa Harbor. He did not identify the soldiers, who are with the 25th Combat Aviation Brigade based at Wheeler Army Airfield, Oahu.

"This is still a search-and-rescue operation," Kellogg said.

Using computer modeling, the Coast Guard is determining how the currents in those waters would likely be carrying debris and surviving crew-

men, Coast Guard spokesman Lt. Scott Carr told reporters.

The water depth under the debris field is 500 to 600 feet, said Capt. David Jenkins of the Honolulu Fire Department.

Air and sea vessels from the Coast Guard, Army, Marine Corps and Honolulu Fire Department have been searching for survivors and debris near Kaena Point since late Tuesday night.

The Black Hawk was one of two helicopters conducting routine night training. It lost radio contact with personnel at Wheeler Army Airfield about 9:30 p.m., at which time the second helicopter made a preliminary search.

That helicopter then returned to Wheeler, where it picked up a second helicopter before returning to continue the search, Kellogg said.

The Coast Guard was called in about 10 p.m., bringing with it an HC-130 Hercules plane, MH-65 Dolphin helicopter and 87-foot and 45-foot cutters.

US, Japan team up for live-fire exercise

By ALLEN ONSTOTT
Stars and Stripes

HOKUDAIEN, Japan — Marine Corps light-armored vehicles and Japanese tanks rolled across the island of Hokkaido on Wednesday during drills designed to hone the allies' ability to fight side by side in wartime.

The action was part of the inaugural Northern Viper, a joint live-fire exercise running through Aug. 28 that aims to get Marines and Japan Ground Self-Defense Force troops working together in an unfamiliar environment on Japan's northernmost island, a Marine Corps statement said. More than 2,000 Marines and about 1,500 Japan army personnel are taking part in the drills.

The training "exposes the Marines to alternate training venues, and it familiarizes a wider audience in Japan with the contributions and capabilities of the Marines to the defense of Japan and regional peace and security," the statement said.

At the Hokudaïen exercise

area, participants conducted live-fire drills with Japanese and U.S. armor providing cover for ground troops firing on range targets. The training was designed to show the "lethality of both [forces'] equipment," said Capt. Cody Hardenburgh, 31, commander of Company A, Combat Assault Battalion, 3rd Marine Division.

Later, on another part of Hokkaido, members of the 3rd Marine Division plan to fire the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System, or HIMARS, for the first time in Japan. The Marines are also scheduled to train with M-777 howitzers and 81 mm mortars brought from Okinawa by U.S. C-130 cargo planes and naval ships.

On Friday, the Marines will fly up to six MV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft over Hokkaido. UH-1 Huey and AH-1Z Cobra helicopters are also participating in the exercise.

The aircraft are part of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, which is doing live-fire drills alongside Japan's 11th Brigade during the three-week exercise.

Ardent supporters stick by president

Associated Press

SUN CITY, Ariz. — President Donald Trump's most ardent champions are sticking by him, happy to absolve him of any wrong in the blame game over the deadly weekend violence at a rally of white supremacists.

Such unflagging support remains despite polls that show his approval rates dipping overall.

■ "I WOULD VOTE FOR HIM AGAIN IN A HEARTBEAT"

In Sun City, Ariz., a retirement community and Trump stronghold north of Phoenix, 80-year-old John Libby said nothing the president has done since Election Day has changed his support for the man.

"I would vote for him again in a heartbeat," Libby said outside a grocery store in a strip mall of low-slung stucco buildings.

The Des Moines, Iowa, native said he thought the president handled the aftermath of the Charlottesville, Va., attack well, but allowed that Trump's response "wasn't fast enough for some people."

■ "HE HAS DONE NOTHING TO TURN ME AWAY FROM HIM"

Patricia Aleeyah Robinson, a retired truck driver from Toledo, Ohio, said her support of Trump has cost her friendships and strained family relationships.

But like many of the president's most passionate supporters, the 63-year-old black woman said her opinions about Trump have not changed since his response to the violence in Charlottesville.

"He has done nothing to turn me away from him," said Robinson. She said he doesn't defer to racists and feels he is the only president who has ever spoken directly to blacks.

■ "HE SHOULDN'T LET THE PRESS GET UNDER HIS SKIN"

Clemente Ruiz, a 49-year-old truck driver in Lubbock, Texas, said he's been happy with the job Trump has done. "I'd vote for him again tomorrow," he said.

The son of a Mexican immigrant who became an American citizen, Ruiz said his only criticism of the president is that he is too "thin-skinned."

"He refuses to let anything go," Ruiz said. "He shouldn't let the press get under his skin the way they do."

Trump decries monument moves

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump decried the rising movement to pull down monuments to Confederate icons Thursday, declaring the nation is seeing "the history and culture of our great country being ripped apart."

Trump's new remarks came even as the White house tried to manage his increasing isolation and the continued fallout from his combative comments on last weekend's racially charged violence in Charlottesville, Va.

He also tore into fellow Republicans who have criticized his statements on race and politics.

Pressured by advisers, the president had taken a step back from the dispute on Monday, two days after he had enraged many by declining to single out the white supremacists and neo-Nazis whose demonstration against the removal of a Robert E. Lee statue had led to violence and the death of a counterprotester in Charlottesville.

He returned to his combative stance on Wednesday — insisting anew that "both sides" were to blame. And then in a burst

of tweets on Thursday he renewed his criticism of efforts to remove memorials and tributes to the Civil War Confederacy.

"You can't change history, but you can learn from it," he tweeted. "Robert E. Lee. Stonewall Jackson — who's next, Washington, Jefferson? So foolish. ..."

In earlier tweets, he lashed out at GOP Sens. Lindsey Graham, of South Carolina, and Jeff Flake, of Arizona.

He accused "publicity-seeking" Graham of falsely stating his position on the demonstrators, called Flake "toxic" and praised a Flake primary election opponent.

Graham said Wednesday that Trump "took a step backward by again suggesting there is moral equivalency" between the marching white supremacists and the people who had been demonstrating against them. And Flake has been increasingly critical of Trump in recent weeks.

Other Republicans, including the most powerful in Congress, have been making strong statements on Charlottesville and racism, but few have been mentioning Trump himself.

Survey: Many allied nations trust Putin more than Trump

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Vladimir Putin is more trusted than Donald Trump to do the right thing for the world among citizens of numerous U.S. allies, including Japan, South Korea and seven European NATO members, according to a survey.

Both leaders scored poorly in the poll by the Pew Research Center. But Trump's scores in particular point to a stunningly high level of international public distrust in the American president.

The United States is obligated to defend all NATO countries under the alliance's treaty, which was initially aimed at the Soviet Union. The U.S. is also obliged to defend Japan and South Korea under separate defense treaties.

In Greece, Germany, Turkey, Hungary,

France, Italy and Spain, more people had confidence in Putin than in Trump "to do the right thing regarding world affairs," according to the poll.

That Trump is so distrusted by the populations of countries historically reliant on the United States for their defense points to the strains caused by his often erratic international pronouncements.

Not all NATO members' citizens favored Putin.

Trump scored higher than Putin in Britain, Canada, the Netherlands and Poland, according to the survey, which Pew said was conducted in 37 countries earlier this year. Trump also led among non-NATO U.S. allies Australia and the Philippines, as well as in Israel.

Pew released some of its figures for Trump in June. It found only 22 percent of

interviewees had confidence in Trump to do the right thing in world affairs. Almost 3 in 4 had little or no confidence in him. Trump trailed former President Barack Obama's tenure-ending confidence levels in all but two countries: Israel and Russia.

The disparity in favor of Putin over Trump was most dramatic in Greece and Germany — where he outscored Trump by 31 and 14 points, respectively. Half of Greeks surveyed said they had confidence in Putin, while 19 percent said the same of Trump. Putin had the confidence of a quarter of Germany, and Trump 11 percent.

In South Korea, Putin got 27 percent to Trump's 17 percent.

Trump barely came out ahead of Putin in Australia, Canada and Britain. His biggest leads were in Israel, where he outscored Putin by 29 points, Nigeria and Poland.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Woman died of shock during home invasion

ME BURNHAM — The state medical examiner's office said a 72-year-old Maine woman died from a heart attack after a naked trespasser jumped into bed with her during a home invasion.

The Morning Sentinel obtained a medical examiner's report saying Joyce Woods suffered from coronary artery disease and died of shock during the April home invasion.

Tara Shibles, 36, was indicted in May on manslaughter, aggravated criminal trespassing and assault charges. Her trial is tentatively set for December.

Police say Woods called 911 early April 2 after Shibles climbed into bed with her and refused to let her turn on the light. Woods' family members arrived before police and placed her in a car, where she died.

Police: Woman survived for 28 days in woods

AL UNION SPRINGS — A missing Alabama woman was found alive after surviving for weeks in the woods.

The Bullock County Sheriff's Office told media outlets that Lisa Theris, 25, was found Saturday walking along a highway outside of Union Springs. She had been reported missing in mid-July.

Sheriff Raymond Rodgers told WSFA-TV that Theris had been lost in the woods for almost one month. He said she survived by drinking water from a brook and eating berries and mushrooms. When found, Theris was covered in bug bites and scratches and had lost 50 pounds.

Deputy Chad Faulkner told WTVY-TV that the two men

Theris was last seen with are being questioned, but haven't been legally implicated in the case.

Nation's oldest black city turns 130 years old

FL EATONVILLE — The town that's described as the oldest continuously existing black city in the United States is celebrating its 130th birthday.

Celebrations in Eatonville, Fla., kick off Saturday with a crafts and culture festival.

The city received its charter from the state of Florida in August 1887. It was conceived as a self-governing all-black town for blacks living in central Florida at the time.

Today, Eatonville has nearly 2,300 residents, and U.S. Census Bureau data says 85 percent of its residents are black.

Canadian man tried to ship live snakes in mail

NY BUFFALO — Federal prosecutors in New York said a Canadian man attempted to ship live snakes to China through the mail.

The U.S. attorney's office in Buffalo said Chaoyi Le, 28, of Mississauga, Ontario, was taken into custody Aug. 11 in Los Angeles after getting off a flight from Shanghai.

Prosecutors said he previously was found with 55 live reptiles — including ball pythons — in Chicago during a trip from Toronto to China in February 2014. Officials said many of the reptiles are protected under international law.

Two months later he was stopped while entering Canada from the U.S. and found to have three albino Western hog-nosed snakes hidden in his socks.

Officials said he faces charges and will be sent back to Buffalo.

Man sentenced for using paddle on teen girls

WA MONROE — A Monroe man was sentenced for spanking 13-year-old twin sisters with developmental disabilities.

The Everett Daily Herald reported a Snohomish County Superior Court judge sentenced Braxton Brand on Tuesday to 126 days in jail and gave him credit for the time already served.

Brand pleaded guilty last week to fourth-degree assault for the April 3 incident involving his neighbor's children. Police said Brand used a paddle on the teens.

Brand's attorney, Neal Friedman, said Brand's wife, who was out of town, sent him a text asking him to help with the neighbor's girls and get them under control.

Brand admitted in court records that he "spanked" the girls.

He was ordered to stay away from the twins.

Police: Retired cop saw fake gun, foiled robbery

CT NAUGATUCK — Police in Connecticut said an attempted robbery was foiled by the victim, a 74-year-old retired police officer, who recognized that the robber's gun was a fake.

The robbery attempt was reported Tuesday at a park in Naugatuck.

The former officer told police that a man grabbed him from behind, demanded money and displayed what the man believed to be a toy gun. He said he tried to knock the fake gun from the man's hand using an umbrella before the man took off.

Police said the victim provided a detailed description and a suspect was arrested that day.

Man cited after passing out in officer's car

PA SHIPPENSBURG — A Pennsylvania man was cited for public drunkenness after breaking into and passing out in the front seat of an off-duty police officer's car.

Police in Shippensburg said the officer was on his way home from his shift early Sunday morning when he stopped at a Sheetz convenience store. His personal car was locked but some windows were down slightly.

When he returned, he found the intoxicated man passed out in the passenger's seat.

He called an on-duty colleague to the scene, who took Travis McLaughlin, 22, into custody.

Couple crashes wedding, but bride found it funny

NJ SPARTA — A couple who gained notoriety for crashing a New Jersey couple's wedding reception and leaving them a card apologizing for their actions said they did it as a lark while on their first date.

Carly Wolfson told WCBS-TV in New York that she sent the bride, Karen Tufo, a Facebook message apologizing for showing up uninvited at the Aug. 6 event.

But Tufo — who has said she found the stunt funny and offered to buy the crashers a drink — told her no apology was needed.

Reception attendees have said Wolfson and Ritchie Barry were the life of the party, spending a lot of time on the dance floor and sitting at the best man's table.

From wire reports

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NFL's slot receivers get paid a lot less

The Washington Post

The space between the end of an offensive line and an outside receiver, commonly called the slot, decides more NFL games than ever before. Cole Beasley lined up there on 85 percent of his snaps last season, and he led the Dallas Cowboys in catches and receiving yards. His ability out of the slot provided security and comfort for a rookie quarterback and made Beasley the engine of Dallas's passing game. And yet, Beasley wants to be known as anything but a slot receiver.

NFL offenses rely more than ever on the ability of shifty, explosive slot receivers to get open quickly and give quarterbacks a low-risk outlet. In contractual negotiations, though, players and agents resist the label of "slot receiver," the football version of "middle reliever." As the importance of the position on the field has increased, it has not translated, in most cases, to market value.

"If you're not a slot receiver and you're just considered a receiver, you got a chance to make a lot of money," Beasley's

co-agent Justin Turner said. "Even if you're the No. 3 receiver, it's a hell of a lot better to be the backup No. 2 and catch 50 balls than be a slot receiver and catch 50 balls. You're going to be docked at least \$1.5 million just for being a slot receiver. It's like the right tackle."

Last season, according to Pro Football Focus, 25 wide receivers lined up in the slot on more than 50 percent of their plays. The group was more diverse than a casual fan might expect. It included veterans who had found life inside (Larry Fitzgerald, Anquan Boldin), young players made for the position (Jamison Crowder, Sterling Shepard) and No. 1 receivers (T.Y. Hilton, Jarvis Landry). It also included Julian Edelman and Beasley, stereotypical slot receivers.

Edelman lined up outside 47 percent of the time, barely qualifying him for the slot label. Edelman runs the rapid-fire patterns for the New England Patriots that have helped Tom Brady remain so good and so durable into his age-40 season. Despite his value and

versatility, Edelman agreed to a two-year, \$11 million deal — less per year than, for a couple of examples, Kenny Stills and Robert Woods.

Edelman's market was hurt by factors unique to him. He wanted to play with Brady in New England, teams were likely skeptical he could maintain his production without Brady's precision and at age 31 he may be starting to decline. Still, the best receiver on the Super Bowl champions had a limited market.

The increased reliance on slot receivers can be traced, in part, to changes in the latest collective bargaining agreement. Shrunken practice time gives defensive fronts an advantage over offensive lines, which are more reliant on cohesion and coordination. The diminished quality and consistency of pass protection makes intermediate and long passes both harder and more dangerous for quarterbacks.

To solve the problems presented by defenses throttling linemen, offenses have increasingly turned to shorter throws.

Quarterbacks can protect themselves with quick drops and short passes to a receiver able to burst off the line, change direction and come open in a flash. Quick passes to a slot receiver, maybe behind a pulling tackle, can augment, or even replace, a running game.

Teams ran 38.1 of their pass patterns from the slot last season, and quarterbacks threw it to receivers lined up in the slot on 35.5 percent of their attempts, both highs for the past 10 years. As a result, quarterbacks chucked shorter passes than in any recent season, averaging 8.25 yards in the air per pass, the lowest number over the past decade.

While slot receivers may not possess the size and athleticism of outside receivers, their skills are seen as no less important.

"It's a different game in there," Patriots Coach Bill Belichick said during last year's playoffs. "It's a game within a game. People that are good in that area like Logan [Ryan] or Julian [Edelman] that play that spot, a lot of it is physical characteristics."

Browns' Thomas believes Osweiler will be starting QB

Associated Press

BEREA, Ohio — After weeks of speculation, analysis and evaluation, the Browns' quarterback competition is headed into its home stretch.

Pro Bowl left tackle Joe Thomas believes it's over — Brock Osweiler will start the season opener on Sept. 10 against Pittsburgh.

"I could be totally wrong," Thomas said Wednesday. "I might be going out on a limb here, but I think they're grooming Brock to be the starter in Week 1 based on what I've seen."

Thomas has seen it all — and then some — during 10 seasons with Cleveland. He's witnessed the Browns bungle enough quarterback decisions that he's hoping the team gets it right

this time.

His preference is for the Browns to show patience and not rush rookie DeShone Kizer, the second-round pick who has had an impressive camp and rallied the team to a win in his exhibition debut. Kizer, a second-round pick from Notre Dame, could very well be ready, but Thomas feels the more prudent approach is to let him learn while watching Osweiler.

"It is a competition, but I would expect Brock to win because of his experience," he said. "And a rookie quarterback is the hardest position to get ready to play in your first year. So there's no doubt he (Kizer) could win the competition. I definitely would expect probably Brock to win it just because my personal philosophy is as a quarterback it takes at least

two or three years to have a basic level of understanding of NFL defenses and offenses to be able to operate proficiently out there on the field, especially in Week 1."

As expected, coach Hue Jackson picked Osweiler to start his second straight pre-season game when the Browns host the New York Giants on Monday night. Kizer will play second, with Cody Kessler and Kevin Hogan getting time after that.

"It doesn't mean anything for the regular season," Jackson said. "This is this game."

Kizer was the third QB used in the exhibition opener, but Jackson moved him ahead of Kessler this week so he gets snaps against better competition.

Jackson added the starter of

the third exhibition game on Aug. 26 at Tampa Bay "has got a very good chance of trotting out there the first game against the Steelers."

As a team leader and 10-time Pro Bowler, Thomas has opinions that matter greatly to Jackson. He consults with him on major decisions, and Thomas said that "99 times out of 100 we're on the same page."

Osweiler's rise from a Houston reject to likely starter may be improbable, but Thomas has been impressed with the way the veteran has gone about his business.

He may have been a long-shot, but Osweiler, who went 8-6 last season as a starter before the Texans traded him in March, has displayed all the characteristics Thomas wants in a starter.

Smaller gloves OK for Mayweather bout

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Floyd Mayweather Jr. and Conor McGregor got their wish to fight in smaller gloves, but not before being chastised by a Nevada boxing official for using the issue to hype their fight later this month.

Nevada boxing regulators on Wednesday gave the two fighters an exemption to a rule requiring 10-ounce gloves for fights at 154 pounds, approving 8-ounce gloves for the Aug. 26 bout. Representatives of both fighters appeared before the Nevada State Athletic Commission to request the waiver.

Commissioners also approved veteran referee Robert Byrd as the third man in the ring for the fight.

Commission Chairman Anthony Marnell said he was comfortable with the fighters using smaller gloves, but unhappy that they used the issue to sell the fight on social media.

"I do not like the Nevada State Athletic Commission being used as a pawn in a social media battle," Marnell said.

Under Nevada regulations, 10-ounce gloves are required in fights above 147 pounds and the bout is set for 154 pounds. But Mayweather has worn 8-ounce gloves most of his career, and McGregor has worn 4-ounce gloves in his UFC fights.

McGregor said the gloves will only speed up the end of the fight, which he earlier predicted wouldn't last four rounds.

"I believe now that gloves are eight ounces I don't believe he makes it out of the second round," McGregor said. "I do not see him absorbing the blows in the first two rounds."

Mayweather's promoter, Leonard Ellerbe, said his fighter is also more comfortable in smaller gloves and would use them to stop McGregor.

"The fight is going to end in a knockout, I'm very confident," Ellerbe said. "And it will probably be early."

McGregor will be in a boxing ring for the first time as a pro when he takes on Mayweather, who is coming out of retirement for a fight that will make him tens of millions of dollars. They will fight under boxing

rules, which will be enforced by Byrd, a veteran of many championship fights.

"The referee makes a big difference in this fight, which is the specific reason I chose Robert Byrd," said Bob Bennett, the commission's executive director.

Commissioners also approved Burt Clements and Dave Moretti of the United States and Italy's Guido Cavaleri as judges for the bout. McGregor's camp had asked for an international judge.

The glove issue took up much of the commission meeting, though in the end all voted in favor of the smaller gloves. There was also discussion about the padding in the gloves, with both sides agreeing to be bound by Nevada boxing inspectors approving the foam padding.

Mayweather has fought 46 of his 49 fights with 8-ounce gloves, including his last six. McGregor has never boxed before, but quickly agreed to Mayweather's challenge on social media to fight in smaller gloves.

UFC chief Dana White

echoed McGregor in saying the smaller gloves will make a difference in the fight.

"It affects the fight big time," White said. "When we were in our original negotiations it was something they would not even talk about. I don't know what changed but I'm glad it did. It makes it so much more fun."

Commissioners said they struggled with making an exception to regulations in place since 2006, but decided to approve the waiver because of the unusual nature of the event.

John Hornewer, an attorney for Mayweather, said the unbeaten boxer would likely not be at the 154-pound limit at the fight weigh-in anyway.

"He'll be 150 pounds. That's his best weight and there's no reason to put on extra weight," Hornewer said.

A McGregor representative said his fighter has been about 160 pounds in training camp and would likely enter the ring somewhere around that weight after making the 154-pound limit the day before.

Wyndham gives golfers last shot at playoffs

Associated Press

GREENSBORO, N.C. — It's last-chance time on the PGA Tour.

The field at the Wyndham Championship is once again littered with players trying to earn their way into golf's postseason or earn full exemption on the tour for 2018.

When the tournament begins Thursday at par-70 Sedgefield Country Club, the focus — as it is every year — will be on those players on the bubble and those trying to improve their position for the playoffs.

"It's a great opportunity to put myself in a better spot heading into next week's playoffs," Henrik Stenson said Wednesday.

Stenson, who won the FedEx Cup in 2013, arrived at Sedgefield with security for next week at No. 75 on the points list.

Others have some work to do.

The top 125 on the points list qualify for The Northern Trust next week in Old Westbury, N.Y., and also will be fully exempt on

the tour next year, if they aren't already.

Every player from No. 113 (Harris English) to No. 143 (Ricky Barnes) is in the Wyndham field. Among those directly on the bubble are No. 124 Daniel Summerhays, No. 125 Geoff Ogilvy and No. 126 Cameron Tringale.

"I guess that would consider me one of those bubble boys now," said Sam Saunders, the grandson of Arnold Palmer who's at No. 127.

Two players — Kyle Stanley and Shawn Stefani — cracked the top 125 here last year, and five did it in 2015.

"I need to play solid this week, but you know, my goal is not just to get into the FedEx Cup playoffs," he added. "My goal is to try and win a golf tournament this week. If I don't, and have a solid finish, that will take care of it as a byproduct. Can't get too hung up on trying to move up a couple spots. But obviously, that is of the utmost importance this week."

Some things to know about the PGA

Tour's final regular-season tournament:

Former champs. Only two of the past five winners of this tournament — Davis Love III (2015) and Camilo Villegas (2014) — are in this year's field. Si Woo Kim, who tied the event's 72-hole record with a 21-under 259 last year, is not here. In all, six of the eight players to win at Sedgefield since the tournament moved here in 2008 are playing, including local favorites Carl Pettersson (2008) and Webb Simpson (2011). Love, Simpson and Ryan Moore (2009) were placed in one threesome.

Favorite? The only player here ranked in the top 15 on the points list is No. 9 Kevin Kisner, who led or shared the lead after each of the first three rounds of last week's PGA Championship in Charlotte before finishing in a tie for seventh place, four strokes behind winner Justin Thomas.

Lots of love. Davis isn't the only Love on the course this week. His son Dru, a former Alabama player in his first year on the tour, received a sponsor's exemption.

Puig's double lifts Dodgers in ninth

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The Dodgers won in — what else — dramatic fashion, scoring three runs in the bottom of the ninth inning for their major league-leading 10th walk-off victory of the season.

Trailing 4-2, Yasiel Puig's two-run double drove in the tying and go-ahead runs to beat the Chicago White Sox 5-4 on Wednesday night for the Dodgers' second comeback win in two games.

"That's what we do, we come back," said Kike Hernandez, who homered in the fourth to tie the game 2-all. "If you're the other team, you better score a lot of runs because we're coming for your pitching staff."

Puig worked a full count against Jake Petricka (1-1) before crushing the ball into center field to end the game.

"The pitch he hit to win the game was in a good location, but that's part of the business," Petricka said. "I can see why they love this place, they're unbeatable here."

The victory salvaged the much-anticipated home debut of Yu Darvish, who didn't figure in the decision while pitching on his 31st birthday.

"What better gift than on his birthday the Dodgers win," Puig said through a translator.

Leury Garcia, Nicky Delmonico and Jose Abreu homered off Darvish, who gave up three runs and eight hits in six innings. The Japanese righthander struck out a season-low two and walked one in his third game for his new team since being acquired in a deadline deal from Texas last month.

Afterward, Darvish said his back was bothering him, something he first felt last week in his start at Arizona. Ace Clayton Kershaw is already on the disabled list with a bad back.

"Between innings I talked to Kershaw and he asked me how do you feel," Darvish said through a translator. "I told him I feel something in my back and he said we need you really bad in six weeks."

"I was getting tight so I

talked to Doc (manager Dave Roberts) and he just said, 'Let's play it safe.'"

Ross Stripling (2-4) got the victory with one inning of relief.

Darvish had struck out 10 in each of his first two starts, but didn't record his first one against the White Sox until the sixth inning.

The Dodgers rallied to tie the game in the second and fourth innings only to have the White Sox take a 4-2 lead in the eighth. But baseball's best team (85-34) wasn't to be denied a night after Los Angeles scored five runs in the eighth to win 6-1.

"I never felt comfortable with a two-run lead against the Dodgers," Chicago manager Rick Renteria said. "They have so much depth and they continue to grind."

The Dodgers closed to 4-3 with one out in the ninth on Logan Forsythe's RBI double in the left-field corner that scored pinch-hitter Cody Bellinger, who singled. Austin Barnes followed with a single

to center, putting runners on the corners.

That set the stage for Puig, who was 0-for-2 with a walk in his first three at-bats. He crushed the ball into center field and went leaping around first base, his arms raised, as the Dodgers broke out in celebration.

It was the kind of ending the sellout crowd of 52,413 — many Japanese fans wearing Darvish jerseys — had arrived expecting with Darvish on the mound. They had yet to settle in their seats when Garcia homered on Darvish's first pitch of the game. The ball clanked off the right field foul pole as fans let out an audible gasp.

"I was thinking that if he puts one in close to the plate I'm going to be swinging," Garcia said.

It was the second straight night that happened and the first time in the White Sox's 117-year history. Tim Anderson homered on the first pitch from Los Angeles starter Alex Wood on Tuesday.

Red Sox slide past Cardinals with walk-off victory

Associated Press

BOSTON — Mookie Betts finally had a pitch he could drive and the Boston Red Sox pulled out another last at-bat win in Fenway Park.

Betts lined a two-run double off the Green Monster with two outs in the ninth inning, capping a three-run rally that lifted the Red Sox to a 5-4 win over the St. Louis Cardinals on Wednesday night.

Xander Bogaerts opened the ninth with a solo homer for the AL East-leading Red Sox, who won for the 12th time in 14 games and maintained their 4½-game lead over the second-place New York Yankees.

It was Boston's eighth walk-off win in its last 19 victories at home.

Cardinals manager Mike Matheny was ejected by home

plate umpire Chris Segal in a wild ninth inning. Trevor Rosenthal gave up Bogaerts' homer into the Monster seats.

Marlins 8, Giants 1: Giancarlo Stanton's homer streak ended, but he got two hits and helped host Miami beat San Francisco.

Rangers 12, Tigers 6: Elvis Andrus had the go-ahead home run among his four RBIs, Cole Hamels won again despite a shaky outing and host Texas swept a three-game series.

Cubs 7, Reds 6: Anthony Rizzo hit a grand slam in the first inning and Javier Baez scored on a wild pitch in the ninth as host Chicago beat Cincinnati.

Angels 3, Nationals 2: Luis Valbuena and Kole Calhoun homered, Ricky Nolasco bounced back from a rocky

first inning before exiting with an injury and Los Angeles split the two-game series with NL East-leading host Washington.

Yankees 5, Mets 3: Aaron Judge launched a titanic homer, Didi Gregorius snapped a seventh-inning tie with a two-run double and the Yankees beat the Mets for their third straight victory in the Subway Series.

Brewers 7, Pirates 6: Manny Pina hit a two-run homer in the eighth inning to lift host Milwaukee over Pittsburgh.

Blue Jays 3, Rays 2: Marcus Stroman pitched 6⅓ innings, Steve Pearce homered and scored twice and host Toronto beat Tampa Bay.

Astros 9, Diamondbacks 5: Josh Reddick hit a two-run homer in a four-run eighth inning as host Houston defeated Arizona.

Mariners 7, Orioles 6: Recently acquired Yonder Alonso hit his first homer for host Seattle and drove in three runs, and Marc Rzepczynski struck out Chris Davis with the bases loaded to end a win over Baltimore.

Royals 7, Athletics 6: Alex Gordon hit a go-ahead single in the ninth inning and Kansas City topped host Oakland.

Padres 3, Phillies 0: Clayton Richard pitched a three-hitter for his first shutout since 2012 and Wil Myers stole three bases in an inning as host San Diego completed a three-game sweep.

Rockies 17, Braves 2: Trevor Story had two homers and a career-high six RBIs, Jon Gray pitched six strong innings and host Colorado routed Atlanta.