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Taliban cling to pockets of city after assault

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Afghan forces were still battling the Taliban in parts of Ghazni on Saturday, a day after the insurgents launched a multipronged assault on the eastern city.

Interior Ministry spokesman Najib Danish said at least 25 security forces have been killed or wounded since the assault began early Friday, and that a local reporter was killed. It was unclear how many other civilians had been killed or wounded during the attack. Danish said more than 150 insurgents have been killed or wounded.

He said that although the fighting was still underway, “the situation is under control and there isn’t any serious threat.”

“Any threat which could cause the fall of the city has been eliminated,” he added.

The Taliban claim to have seized parts of the city and to have killed local officials. In a media statement, the group said it had seized dozens of armored vehicles as well as light and heavy weapons and ammunition. They said they “liberated” the central prison in Ghazni and freed all Taliban prisoners.

It was not possible to verify the claims

because the Taliban destroyed a nearby communications tower, cutting off cell-phone and land line access to the city. The insurgents also set fire to the local TV headquarters, making it difficult to broadcast images from Ghazni.

The city of about 140,000 people was in lockdown for the second day as residents stayed indoors and reported sporadic gunfire. The highway from Kabul to Afghanistan’s southern provinces, which runs through Ghazni, is still closed.

Ghazni is a gateway city linking the heavily Taliban-influenced south and east of Afghanistan to Kabul and is one of the last vestiges of government control in the province of the same name. The Taliban hold sway in most of the province where ethnic Pashtuns live, while the government’s influence is limited to Ghazni and small pockets dominated by ethnic Hazaras.

In northern Baghlan province, meanwhile, Taliban attacked police and army checkpoints, killing 13 police and soldiers, officials said.

Gen. Ekramuddin Serih, provincial police chief, said six policemen were killed and two police officers were wounded in the

gun battle Friday night in Baghlani Kohna district. At least 10 insurgents were killed and four other were wounded, he said.

Seven soldiers were killed and two other troops were taken alive by the insurgents, according to a provincial official from Baghlan governor’s office who was not authorized to speak with media about casualties.

“Taliban were not able to overrun the checkpoints and were defeated by the (security) forces,” said Serih.

The Taliban have stepped up attacks across the country since NATO and the U.S. formally ended their combat mission in 2014. U.S. and NATO forces remain in Afghanistan mainly in a supporting and training role in the 17-year-old war.

The Taliban attack came as President Ashraf Ghani contemplated a cease-fire offer to mark the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha later this month. The Taliban have rebuffed offers of negotiations with the government but have held one preliminary round of direct talks with Alice Wells, Washington’s top diplomat for South and Central Asia, including Afghanistan.

Army’s XM25 program officially goes kaput

BY CHAD GARLAND

Stars and Stripes

The Army has formally terminated its effort to develop a 25 mm airburst weapon, the largest of nearly three dozen ways a Pentagon watchdog has said the military could save \$2.3 billion in defense spending.

The ill-fated weapon, known as the XM25 and nicknamed “The Punisher,” was once hailed as a game-changer for ground troops who would be able to use it to target enemies hiding behind cover. But it came under closer scrutiny several years ago after sched-

ule slippage, cost overruns and aborted operational testing in Afghanistan.

In 2016, the Pentagon inspector general recommended that the Army consider ending the program and instead invest its nearly \$1 billion in funding elsewhere. The program remained in limbo since early last year, when the Army canceled its contract with main contractor Orbital ATK Inc., but an Army official overseeing the effort could not clarify its overall status.

The shoulder-fired, semi-automatic weapon was designed to fire 25 mm high-explosive grenades that burst

in midair over enemy troops taking cover behind walls or inside bunkers or trenches, where they’re difficult to hit.

This week, Army officials said that the service’s top acquisition official had signed a memorandum terminating the program on July 24, after a negotiated settlement with Orbital ATK that allowed the military to retain intellectual property rights and hardware developed as part of the effort.

“After cancelling the program last year, the Army has since received rights to the program’s research and development,” Lt. Col. Isaac Taylor, an Army spokesman, said

Thursday in a statement. “This is in addition to the 20 existing XM25 systems — to include high explosive air-burst and target practice rounds — that the Army garnered as part of the negotiated settlement.”

The statement came in response to a report from the Pentagon IG last week highlighting the program in a list of more than 1,500 recommendations for cutting waste or improving efficiency.

Operational testing of the XM25 in Afghanistan from 2010 to 2013 delivered mixed results and was halted after three soldiers were slightly injured by malfunctions.

Trump hits Turkey with tariffs amid rift

Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON — Following an impasse in high-level negotiations to free an American preacher detained in Turkey, President Donald Trump on Friday said he had ordered heavy tariffs on Ankara's export of steel and aluminum to the U.S., a punitive move that deepened a growing political and economic rift with the NATO ally.

In a tweet, Trump said he had "just authorized a doubling" of tariffs against Turkey, upping those on aluminum to 20 percent and steel to 50 percent. The U.S. imports about \$1 billion in steel and aluminum from Turkey, so the direct impact is not likely to be substantial.

But the ripple effects were considerable as the Turkish currency, the lira, plummeted on the news, pushing the country closer to a full-blown economic crisis, and dragging the euro down sharply Friday.

Without mentioning Trump by name, Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, denounced the U.S. in a speech Friday in the Black Sea town of Rize. "They cannot use the language of threat and blackmail against this nation," he said. "Bullying this nation will get them nowhere."

Then he had a friendly chat with Russian President Vladimir Putin, his office said.

Officials probe how 'suicidal' employee could steal plane

Associated Press

SEATAC, Wash. — Investigators worked to find out how a "suicidal" airline employee stole an empty Horizon Air turboprop plane, took off from Sea-Tac International Airport and crashed into a small island in the Puget Sound after being chased by military jets that were scrambled quickly to intercept the aircraft.

The Friday night crash happened because the 29-year-old man was "doing stunts in air or lack of flying skills," the Pierce County Sheriff's Department said. The man, who was believed killed, wasn't immediately identified.

The man was suicidal and there was no connection to terrorism, Ed Troyer, a spokesman for the sheriff's department, said on Twitter.

Video showed the Horizon Air Q400 doing large loops and other dangerous maneuvers as the sun set on the Puget Sound. There were no passengers aboard. Authorities initially said the man was a mechanic, but Alaska Airlines later said he was believed to be a ground service agent employed by Horizon. Those employees direct aircraft for takeoff and gate approach and de-ice planes.

The plane was pursued by military aircraft before it crashed on Ketron Island, southwest of Tacoma, Wash. Troyer said F-15 aircraft took off out of Portland, Ore., and

were in the air "within a few minutes" and the pilots kept "people on the ground safe."

The sheriff's department said they were working to conduct a background investigation on the Pierce County resident.

The aircraft was stolen about 8 p.m. Alaska Airlines said it was in a "maintenance position" and not scheduled for a passenger flight. Horizon Air is part of Alaska Air Group and flies shorter routes throughout the U.S. West. The Q400 is a turboprop aircraft with 76 seats.

Pierce County Sheriff Paul Pastor said the man "did something foolish and may well have paid with his life."

The man could be heard on audio recordings telling air traffic controllers that he is "just a broken guy."

An air traffic controller called the man "Rich," and tried to convince the man to land the airplane.

"There is a runway just off to your right side in about a mile," the controller said, referring to an airfield at Joint Base Lewis-McChord.

"Oh man. Those guys will rough me up if I try and land there," the man responded, later adding "This is probably jail time for life, huh?"

Later, the man said, "I've got a lot of people that care about me. It's going to disappoint them to hear that I did this ... Just a broken guy, got a few screws loose, I guess."

Okinawa rally opposes US base relocation

Associated Press

TOKYO — Tens of thousands of protesters gathered Saturday in Okinawa vowing to stop the planned relocation of a U.S. military base on the southern Japanese island.

Opponents of the relocation say the plan to move U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma from a crowded neighborhood to a less populated coastal site would not only be an environmental debacle but also ignore local wishes to have the base moved from the island entirely.

About 70,000 people gath-

ered at park in the state capital of Naha under pouring rain ahead of an approaching typhoon and observed a moment of silence for Okinawa's governor, Takeshi Onaga, who died Wednesday of cancer.

Onaga, elected in 2014, had spearheaded opposition to the relocation and criticized the central government for ignoring the voices of Okinawans. He had filed lawsuits against the central government and said he planned to revoke a landfill permit issued by his predecessor that is needed for construction of the new base.

Deputy Gov. Kiichiro Ja-

hana, representing Onaga at Saturday's rally, said he will follow through with the revocation process as instructed by the governor and will succeed his "strong determination and passion."

Okinawans are trying to block the central government plan to start dumping soil into Henoko Bay within days to make a landfill for the new site of the Futenma base. Environmental groups say construction at the bay risks corals and endangered dugongs.

Saturday's protesters held up signs saying "Henoko new base, NO!" and "Okinawans

will not give up," as they chanted slogans. They also adopted a resolution demanding the central government to scrap the relocation plan immediately.

The central government says the current plan is the only solution, but many Okinawans want the base entirely moved outside of Okinawa. About half of the 50,000 American troops in Japan are stationed on Okinawa.

Onaga had said Tokyo's postwar defense stance under the Japan-U.S. security alliance was built on Okinawa's sacrifice.

Crews battle wildfire near California homes

Associated Press

LAKE ELSINORE, Calif. — Firefighters worked furiously Friday to keep a Southern California wildfire from burning more homes while crews in the north finally gained ground on deadly and destructive blazes that have burned for two weeks.

Aircraft have been making flight after flight, dumping water and bright pink retardant to protect Lake Elsinore and other foothill communities as the fire sweeps through the dense, bone-dry brush of the Cleveland National Forest.

The Holy Fire — named for Holy Jim Canyon where it began Monday — grew to nearly 30 square miles after nearly doubling in size overnight. But firefighters also made progress, with containment doubling

from 5 percent to 10 percent.

Some hillsides were being allowed to burn under the watchful eyes of firefighters as a way to reduce fuel and make it harder for flames to jump roadways into communities if winds pick up again.

Although the fire burned a dozen forest cabins early on, only one home was lost Thursday as fire crews managed to fend off flames that stalked downhill and came right up to yards.

Standing in the ashes of his house on Friday, Dan Pritchett told KNBC-TV that he and his brother stayed until a wall of flames roared near.

“I turned to him and said, ‘Let’s go,’” Pritchett said. “(There were) 100-foot flames right on the crest of the hill, right in front of me.”

No more homes were torched on Friday but some 20,000 people remained under evacuation orders.

Gusty winds continued to drive the flames but were expected to ease off overnight before blowing up again Saturday afternoon.

The man charged with deliberately starting the fire appeared in court Friday but his arraignment was postponed.

Forrest Clark, 51, made several outbursts, claiming his life was being threatened and said the arson charge against him was a lie. A court commissioner ordered his bail to remain at \$1 million.

“May I pay for that immediately?” asked Clark, who could face life in prison if convicted.

The Holy Fire was one of nearly 20 blazes across California.

NM compound littered with ammo, dirty diapers

Associated Press

AMALIA, N.M. — Dirty diapers, shotgun shells, small, broken bicycles, the white sandal of a baby, anguished journals about faith and a DVD about killing techniques in close combat — ordinary and extraordinary household objects littered a squalid compound on a high-desert plain of northern New Mexico, bearing silent witness to the lives of 11 children and five adults — and perhaps one missing boy.

The settlement sprang up on the outskirts of tiny Amalia, N.M., last winter — as a manhunt unfolded for the father of a 3-year-old boy abducted from Georgia.

Police raided the property a week ago in response a report of children living in filth, severe hunger and dangers including

a leaky propane tank — detaining all living inhabitants.

On Monday, authorities returned with new intelligence to retrieve the body of a small boy — possibly the missing and severely disabled Georgia boy Abdul-ghani Wahhaj.

The state medical examiner has not yet identified the body, and prosecutors said they were awaiting word on the cause of death before deciding on any further charges against his father, Siraj Ibn Wahhaj, one of the five adults arrested at the compound.

The grandfather of the missing boy, Siraj Wahhaj, is a Muslim cleric who leads a well-known New York City mosque. He believes the body is that of Abdul-ghani.

It was unclear exactly where the child’s body had been concealed within the com-

pound — or how long it had been there.

The empty dwelling, without running water or a drainage system, is arranged around a rickety camper that is half submerged in a dirty pit and surrounded by 7-foot berms of used tires, sections of adobe wall topped with broken glass, a junked refrigerator and other odd supplies.

An alcove shaped out of wooden shipping pallets hides a makeshift bathroom — with a toilet seat suspended above a blue plastic bucket. A pair of underpants dangled from a pole overhead.

To one side of the camper, an underground tunnel — big enough to crawl through — led into and out of the compound, which was flanked by an apparent target range. Dozens of spent casings were left behind there.

Judge rejects plea deals in Oakland warehouse fire

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — In an unusual move, a California judge on Friday rejected the plea deals of two men who were charged with 36 counts of involuntary manslaughter after a 2016 California warehouse fire.

As he handed down his decision, Judge James Cramer said Derick Almena, 48, didn’t accept “full responsibility and remorse” for the fatal blaze that occurred during an unlicensed concert at the dilapidated Oakland warehouse known as the “Ghost Ship.”

The plea deal had called for Almena to be sentenced to nine years in prison and Max

Harris, 28, to six years. The judge said he found Harris to be sincere but because the plea bargain was for both Harris and Almena, both pleas were rejected.

In court on Friday, Harris apologized to the families of the victims for his actions but told them he didn’t expect forgiveness.

“I know nothing I can say will come close. I’m sorry,” he said. “You’re in my prayers and will be for the rest of my life.”

The men could have been released from prison after serving just half their sentences, which is typical for California inmates who keep good disciplinary records. Relatives of victims who died in the blaze had slammed the proposed sentences as too lenient.

Cyrus Hoda, the brother of victim Sarah Hoda, said Almena and Harris were “culture vultures” trying to become San Francisco Bay Area arts players by luring people to a dangerous place to live and party.

Authorities have alleged Almena rented the warehouse and illegally converted it into an entertainment venue and residences before the fire. Harris was accused of helping him collect rent and schedule concerts.

Prosecutors said the two men had turned the warehouse into a residential “death trap” by cluttering it with highly flammable knick-knacks, blocking the building’s few exits and failing to make adequate safety precautions.

Kavanaugh appears poised for confirmation

The Washington Post

ORONO, Maine — Democrats have all but acknowledged that they are unable to stop the Senate from confirming Trump nominee Brett Kavanaugh for the Supreme Court this fall.

Moderate Republican senators such as Susan Collins of Maine, the most closely watched GOP swing vote, are sending strong signals that they will back Kavanaugh. Several Democrats facing difficult re-elections this year have indicated they are open to voting for the judge. And leaders of the resistance are already delivering post-mortem assessments and blaming fellow Democrats for a looming failure.

Barring a major revelation, the Senate is poised to install the 53-year-old Kavanaugh on the high court and take the next step toward fulfilling President Donald Trump's pledge to remake the Supreme Court and the wider federal judiciary, potentially for decades.

"There were too many Democrats who decided out of the gate that this was an unwinnable fight," said Brian Fallon, the executive director of Demand Justice, a leading anti-Kavanaugh group that will continue to battle the nomination.

The fizzling of the campaign to block Kavanaugh underscores the relative weakness of the Democrats, who had promised their political base a pitched battle to pro-

tect the landmark *Roe v. Wade* abortion ruling and other liberal causes. From the moment Trump introduced Kavanaugh to the nation at a prime-time White House ceremony, Democratic leaders sought to portray the would-be justice as a far-right ideologue and targeted a handful of senators in both parties seen as persuadable.

But Democrats are likely to watch helplessly as the Senate confirms Trump's second Supreme Court pick after Justice Neil Gorsuch. In addition, Republicans have pushed through 24 circuit court judges, a record number for a president in his first two years in office, and two more are in the queue when the Senate returns this week.

Omarosa makes claims of Trump racism in new book

Associated Press

BRIDGEWATER, N.J. — Former White House staffer Omarosa Manigault Newman claims in a new book that there are tapes of President Donald Trump using racial slurs and that she saw him behaving "like a dog off the leash" at numerous events he attended without his wife, first lady Melania Trump.

The accusations are among a long list of scandalous claims contained in her new book, "Unhinged," set to come out Tuesday. The Associated Press purchased an early copy of the memoir, which the White House has already slammed as "riddled with lies and false accusations."

In the book, Manigault Newman, who was a contestant on Trump's "The Apprentice" reality show and later served as a senior adviser to the president, hurls a litany of allegations, painting the president as scattered, self-absorbed, misogynistic and insecure.

Trump, she said she'd concluded after years of defending him, was a bigot.

"I didn't want to believe it," she writes. "I rejected what other people said about him because they didn't know him like I did. I had to go through the pain of witnessing his racism with my own eyes, and hearing it with my own ears, many times, until I couldn't deny it any longer."

She also claims without evidence that tapes exist of the president using the N-word

repeatedly on the reality show's set. She acknowledges she had never been able to obtain or hear the tapes but said three unnamed sources had described their contents.

Manigault Newman also alleges that allies of the president tried to buy her silence. When she left the White House, she says she was offered \$15,000 a month to serve in a "senior position" on Trump's 2020 re-election campaign. But that offer came along with a stringent nondisclosure agreement that was as "harsh and restrictive" as she had seen while working in television.

After turning down the job, she said she received a "flurry" of letters from attorneys representing the president telling her to "stay silent about Trump, or else."

Manafort witness: Bank CEO eyed Trump cabinet job

Associated Press

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — A New York bank executive testified Friday that Paul Manafort received more than \$16 million in loans after the bank's chairman expressed interest in joining Donald Trump's cabinet if he won the 2016 presidential election.

The testimony in the former Trump campaign chairman's financial fraud trial came after proceedings were halted for hours by mysterious backstage discussions between the judge and attorneys for both sides. Prosecutors now say they will wrap up their case against Manafort on Monday. Defense lawyers have not said whether they expect to call any witnesses after that.

It was a strange hiccup in nine days of proceedings that have been sometimes dramatic and featured tense exchanges

between prosecutors and an impatient U.S. District Judge T.S. Ellis III as he has pushed the government to speed up its case.

Ellis recessed the trial without explanation after huddling with his bailiff and attorneys from special counsel Robert Mueller's office and Manafort's lawyers for more than 20 minutes.

At one point, Ellis left the courtroom and headed toward the jury room. After bringing court back into session, he reminded jurors several times that they weren't to discuss the tax evasion and bank fraud case at all. That included telling them to not even comment on the attire of any witnesses.

The exchange came during a day in which jurors heard detailed testimony about Manafort's bank loans and about his New York Yankees luxury season ticket purchases — paid for from an offshore ac-

count that prosecutors say he concealed from the IRS.

Dennis Raico, an executive at Federal Saving Bank who testified under an immunity agreement, detailed for jurors how he grew uncomfortable by the actions of bank chairman Stephen Calk in the handling of Manafort's loans. Prosecutors have said that despite red flags, Calk pushed through the loans for Manafort because he wanted a job in the Trump administration.

During his testimony, Raico told jurors that Calk discussed roles in the Trump campaign ahead of approving the loans and later specifically referenced being a candidate for Secretary of the Treasury or Housing and Urban Development in messages he wanted Raico to pass to Manafort. Raico said he didn't relay Calk's messages because he thought they were inappropriate.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Vacationing trooper saves swimmer

NJ WEST TRENTON — New Jersey State Police said a trooper who was vacationing off North Carolina's Outer Banks saved a woman who got caught in a riptide.

NJ.com reported Trooper Craig Kempinski was enjoying the beach in Hatteras a week ago when his wife noticed a swimmer in distress. Kempinski quickly grabbed a boogie board and paddled out about 200 yards to the woman.

Kempinski placed the woman on the board and brought her back to shore with the help of a good Samaritan. The woman wasn't injured.

Provo exhibit allows visitors to color on art

UT PROVO — An art exhibit in Provo has turned gallery space into a giant coloring book by allowing visitors to fill in the elaborate drawings of comic book style heroes and villains.

Utah Valley University's Woodbury Art Museum is hosting the "Heroes and Villains: How Mythology Made Comics" exhibition, which runs through mid-September, The Daily Herald reported.

The exhibit features 44 canvases measuring 40 inches by 60 inches with line drawings from 12 different artists and illustrators.

5 busted in counterfeit Air Jordan sneaker ring

NY NEW YORK — Five people were charged in federal court in New York in connection with a \$70 million counterfeit Nike Air Jordan sneaker ring.

Federal prosecutors said

the people imported hundreds of thousands of athletic shoes from China made to resemble Nike Air Jordans and then affixed counterfeit Nike trademarked logos to the knockoffs in New York and sold them across the country. Real Air Jordans can sell for hundreds of dollars a pair.

The people were arrested on charges of conspiring to traffic in counterfeit goods. They each face a maximum of 20 years in prison if convicted.

Woman on the hunt for her escaped lizard

MA WILMINGTON — A 3½-foot lizard is on the loose in Massachusetts, and its owner warned that it could bite.

Liz Rose told The Sun of Lowell that her Argentine black and white tegu lizard named Tiggs escaped its outdoor enclosure at her Wilmington home recently.

Rose has also set up multiple traps baited with chicken and quail eggs — a tegu favorite — without success. Rose advises anyone who spots Tiggs not to approach the animal, as he could become frightened and flee or could bite if someone attempts to handle him.

Man escapes officers' grasp, flees shoeless

ME YORK — Police in Maine said Tasers didn't stop a habitual offender from evading arrest. They said the man escaped officers' grasps, jumped out a window and ran barefoot into the woods during a thunderstorm.

The York Police Department said it's searching for Corey W. Paradise, who's wanted on outstanding warrants.

Police said an officer spotted Paradise driving and found his car parked at a construction

site.

They said he resisted arrest and managed to escape even though officers used their stun guns. Police said the search was hampered by thunderstorms.

Officers say Paradise was wanted on drug and motor vehicle violations in York and Cumberland counties. Police said he'll now face additional charges.

Eisenhower Museum gets \$1M in donations

KS ABILENE — Two organizations have each donated \$500,000 to renovation efforts for the Eisenhower Presidential Museum in Kansas.

The Salina Journal reported that the DeBruce Foundation along with the Walter S. and Evan C. Jones Testamentary Trust have donated to a capital campaign to fund the renovation.

Eisenhower Foundation Executive Director Meredith Sleichter said the donations will help create new museum exhibits.

Rain may explain more bear sightings

NC CHARLOTTE — This summer's persistent, heavy rains may be the reason behind increased bear sightings in the North Carolina mountains.

The Charlotte Observer reported North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission biologist Mike Carraway said pounding rains that have flooded parts of the mountains in recent weeks have delayed berries and other bear food from ripening.

Bears searching neighborhoods for food inside cars and trash bins have been captured on video and shared on social media.

Newspaper moves but Tribune sign will remain

IL CHICAGO — The Chicago Tribune left its long-time home but the newspaper's iconic sign will remain when the landmark building is turned into condominiums.

The Chicago Tribune reported that its parent company, Tronc, and the real estate firms that are developing Tribune Tower have agreed to settle a lawsuit that had put the fate of the sign in jeopardy.

The paper reported that the 8-foot-tall letters that spell "Chicago Tribune" will be removed later this year during the construction project to turn Tribune Tower into condominiums.

The letters will be put back in early 2020 when the renovation is completed.

The newspaper moved its offices from the 93-year-old neo-Gothic Tower several weeks ago to a nearby high-rise.

Corvette Museum looks to diversify collection

KY BOWLING GREEN — The curator of the National Corvette Museum wants to expand its collection beyond the titular car in order to better tell its story.

Derek Moore told the Bowling Green Daily News the museum has done "a good job telling the Corvette-centric story" since opening in 1994, but it's time to delve into the impact America's sports car has had.

Moore has put out a call for donations of classic automobiles such as 1950s-era Ford Thunderbirds and early American sports cars such as the Stutz Bearcat and the Nash-Healey. He said these non-Corvettes have played a role in the evolution of the Corvette by providing competition.

From wire reports

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MLB tries to overcome offensive tweets

Associated Press

Major League Baseball has made an effort to grow the sport among African-Americans, and there are finally some small signs of progress. Meanwhile, ballparks from coast to coast host nights celebrating the LGBT community, another example of baseball's attempts to promote diversity.

Right now, all of that is being overshadowed after the discovery of some inflammatory old tweets from current players, social media posts that threaten to undermine some of the work MLB has invested.

"I think the main challenge is that a lot of times good deeds are not as interesting as misdeeds," said Billy Bean, MLB's vice president for social responsibility and inclusion. "We've worked so hard to not only introduce the sport in underserved areas and grow our Play Ball initiative, our Breakthrough Series — our RBI program is in its third decade. The

number of kids that we're putting uniforms on and introducing to the sport at a younger age — that definitely gets pushed to the wayside when (there is) something as controversial as a tweet that contains racist or misogynistic or homophobic language in it."

Whatever progress baseball has made promoting inclusion, it took a backseat recently. Years-old racist, misogynistic and homophobic tweets from Milwaukee reliever Josh Hader were found during the All-Star Game. Then Atlanta pitcher Sean Newcomb and Washington shortstop Trea Turner had their own offensive tweets unearthed. The tweets were from well before those players reached the major leagues, but they raised uncomfortable questions for a sport still trying to increase participation among African-Americans.

"I strongly believe people are going to move forward," Oakland slugger Khris Davis said. "There's never an easy answer.

I think Major League Baseball's doing a fine job promoting baseball to black players."

Davis' father, Rodney, has done some work for the MLB Urban Youth Academy, and the younger Davis played for a travel team affiliated with the Academy. Programs like that received credit when MLB said the percentage of black players from the United States and Canada on opening day active rosters rose to 8.4 percent this year. That's the highest level since at least 2012, but still well below the percentage from the mid-1980s. A report around the start of the season found the sport was showing improvement with racial and gender hiring practices.

A team made up largely of black players from Washington's Mamie Johnson Little League qualified for a regional tournament in Connecticut recently — a feel-good story for baseball in the aftermath of the offensive social media posts. The league began operation

just a few years ago and has partnered with the Washington Nationals' youth academy.

Keith Barnes, the league's president, said he didn't think the kids were paying too much attention to the controversy over racist tweets. He certainly doesn't think it will affect their enjoyment of the sport.

"I think most of the work has to be done at the grassroots level to bring kids to the sport," Barnes said. "I don't think it's more on the major league level. It's more imperative that the community drive kids to play the sport."

Still, young athletes look up to major leaguers, and incidents like these can be damaging. Even before the tweets surfaced, a well-known major league pitching coach was fired for comments he made to a team employee. Chris Bosio, who was with the Detroit Tigers, later told USA Today he used the word "monkey" — but insisted he didn't say it in a racial or demeaning context.

Woodland keeps record, lead at PGA Championship

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Gary Woodland kept his 36-hole record at the PGA Championship and got some company in the record book.

Tony Finau capped one of the craziest rounds of his career and matched the PGA Championship record with 10 birdies, which at least allowed him to make the cut on the number. For everyone else who resumed the rain-delayed second round Saturday morning, it was all about staying close to the leader.

Woodland had a 4-under 66 on Friday morning to reach 130 for 36 holes, breaking the PGA record by one shot, tying the 36-hole record for all majors and giving him a one-shot lead over Kevin Kisner.

Rickie Fowler was the only player who made a run at him on the sponge-like fairways of Bellerive. Fowler resumed his

second round by making birdie on the reachable par-4 11th hole, but he stalled from there and wound up with a 67.

He was at 8-under 132, along with two-time U.S. Open champion Brooks Koepka. Dustin Johnson led the group at 133 and was joined by Shane Lowry, who completed a 64 after the delay.

Defending champion Justin Thomas stayed in the game, and so did Tiger Woods.

Thomas, trying to join Woods as the only back-to-back winners of the PGA Championship since it changed to stroke play in 1958, ran off four birdies on the back nine for a 65 that left him in the group at 6-under 134.

"I'm in a lot better position than I was when I came out here this morning, which is great," Thomas said. "There's a lot of golf left on a very gettable golf course. But at the same time, it

can show its teeth if you're not driving it well."

Woods got up-and-down from 69 yards for birdie on the par-5 eighth when he resumed, but his momentum was slowed at the start of the back nine when he twice missed par putts from about 5 feet, sandwiched around a birdie.

"That stemmed the momentum a little bit," Woods said.

He picked up one last birdie when he reached the green in two on the 597-yard 17th hole and two-putted, sending him to a 66. It was his fourth round of 66 or better this year, including his third round at the British Open.

Still, he was six shots behind in a tie for 19th with plenty of power players in front of him.

"Guys are making birdie from everywhere," Woods said. "Everyone is bunched. On top of that, if you hit the ball well enough, you'll leave yourself in

the right sections. There's not a single putt out here that you're afraid of."

Koepka and Charl Schwartzel tied the PGA Championship record — previously set 14 times — of 63. One more record was set Saturday morning when the cut was at 140, breaking by one shot the lowest score to make the cut. It was 141 at Atlanta Athletic Club in 2001.

Woods was at the bottom end of the 24 players separated by six shots going into the final two rounds. The third round featured threesomes off both tees, meaning close to five-hour rounds on a course that feels even longer to walk because of the soggy conditions.

"I feel like I just played 27 holes, and I only played 11," Thomas said.

Phil Mickelson played nine holes, and he won't be playing any more. Lefty missed the cut for the first time this year.

Posey, McCutchen lead Giants past Pirates

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — The San Francisco Giants finally got their offense going, and they needed it to survive another shaky performance from their bullpen.

Buster Posey got four hits, Andrew McCutchen homered against his former team and the San Francisco Giants defeated the Pittsburgh Pirates 13-10 on Friday night.

“They just started swinging with I think more authority,” Giants manager Bruce Bochy said.

The Giants had lost three in

a row and Pittsburgh had won three straight.

Posey broke out of a 0-for-13 stretch with his second four-hit game in less than two weeks. All four hits came in the first four innings as the Giants built a 10-2 lead.

Posey and Alen Hanson each drove in three runs. McCutchen hit a leadoff homer and later drew four walks for a San Francisco team that batted .212 and averaged 2.7 runs over its previous six games.

“They were letting it go tonight,” Bochy said. “It was good to see them have some success, I mean we’ve been shut down,

we’ve been due for a game like this where we break it open, even though they came back and made it a game.”

Francisco Cervelli drove in five runs with three hits for the Pirates. His 11th home run of the season and fourth career grand slam, off reliever Pierce Johnson, closed Pittsburgh within 11-7 in the seventh inning.

Adeiny Hechavarria, playing his second game since being traded from Tampa Bay to Pittsburgh, went 2-for-2 with a home run. Giants starter Derek Holland (6-8) gave up five runs in 6¹/₃ innings.

A big night from the offense allowed him to be more aggressive.

“It’s huge,” Holland said. “The offense is putting in the work, and I’m little bit upset with myself. They put the runs up, I’ve got to keep the momentum on our side.”

Clay Holmes (1-2) was tagged for seven runs in 2 ²/₃ innings in his third career start.

“Our command was pretty inconsistent throughout the evening,” Pirates manager Clint Hurdle said. “Clayton was so good the last time out. His fastball command was off and that complicates things.”

MLB roundup

Rangers rookie Guzman hits 3 homers against Yanks

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Ronald Guzman became the first rookie to hit three home runs in a game against the Yankees, powering the Texas Rangers past New York 12-7 on Friday night.

Eight days after Boston’s Steve Pearce connected three times off the Yankees, Guzman duplicated the feat in ending New York’s four-game winning streak.

Guzman grounded out his first time up, then hit solo home runs in three straight at-bats. The 23-year-old first baseman batted again in the eighth with a chance to tie the big league record for homers in a game — no rookie has ever hit four — but struck out swinging against Chad Green.

Guzman’s two homers off Masahiro Tanaka (9-3) and one off A.J. Cole made him the first Texas player to hit three home runs in a game since Adrian Beltre in 2012.

Overall, Guzman has 12 home runs this season, six against the Yankees.

Beltre also joined in the fun with his seventh homer of the season, tying recent Hall of Fame inductee Chipper Jones

for the 33rd spot on baseball’s career list with 469.

Mike Minor (9-6) won his third straight start.

Guzman pulled homers to right field in the fourth and the sixth that made it 6-1 and chased Tanaka. Guzman went the opposite way for a drive in the seventh off Cole.

Austin Romine and Brett Gardner homered for the Yankees.

Red Sox 19, Orioles 12: Xander Bogaerts and Andrew Benintendi each hit three-run homers, Brock Holt connected in a six-run sixth inning and visiting Boston overpowered Baltimore.

After hitting for the cycle one night earlier, Mookie Betts went 3-for-4 with two walks and three RBIs. The 19 runs were the most for Boston since a 22-run outburst against Seattle in August 2015.

The Red Sox have won 11 of 13 to open a nine-game lead over the second-place Yankees in the AL East.

Boston starter Nathan Eovaldi gave up eight runs, four earned, and 10 hits in 2 ²/₃ innings.

Padres 2, Phillies 0: Jacob Nix (1-0) pitched six strong in-

nings in his major league debut and host San Diego blanked Philadelphia.

Angels 4, Athletics 3: Kole Calhoun and Justin Upton hit two-run homers, Albert Pujols reached another milestone and host Los Angeles rallied past Oakland.

Cubs 3, Nationals 2: Jason Heyward broke up a no-hitter with a tying, two-run single in the sixth inning, Anthony Rizzo drew a bases-loaded walk in the seventh and host Chicago beat Washington.

Rays 7, Blue Jays 0: Blake Snell (13-5) pitched five perfect innings and then was pulled, Michael Perez hit his first career home run and visiting Tampa Bay beat Toronto.

Mariners 5, Astros 2: Nelson Cruz hit a tiebreaking two-run double in a three-run eighth inning to lift visiting Seattle past Houston.

Reds 3, Diamondbacks 0: Anthony DeSclafani (6-3) struck out a season-high nine to outduel Clay Buchholz and scored one of his team’s two runs on Billy Hamilton’s suicide-squeeze bunt to help host Cincinnati beat Arizona.

Rockies 5, Dodgers 4: Ryan McMahon hit a two-run

homer in the seventh after replacing injured slugger Nolan Arenado, and host Colorado’s beleaguered bullpen kept Los Angeles in check.

Cardinals 7, Royals 0: Matt Carpenter homered for the sixth time in seven games, Austin Gomber (2-0) pitched five scoreless innings and visiting St. Louis beat Kansas City.

Mets 6, Marlins 2: Zack Wheeler (7-6) won his fifth straight start, pitching seven solid innings and visiting New York sent Miami to its ninth loss in 10 games.

Tigers 5, Twins 3: Niko Goodrum and Jose Iglesias homered and host Detroit beat Minnesota to snap a six-game losing streak.

White Sox 1, Indians 0: Daniel Palka led off the ninth inning with a home run, Carlos Rodon matched a career high by throwing eight innings of scoreless four-hit ball and host Chicago beat Cleveland.

Braves 10, Brewers 1: Kevin Gausman (6-9) pitched eight strong innings to win his SunTrust Park debut, and Ender Inciarte drove in four runs in host Atlanta’s victory over Milwaukee.

NASCAR interim leader remains quiet

Associated Press

BROOKLYN, Mich. — Jim France seems to be choosing to stay in the shadows, declining to let the public hear from him as the interim chairman and CEO of NASCAR.

France is not expected to be available for interviews as NASCAR prepares to run its first race, at Michigan International Speedway, since chairman Brian France took an indefinite leave from the company his family owns.

Brian France was arrested on charges of driving while intoxicated and criminal possession of oxycodone Sunday night in New York's Hamptons. His uncle, Jim, was picked the next day to take over on an interim basis. He was vice chairman and executive vice president of

NASCAR.

It is not the news, or the moves, the series wanted as it struggles to cope with dropping attendance, TV ratings and major sponsorship deals.

And, it might be a long wait if anyone is hoping Jim France, who is quiet even behind the scenes, will become the face and voice of the sport.

"I just hope that whoever is in that position takes it serious and does a good job with it because there are so many people in this industry that want to see it succeed," said Kyle Larson, who drives the No. 42 Chevrolet. "I hope this is a good step to have a good change for us and get some good momentum back for our series."

Brian France is the grandson of NASCAR founder Bill France Sr. and replaced his fa-

ther, Bill France Jr., as head of NASCAR 15 years ago.

Now, it's Jim France's turn to take the wheel.

And, the relatively few people who know the Vietnam veteran well are expressing full confidence in his ability to lead during a potentially pivotal time for the series.

Jim France has worked for the family business since 1959, serving in a slew of roles. He founded Grand-AM in 1999 and help to orchestrate a merger with American Le Mans Series to form IMSA in 2014. He was also a key player in NASCAR's purchase of ARCA.

"We've known Jim France since the 1970s and he's given respect when he walks in a room," said Len Wood, co-owner of the No. 21 Ford. "He's earned respect. He's al-

ways been the quiet guy in the background that did way more than you knew. He's the kind of jeans-and-flannel guy, who you can bounce ideas off of anytime.

"We have the utmost confidence in him."

Rick Hendrick does, too.

"He's going to be awesome in that role," the team owner said in an interview on Sirius. "I've watched what he's done with IMSA and how he's brought all these different manufacturers to the table and how that sport has grown with the 24 hour and everything else.

"A lot of people don't know Jim because he never has been out front a lot, but there is a great leader and a great racer and NASCAR is in awesome hands."

Sports briefs

JGR teammates Hamlin, Busch go 1-2 in qualifying

Associated Press

BROOKLYN, Mich. — Denny Hamlin and Kyle Busch swept the front row in qualifying at Michigan International Speedway. Kevin Harvick, neck-and-neck with Busch all season, was right behind in third.

Hamlin went 202.794 mph in Friday's session to win a pole for the second consecutive week. The JGR veteran is winless this season, while teammate Busch has six victories and Erik Jones has one.

His No. 11 team has clearly hit on something these last two weeks and Hamlin, a two-time Michigan winner, was fastest in all three rounds of qualifying and Friday's first practice. But he's still in search of a win and wants to continue his streak of at least one victory a year every season since his 2006 rookie year.

"It is a very important streak; I think about it," said Hamlin, who thought the streak was over in 2013 when he broke

his back and missed a month, then didn't win until the season finale.

"You look back at the really great drivers of NASCAR, and they had long streaks, 10 years and above, of winning in a row, and you want to keep that going for sure. It's important."

Busch made it an all-Toyota front row for Sunday's race with a lap at 202.731 mph. Harvick, in a Ford for Stewart-Haas Racing, went 202.100. Harvick and Busch are tied for most Cup Series victories, while Martin Truex Jr., the final member of the so-called "Big 3," has four wins this year. He qualified seventh.

Curry shoots 86, misses Web.com cut

HAYWARD, Calif. — Stephen Curry shot 16-over 86 on Friday to finish last in the Web.com Tour's Ellie Mae Classic.

The Golden State Warriors star dropped 11 strokes to par

on the first eight holes. He was at 17-over 157 for two rounds after opening with a 71 on Thursday.

"I couldn't hit a driver to save my life today, so that's how golf goes," said Curry, who was making his second appearance in the event at TPC Stonebrae. "One day you have it, or at least in the amateur world, one day you have it and one day you completely lose it and you have no idea what you're doing over the top of the ball."

Curry was last among the 154 finishers. He was 33 strokes behind leader Alex Prugh and missed the cut by 13 strokes. Last year, Curry shot 74-74 to tie for 148th and missed the cut by 11 shots.

Playing as an amateur, Curry bogeyed the par-3 second, made a quadruple-bogey 9 on the par-5 third after hitting consecutive drives out of bounds, bogeyed the par-4 fifth, made a triple on the par-4 seventh and a double on the par-4 eighth.

US beats Japan to reach softball final

MAKUHARI, Japan — Pitcher Rachel Garcia drove in the winning run in the eighth inning Saturday to lift the United States to a 4-3 win over Japan and into the final of the women's world softball championship.

It also gave the Americans a chance to qualify for the Olympics.

With a runner on third base, Garcia hit a line drive to the gap in left-center field to seal the win. The defending champions will face either Japan or Canada in Sunday's final of a tournament that doubles as a qualifier for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

The winner of the tournament will be awarded an Olympic spot. If Japan wins, the second-place finisher will get the Olympic spot because Japan has an automatic berth as host.