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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Carter urges Turkey to control Syrian border

Associated Press

INCIRLIK AIR BASE, Turkey — Defense Secretary Ash Carter said the U.S. wants Turkey to better control its border with Syria, which could help block the flow of foreign fighters to the Islamic State group, and to more forcefully join the U.S.-led coalition “in the air and on the ground.”

In Turkey, Carter said he is looking for new ways the U.S.-led coalition can strengthen its fight against Islamic State militants in Iraq and Syria.

Carter said he will be asking his military commanders and other officials to come up with new tactics that can be used to attack the Islamic State group and to identify new contributions that coalition partners can make to accelerate the destruction of the insurgent group.

Speaking to reporters traveling with him, Carter said, “We want Turkish

forces to join in the air and on the ground as appropriate.”

Carter left the U.S. immediately after meeting with President Barack Obama and the National Security Council at the Pentagon on Monday.

“We need to identify and then carry out every conceivable way of accelerating the defeat of ISIL,” said Carter, using another acronym for the Islamic State group. “The president is asking all of us to do more.”

Carter and other U.S. and coalition leaders have recently been claiming progress in the fight, saying the Islamic State group is on the defensive and losing some ground.

But progress to retake key Iraq cities such as Ramadi and Mosul has been slow. In recent days, Iraqi forces backed by coalition airstrikes have been able to largely encircle Ramadi, but officials say they can’t estimate how long it may take to oust the militants from the city.

Carter has written letters to various members of the coalition asking for additional support for the Islamic State fight, and in many cases spelled out what each country may be able to do. For some, that may be airstrikes, while others may be able to contribute transportation aircraft, intelligence, surveillance or troops on the ground to provide training.

“Over this trip and in the subsequent weeks and months, I’ll be asking them each to make the strongest, most robust contributions that they can,” said Carter, who is making a weeklong trip to the region.

He said the U.S. would particularly like to see the Gulf countries do more.

“I think that some of the Gulf countries could make very important contributions to encouraging and assisting Sunni communities subjected to ISIL rule to resist ISIL rule — something they can do that’s harder for other countries to do,” he said.

Saudi Arabia announces anti-terrorism alliance

Associated Press

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia — Saudi Arabia said Tuesday that 34 nations have agreed to form a new “Islamic military alliance” to fight terrorism with a joint operations center in the kingdom, but the coalition does not include Shiite-majority Iran or Iraq, and it’s not clear how exactly it would function.

The announcement, published by the state-run Saudi Press Agency, said the Saudi-led alliance is being established because terrorism “should be fought by all means and collaboration should be made to eliminate it.”

However, the absence of Iran, Iraq and Syria, three countries battling the Islamic State group, raised questions about whether the alliance was intended to present a unified front against the extremists or Tehran, Saudi Arabia’s main regional rival.

Riyadh backs rebels fighting to overthrow Syrian President

Bashar Assad, a key Iranian ally, and has been leading an Arab coalition against Iran-supported Shiite Houthi rebels in Yemen since March. It is also part of the U.S.-led coalition fighting the Islamic State group in Syria and Iraq.

The Saudi statement said Islam forbids “corruption and destruction in the world” and that terrorism constitutes “a serious violation of human dignity and rights, especially the right to life and the right to security.”

Saudi Deputy Crown Prince and Defense Minister Mohammed bin Salman told a news conference that the new coalition will develop mechanisms for working with other countries and international bodies to support counterterrorism efforts. He said their efforts would not be limited to countering the Islamic State group.

“Currently, every Muslim country is fighting terrorism

individually ... so coordinating efforts is very important,” he said.

Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir told reporters in Paris that members could request assistance from the coalition, which would address the requests “on a case-by-case basis.”

“There is no limit in terms of where the assistance would be provided, or to whom it would be provided,” he said.

The new counterterrorism coalition includes nations with large and established armies such as Pakistan, Turkey and Egypt, as well as war-torn countries like Libya and Yemen. African nations that have suffered militant attacks, such as Mali, Chad, Somalia and Nigeria, are also members.

It was not immediately clear what role, if any, the United States would play in the coalition. U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter said he is looking

forward to learning more about what Saudi Arabia has in mind.

“In general, at least, it appears that it’s very much aligned with something that we’ve been urging for quite some time, which is greater involvement in the campaign to combat ISIL by Sunni Arab countries,” Carter told reporters during a visit to Incirlik Air Base in Turkey, referring to the Islamic State group by one of its acronyms. He said he’d like to talk to the Saudis about the plan to learn more about it.

The full roster of the new coalition is: Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Jordan, Tunisia, Yemen, the Palestinians, Egypt, Morocco, Turkey, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Benin, Chad, Togo, Djibouti, Senegal, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Gabon, Guinea, Comoros, Cote d’Ivoire, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Nigeria.

Swift: China's plans won't alter US role

BY WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — China's militarization of disputed islands in the South China Sea won't alter operations for the U.S. Pacific Fleet, whose ships have steamed a combined 700 days in those waters so far this year, the Navy's top officer in the region said Monday.

"I'm interested — potentially to the point of fascination — about the element of militarization, but the fact of the matter is that it's not going to make any difference to my operations," Adm. Scott Swift, U.S. Pacific Fleet's commander, told an audi-

ence at the Cooperative Strategy Forum held at the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies in Honolulu. "We'll continue to operate in accordance with international law in the South China Sea or any place else, just as we would globally."

Swift was referring to a group of land features that are part of the Spratly Islands and claimed by China, the Philippines and a few other countries in the region. For the past year, China has been using dredged sand to expand those features into full-scale islands on which it is building runways and other facilities. Some U.S. officials have described the activity as milita-

rization, a characterization disputed by China.

Swift sidestepped those semantics, calling the militarization issue moot.

"If they were militarized, I don't think that would change the United States' approach or the Pacific Fleet's approach any different than if they weren't militarized," he said.

Swift told the audience of maritime security academics and leaders from nine regional navies that he would be equally unperturbed if China declared an Air Defense Identification Zone over the islands. From an American perspective, he said, it's very clear that a country im-

plementing an ADIZ is reserving the right to identify vessels passing through the zone. In November 2013, China imposed an ADIZ over the Senkaku Islands, a chain in the East China Sea also claimed by Japan. American military aircraft have continued to fly there.

A South China Sea game-changer for the fleet would be if the disputed artificial Spratly islands were militarized and China then began enforcing an exclusion zone, preventing ships from entering.

"That would be an international issue if that were to happen," he said.

Marines to allow locks and twists

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN

Stars and Stripes

Female Marines will be the first members of the U.S. military permitted to wear locks in their hair while in uniform, the service announced Monday.

The modifications, which also permit twists, come more than a year after the Marines began reviewing their uniform policy to address allegations of racially insensitive hairstyle regulations across all branches of the military. Commandant Gen. Robert B. Neller approved the new female hairstyle recommendations that were made by a Marine Corps uniform board, the Marines said in a statement.

Marine Corps officials say the changes give female Marines more ways to wear their hair while still maintaining a professional and neat appearance. Locks and twists, in particular, may be easier for some female Marines to maintain while deployed and are less costly and time-consuming to maintain than other approved styles, officials said.

US troops pulled into a fight for Helmand

BY HEATH DRUZIN

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — U.S. troops are increasingly being pulled back into battle to aid overstretched Afghan forces, most recently in the southern province of Helmand where an assertive Taliban is threatening to take over an area where hundreds of Americans have died.

Taliban insurgents are pressing toward Helmand's provincial capital, raising fears of a repeat of the capture of Kunduz in the north at the end of September. U.S. special operations troops aided Afghan forces in

the two-week battle to retake Kunduz.

As in Kunduz, U.S. special operators are providing help on the ground. Their role in both instances is muddying the definition of a "noncombat" mission at a time when Afghanistan is seeing one of the highest levels of violence since the U.S.-led coalition ousted the Taliban from power in 2001.

The latest operations by the Taliban in Helmand began almost simultaneously with the fall of Kunduz and appear to be part of a more aggressive campaign by the guerrilla group, which in

years past largely melted away to Pakistani safe havens as the weather turned cold, leading to a lull in fighting.

Col. Michael Lawhorn, spokesman for coalition forces in Afghanistan, confirmed in a phone interview that there are American special operations troops working with their Afghan counterparts in Helmand, though he said no American troops are permanently based in the province. The New York Times earlier this week first reported the commitment of U.S. troops and air power to the battle in Helmand.

Experts: Army keeping Bergdahl options open

BY NANCY MONTGOMERY

Stars and Stripes

Military law experts cautioned against reading too much into an Army commander's decision to send Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl to trial at a general court-martial rather than to follow a recommendation that would have limited penalties and losses.

"What this does is keep options open for the Army," said Zachary Spilman, a Marine Corps Reserve lawyer and moderator of a military justice blog.

In a decision announced Monday, Gen. Robert Abrams, commander of the U.S. Forces Com-

mand at Fort Bragg, N.C., ruled that Bergdahl, 29, should be sent to a general court-martial, where he faces a sentence of up to lifetime imprisonment if convicted of misconduct and up to five years for the desertion charge.

"I think this case is all about whether he's responsible for his own captivity," Spilman said. "I think the crucial question is was he a prisoner of war or not? I get the feeling that Army leadership doesn't want to make that decision alone. They want a trial to figure that out."

Army prosecutors say they won't be ready to proceed for months, said Eugene Fidell, Bergdahl's chief defense lawyer.

Wilson, Seahawks on a roll

Associated Press

RENTON, Wash. — As the Seattle Seahawks continue their roll toward the postseason in part because of record-setting play for Russell Wilson, they keep running into roadblocks.

First was the abdominal surgery that put Marshawn Lynch on the bench. Then the knee injury to Jimmy Graham that ended his first season with Seattle prematurely.

And most recently, the broken ankle and ligament damage suffered on Sunday in Seattle's 35-6 win over Baltimore by rookie running back Thomas Rawls, who had proven more than capable as Lynch's replacement.

In a way, all those obstacles have made what Wilson and the Seahawks have accomplished over the past four weeks even more impressive.

Wilson has put together one of the finest four-week stretches of quarterbacking at least in Seattle history, putting together a string of performances that are tough to match and propelled the Seahawks back into the discussion among the favorites in

the NFC even if their playoff path is almost certain to be as a wild-card team.

But now the question will be can the Seahawks keep this stretch of exceptional offensive play going forward with yet another significant loss on offense.

"Our commitment is going to stay the same because we have a balance that we really play with. We have a philosophy and an approach that doesn't need to be changed right now," Seattle coach Pete Carroll said on Monday.

"If we were having issues and troubles then maybe something would happen. The whole idea of being a balanced attack is when you need it you can go to it and if we need to throw the football more we will. If we need to run the football more we will."

Wilson's past four games have been remarkable. According to STATS, Wilson is the first quarterback going back to 1960 to have four straight games with a passer rating of 138.5 or higher. He's thrown for 1,171 yards, completed 75.4 percent of his throws, thrown 16 touchdowns and had zero interceptions.

And he's done most of it without needing to run for safety and scrambling from the pass rush. Seattle's offensive line has been equal to its quarterback and allowed Wilson to throw on time and without stress.

Because of the uncertainty regarding when Lynch will return, the Seahawks signed Bryce Brown on Monday to add depth at running back. It will be DuJuan Harris and Brown likely carrying the load on first and second downs and Fred Jackson continuing his role as the third-down back going forward until Lynch is back.

After making a brief appearance at the team's headquarters last week, Carroll said Lynch will be doing his rehab offsite until he's ready to start practicing again. But there continues to be no estimate on when that'll be.

"He went through a big surgery. He's got a lot to get through. He's got to get past that, whatever impact that has had and then he's got to get back into football shape and get going," Carroll said.

Giants in 3-way tie for NFC East lead

Associated Press

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — Killing time hours before kickoff at the New York Giants' hotel, Eli Manning plotted a play he wanted to try against the Miami Dolphins.

It worked better than he ever imagined. With the game tied in the fourth quarter, Odell Beckham Jr. slipped 5 yards behind the secondary to score the go-ahead 84-yard touchdown, and the Giants forged a three-way tie atop the NFC East by beating Miami 31-24 Monday night.

Beckham gave Manning credit for cooking up the pivotal play.

"It was something he saw when he watched film," Beckham said. "His mind is different. It's special to be able to see something like that. It was something we hadn't practiced and was completely on the fly."

Here are things to know about the Giants' first visit to Miami since 1996:

The standings: The Giants (6-7) broke a three-game losing streak and are tied with the Redskins and Eagles for the lead in their woeful division.

"It's a must-win, a playoff game for us," Beckham said. "They're all playoff games."

The Giants' next game is indeed a biggie: They play host to NFC South champion Carolina (13-0) on Sunday.

The Dolphins (5-8) were mathematically eliminated from the playoff race, extending their postseason drought to a franchise-record seven consecutive years.

Going deep: Beckham's long touchdown catch put the Giants ahead to stay with 11 minutes to go.

Cornerback Jamar Taylor and seldom-used safety Shamiel Gary were the closest defenders, but Manning hit Beckham in stride at midfield and he sprinted to the end zone for his 12th TD this year.

"We thought it would be a big play," Manning said, "but I didn't think he would be that open."

Other Odell: Beckham had seven catches for 166 yards and the game's final two scores. The 100-yard game was his sixth in a row, a Giants record.

"They got it to a star player, and he made plays for them," Dolphins defensive tackle Ndamukong Suh said.

Beckham missed one series when he went to the locker room due to cramps in both calves.

Manning's best: The Giants quarterback went 27-for-31 for 337 yards and four scores. His passer rating of 151.5 was his highest since 2009, and his 87 percent completion percentage was a career high.

"Guys were getting open quickly," Manning said. "We got everybody in the mix. That's when we're at our best."

Bengals' QB compares self to Brady

Associated Press

AJ McCarron will make Andy Dalton feel like Drew Bledsoe.

Bledsoe was the starting quarterback for the New England Patriots in 2001 when an injury opened the door for an unknown sixth-round pick from Michigan. Tom Brady replaced Bledsoe, never relinquished the job and is still going strong 14 years later.

McCarron takes over for the first-place Cincinnati Bengals after Dalton broke his right thumb Sunday. Dalton might want to hurry back because McCarron has Brady on his mind.

"I guess Tom Brady was in the same situation when he had the opportunity, so I gotta make the most of it," McCarron said after going 22-for-32 for 280 yards with two touchdowns, three sacks and two interceptions in a loss to Pittsburgh.

Now there's an overreaction.

Hey AJ: Win a game before you mention yourself and Brady in the same sentence.

If McCarron leads the Bengals (10-3) to a victory over the lowly 49ers (4-9), he'll become the first Alabama quarterback

to win an NFL start since Jeff Rutledge in 1987.

After that, all McCarron needs are four Super Bowl rings to be in Brady's class.

Here are other overreactions from Week 14:

Overreaction: Chip Kelly was right about Sam Bradford all along. Bradford led the Eagles to a second straight win and is 6-2 as a starter in the last eight games he's finished.

Realistic reaction: Bradford is clearly more comfortable in Philadelphia's offense, but it's still uncertain whether he's the answer at quarterback.

Overreaction: Blake Bortles is the next Dan Marino. Bortles became the first QB in Jaguars history to throw 30 touchdown passes. He joined Marino, Matthew Stafford and Daunte Culpepper as the only QBs age 23 or younger to throw that many.

Realistic reaction: He's closer to Stafford than Marino.

Overreaction: The Broncos lost to Oakland so it's time for Peyton Manning to replace Brock Osweiler.

Realistic reaction: Even coach Gary Kubiak isn't ready to commit to Manning.

Overreaction: Andy Reid is the Coach of the Year. His Chiefs have won seven straight games to get in the middle of the AFC playoff race.

Realistic reaction: They shouldn't have been 1-5 in the first place.

Overreaction: The Patriots and Seahawks will have to outbid each other for Ray Rice. Seattle lost injured running back Thomas Rawls, who was filling in for Marshawn Lynch. New England, already missing Dion Lewis, lost LeGarrette Blount.

Realistic reaction: Uh, no.

Overreaction: The NFC East is on a roll. The Redskins, Eagles and Giants each won to remain tied for first place.

Realistic reaction: They're all 6-7.

Overreaction: Russell Wilson is the NFL MVP. Seattle's quarterback has 26 TDs, seven interceptions and leads the NFC with a passer rating of 110.0.

Realistic reaction: Brady and Cam Newton stand in his way.

Giants sign Cueto for 6 years, \$130M

The Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Even after signing Jeff Samardzija to a large, long-term contract last week, the San Francisco Giants had their eye on Johnny Cueto — they've been watching and admiring him from afar for years.

The Giants' upgraded rotation sure is taking shape, with the 2014 World Series

champions agreeing Monday with Cueto on a \$130 million, six-year contract to add another top-tier starter.

"Johnny has always been, and rightly so, very high on our list ... high on our short list," Giants general manager Bobby Evans said. "He's somebody we've admired for a long time."

Cueto is set to join a rotation led by left-hander Madison Bumgarner and

new addition righty Samardzija, who was introduced Friday after formalizing his \$90 million, five-year contract — one week after the team lost out to the Diamondbacks on Zack Greinke.

Cueto turned down a \$120 million, six-year contract from Arizona late last month. The Giants began talks with Cueto's representatives during last week's winter meetings in Nashville.



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Clippers edge Pistons in OT

Associated Press

AUBURN HILLS, Mich. — Doc Rivers considers himself a fairly good NBA coach, but he wasn't even going to pretend that he was responsible for the Los Angeles Clippers' 105-103 overtime win against the Detroit Pistons on Monday night.

"That was crazy," he said of the game's finish. "I have to tell you that the players won this, because I screwed this game up more than you know. The two biggest plays we got came when they talked me out of the play I wanted to call."

The first big play came when J.J. Redick hit a tying three-pointer with 19.6 seconds left in overtime.

"I don't know if Doc is trying to deflect credit, but our coaching staff made a lot of cerebral calls tonight," Redick said. "The play was for me to get a three or Blake (Griffin) to get a layup. I saw Blake look to the corner, and I wasn't there yet, but he trusted I would get there."

Detroit's Reggie Jackson missed at the buzzer, forcing overtime, and neither team was able to take control.

Kentavious Caldwell-Pope made 1 of 2 foul shots with 30.5 seconds left to tie it for the Pistons. Jamal Crawford took a pass from Griffin and hit a three-pointer from the left wing with 12.4 seconds to go.

"After they scored the first time, I let them change the play the second time, too," Rivers said. "They were so into the game that they had a great feel."

Pistons coach Stan Van Gundy was furious with Andre Drummond, who gambled on the play to try for a steal and instead left Crawford all alone.

"I have no idea what he was thinking, but it was certainly not anything that was part of our defensive plan," Van Gundy said. "He ran out to the free-throw line, which meant Marcus (Morris) had to sink back into the lane to guard the rim. That's just undisciplined panic."

With the Pistons needing three, the Clippers fouled Jackson with 9.3 seconds left, setting off a chaotic finish.

Jackson made the first shot, but missed the second. The ball dropped right to Drummond, who missed a point-blank putback, then tipped the miss too hard.

Jackson managed to get his hands on the ball twice, but missed a short jumper and ended up hitting the top of the backboard with a desperation shot at the buzzer.

"We were thinking we were going to get double-OT, but the ball wouldn't go in," Jackson said. "I got a good look, but it didn't drop and then I was just trying to make something happen."

Griffin finished with 34 points for the Clippers, Redick had 24 and Chris Paul put up 13 points and 12 assists.

Jackson finished with 34 points, 11 rebounds and seven assists. Drummond added 20 points and 15 rebounds.

Nuggets 114, Rockets 108: Will Barton scored 23 points, including two game-sealing free throws with 13.5 seconds remaining, and host Denver held off Houston after a sneaker-tossing incident nearly turned the tide.

A tossed shoe allowed the Rockets to rebound from a big deficit late in the fourth quarter. Houston's Trevor Ariza lost a sneaker with 4:53 remaining and his team trailing by 15. Barton picked it up and threw it off the court so as not to

trip on it, leading to a technical for delay of game. The Rockets cut the deficit to 110-108 late and had a chance to take the lead. But Jason Terry missed a three-pointer with 15.9 seconds left and Barton wrapped up the win from the line.

Heat 100, Hawks 88: Chris Bosh scored 24 points, Gerald Green had 20 and Miami handed slumping Atlanta another home loss.

Trail Blazers 105, Pelicans 101: Damian Lillard scored 30 points and host Portland beat New Orleans for the seventh straight time.

Bulls 115, 76ers 96: Jimmy Butler had 23 points and host Chicago rallied from a halftime deficit to rout lowly Philadelphia.

Spurs 118, Jazz 81: Kawhi Leonard had 22 points and host San Antonio never trailed.

Grizzlies 112, Wizards 95: Marc Gasol had 24 points and 12 rebounds, Mike Conley finished with 18 points and 11 assists and host Memphis beat Washington.

Pacers 106, Raptors 90: Jordan Hill had season highs with 20 points and 13 rebounds, Monta Ellis had 18 points and host Indiana ended Toronto's four-game winning streak.

Mavericks 104, Suns 94: Chandler Parsons scored 15 of his 17 points in the second half, Raymond Felton followed his second career triple-double with 17 points and host Dallas beat former teammate Tyson Chandler and Phoenix.

Magic 105, Nets 82: Nikola Vucevic scored 18 points, Elfrid Payton had 17 and Orlando got its first victory in Brooklyn.

Clemson gets back to work

Associated Press

CLEMSON, S.C. — Clemson's Dabo Swinney enjoyed festive award banquets; the texts, emails and calls of congratulations on the Atlantic Coast Conference championship and watching his star quarterback Deshaun Watson work the Heisman Trophy stage. Now, the coach of the top-ranked Tigers is ready to get back to work.

No. 1 Clemson (13-0) returned to practice Monday in preparation for its Orange Bowl matchup against No. 4 Oklahoma (11-1) on New Year's Eve — and the chance to play for a national championship.

"We think we've got a good plan," Swinney said. "Now we've got to go execute it."

If Clemson's past is prologue, that won't be difficult.

The Tigers have won their past three bowl games, all against national championship-winning opponents, including Oklahoma. Clemson rallied from 11-points down in the fourth quarter to beat LSU 25-24 in the Chick-fil-A Bowl three seasons ago. It defeated Ohio State 40-36 in the Orange Bowl after the 2013 season before obliterating the Sooners 40-6 in the Russell Athletic Bowl last winter.

Swinney said he's got a main message to his players going forward this week: Don't expect last year's Oklahoma team this time around.

The Sooners, Swinney said, have a smoother, more effective offense led by quarterback Baker Mayfield, plus a fierce defense that Clemson will have to be at the top of their game to overcome. Things broke right for the Tigers a year ago, Swinney continued, with Oklahoma committing five turnovers in the blowout.

There was a rush of activity at Clemson's football offices and meeting rooms inside Death Valley, with players breaking off into position meetings before heading out for practice.

The Tigers expect to work out or meet on campus through Dec. 21, when Swinney gives the team off for the holiday. They'll gather again Christmas night, then work out briefly on Dec. 26 before flying off to Miami to finish game-planning for the Sooners.

Swinney expects a healthy group on the trip. He said all-Atlantic Coast Conference first-team receiver Artavis Scott had a procedure to fix a damaged meniscus in a knee — Clemson policy does not identify which knee was affected — that had bothered him for about a month, Swinney said.

Scott would be limited in practice for a day or two, but figured to be full speed for the Orange Bowl.

Swinney, Watson and defensive end Shaq Lawson have had a hectic time since defeating North Carolina 45-37 to win Clemson's 15th ACC crown on Dec. 5.

Lawson was in Houston early last week as a finalist for the Lombardi Award.

Watson first went to Atlanta where he won the Davey O'Brien award as college football's top quarterback before jetting with his family to New York for the Heisman ceremony. Watson finished third behind winner Derrick Henry of Alabama and runner-up Christian McCaffrey of Stanford.

Watson enjoyed his postseason trips, but he certainly relished being back on the field with his team even more.

"It's exciting," Watson said. "We might have been a little rusty at first before we got it going."

Caps pummel Pens to spoil coach's debut

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — The first shift of Mike Sullivan's tenure as Penguins coach went brilliantly. Pittsburgh put the puck deep in the Washington Capitals' end and spent a solid minute darting around the zone as if playing an elaborate game of keep away.

Then the adrenaline faded and the reality set in.

The volatile Penguins remain a muddled work in progress. The Capitals are not.

T.J. Oshie scored twice and added an assist as Washington spoiled Sullivan's debut with a 4-1 win on Monday night. The victory propelled the Capitals into the top spot in the Eastern Conference standings and 11 points clear of their struggling rivals.

"We were stressing it quite a bit before the game, that they were going to come out with some intensity, they're going to try to impress their new coach," Oshie said. "I thought we did a good job of matching their intensity and having a good start."

Nicklas Backstrom added a goal and two assists for Washington. John Carlson scored his fifth of the season and Braden Holtby stopped 44 of Pittsburgh's season-high 45 shots.

"It was a lot of shots, but I think we did a pretty good job battling in front and keeping those second opportunities to the minimum," Holtby said.

Evgeni Malkin scored his team-leading 14th goal and Marc-Andre Fleury made 30 saves, but the Penguins failed to keep pace with Washington in the team's first game since firing Mike Johnston on Saturday.

Enter Sullivan, who stressed he doesn't think the Penguins need to be rebuilt so much as refocused. While he saw some things he liked against one of the NHL's best teams, Sullivan knows there is plenty to work on after spending three periods watching the Capitals effectively counterpunch every time it seemed as though Pittsburgh was generating momentum.

"We can't get discouraged, just more determined," Sullivan said.

It will take a kind of grit that has only come in spurts for a lineup that boasts a pair of scoring champions in Malkin and Sidney Crosby but has somehow struggled to score. Crosby fueled Pittsburgh's electric first shift but remains stuck on six goals.

"I thought our effort was there," Crosby said. "We generated some good chances. I think execution-wise he wants us to make a few more plays coming out of our end and to be a little bit more poised in that area."

There are no such issues in Washington, which is off to the best start in the franchise's 41-year history by finding a way to both take advantage of Alex Ovechkin's dynamic offensive play while also paying attention to detail at the other end of the ice.

Washington needed just more than 7 minutes to build a two-goal lead. Backstrom took a backhand feed from Oshie and cruised down the slot before beating Fleury over his glove. Carlson doubled Washington's advantage 7:04 into the first by flipping his own rebound past Fleury as Pittsburgh's defense scrambled to protect the front of the net.

Oilers 3, Bruins 2 (OT): Andrej Sekera scored 41 seconds into overtime to lift

visiting Edmonton over Boston for its sixth straight victory.

Cam Talbot made 47 saves, and Jordan Eberle and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins scored first-period goals for Edmonton.

The Bruins tied it on Brad Marchand's goal with 4:38 to play in regulation.

Lightning 2, Blue Jackets 1: Brian Boyle scored a short-handed goal in the third period and Ben Bishop made several big stops down the stretch, finishing with 25 saves as Tampa Bay beat host Columbus.

Jonathan Marchessault also scored for the Lightning, but star forward Steven Stamkos was held off the scoreboard for the ninth straight game.

Columbus' Joonas Korpinen, a 21-year-old rookie, was impressive in stopping 27 shots during his first NHL start.

Senators 5, Kings 3: Mike Hoffman had two goals and an assist to lead host Ottawa over Los Angeles.

Kyle Turris, Erik Karlsson and Mika Zibanejad also scored for the Senators. Craig Anderson made 33 saves in his 15th straight start.

Jonathan Quick stopped 16 shots for Los Angeles.

Sabres 2, Red Wings 1: Ryan O'Reilly and Johan Larsson scored 61 seconds apart late in the third period, rallying Buffalo past host Detroit.

O'Reilly tied it 1-all at 15:46 when he deflected shot beat goalie Petr Mrazek between the legs. Larsson scored the go-ahead goal with 3:13 remaining.

Buffalo snapped an eight-game winless streak in Detroit with its first victory there since Oct. 13, 2006. Chad Johnson made 32 saves for the Sabres.