

STARS AND STRIPES®

Saturday, December 19, 2015

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

SHOWING OFF THEIR PROWESS

Analysts: Powers using Syrian conflict as opportunity to demonstrate capabilities

BY SLOBODAN LEKIC

Stars and Stripes

BEIRUT, Lebanon — Based on a 1950s civilian turboprop airliner, the slow-moving Ilyushin Il-18 Coot seems an unlikely addition to Russia's growing arsenal of modern weapons systems deployed to Syria to fight rebel forces there.

But analysts say the presence of the Coots — a naval electronic intelligence version of the old airliner bristling with phased-array side-looking radar, long-range cameras, infrared sensors and sophisticated eavesdropping equipment — is evidence of Russia's long-term plans and the way nations participating in the Syrian campaign view one another as potential foes.

Western leaders, including President Barack Obama, have warned that Russia — whose forces started bombing Syrian rebels at the end of September — were risking getting bogged down in the five-year Syrian conflict.

Local analysts see it differently.

"Of course (Russian President Vladimir) Putin doesn't have an exit strategy," said Labib Kamhawi, a Jordanian analyst. "The Russians are in Syria to stay."

Moscow's forces launched their first attacks in Syria to prop up President Bashar Assad against rebels — not only the Islamic State but against insurgent groups supported by the United States and its allies. The U.S. believes there can be no lasting peace in Syria or final victory over the Islamic State as long as Assad remains in power.

"Using the Russian air force to support Syrian President Bashar Assad's ailing war effort went against all that (the

U.S.-led) coalition has been trying to achieve in the past year," said Alan Warnes, editor of Air Forces Monthly magazine.

Testing weapons

Not only is the Russian campaign designed to keep Assad in power but it is offering Moscow the opportunity to test weapons and doctrine as Putin rebuilds his military, which was decimated after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

"Through its operations in Syria, Russia is testing its capabilities to conduct air campaigns. It is a first for post-Soviet Russia and will shape Russia's future air campaigns," said a recent report by STRATFOR, a global intelligence firm based in Austin, Texas.

Russia has already demonstrated it can strike targets throughout Syrian and Iraqi territory if necessary, it said.

On Thursday, Bloomberg News reported that the U.S. Air Force had temporarily halted manned flights inside an area known as "Box 4" in northern Syria because of the threat posed by newly deployed Russian SA-17 surface-to-air missiles.

The area along the Turkish border, also known as the Azaz Corridor, is a major infiltration route for jihadi and other anti-government forces. It is now being squeezed by government troops — supported by Russian airstrikes — and militias pushing east from Aleppo and by fighters of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party pushing westward.

Analysts have pointed out that the array of warplanes, missiles and support aircraft deployed to the region are not the types of weapons needed for fighting the Islamic State group

or other rebel groups — mostly a light infantry force equipped with basic weapons. Instead, the Russians are using weapons intended for countering modern conventional powers.

These include the Sukhoi Su-30SM Flanker multirole fighters and Su-34 Fullback all-weather fighter bombers. All are designed to operate in conditions against sophisticated air defenses — which the Islamic State group doesn't possess.

The coalition's arsenal

The Russians aren't the only parties using equipment designed for opponents far better armed and sophisticated than the Islamic State, the Nusra Front and other rebel groups in Syria.

The U.S. arsenal also includes top-of-the-line equipment, including the stealth Lockheed F-22 Raptor air superiority fighters, intended to provide air dominance in conflicts with the world's most advanced militaries.

Also, coalition partners such as France and Britain have used their latest Eurofighter Typhoon and Dassault Rafale interceptors in the air campaign against Islamic State forces.

Analysts say it is overkill to use sophisticated weapons against a low-tech opponent like the Islamic State group. The old, low-flying A-10 Thunderbolt II ground-support jets employed by the U.S. Air Force from its base in Incirlik, Turkey, are far more effective against such light infantry forces, they say.

"It's worth keeping an eye out for such deployments because they're an indication of where the parties see danger coming from" said Ed Blanche, a Beirut-based analyst and mem-

ber of London's International Institute of Strategic Studies.

He noted that after the Turks shot down a Russian Su-24 Fencer fighter bomber, Moscow immediately deployed its ultrasophisticated, long-range S-400 air defense missiles to the Bassel al-Assad air base near the Syrian port city of Latakia, from which the Russian squadrons have been operating.

They also equipped their attack jets and fighter escorts with the off-boresight Vympel R-27 dogfighting missiles, "in a clear indication that their potential opponents are Western fighters rather than Islamic State forces," Blanche said.

Early in the five-year conflict in Syria, NATO deployed several Patriot anti-aircraft and anti-missile batteries in southern Turkey, but these have never been used.

Hisham Jaber, a retired Lebanese general and military analyst, said all parties were using Syria as a testing ground for high-tech weapons systems.

He said Britain and France appeared to be using the bombing campaign in Syria to show off the capabilities of their warplanes to potential buyers in the lucrative Middle East arms bazaar.

Although U.S. plane-makers still dominate regional markets, in the past year Dassault has won deals to supply its twin-jet fighter bomber to Egypt, India and Qatar, while the Eurofighter consortium has sold its multirole aircraft to Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Oman.

The conflict has afforded unprecedented opportunities for the powers involved to monitor and learn from one another's operations and tactics, Blanche said.

lekic.slobodan@stripes.com

US strike said to kill Iraqi troops

Associated Press

ABOARD THE USS KEARSARGE — The American airstrike that may have killed a number of Iraqi soldiers on Friday seems to be “a mistake that involved both sides,” Defense Secretary Ash Carter said Saturday. Iraq pledged to punish those responsible.

Speaking to reporters during a visit to the USS Kearsarge in the Persian Gulf, Carter said the incident near the western Iraqi city of Fallujah was “regrettable.” He called Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi to express condolences.

“These kinds of things hap-

pen when you’re fighting side by side as we are,” Carter said. He said the airstrike Friday “has all the indications of being a mistake of the kind that can happen on a dynamic battlefield.”

Iraq’s defense minister, Khalid al-Obeidi, told reporters in Baghdad that the strike killed one officer and nine soldiers. He said Iraq had begun an investigation and that the “wrongdoer would be punished according to Iraqi law.” He did not elaborate.

A U.S. military statement Friday did not say how many Iraqi soldiers may have been killed.

Carter called Abadi from the USS Kearsarge, which is sup-

porting coalition missions in Iraq and Syria against Islamic State militants. The Kearsarge carries a Marine expeditionary unit and naval aircraft.

Carter did not provide details about the airstrike, which the U.S. military headquarters in charge of the war effort in Syria and Iraq said was one of several it conducted Friday against militant targets. The U.S. statement said the airstrikes came in response to requests and information provided by Iraqi security forces on the ground.

A defense official said there was fog in that area and that weather may have played a role.

Navy urged to take action vs. admiral

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — A U.S. senator said Friday that he would block the nomination of the Navy’s second-ranking civilian leader until the service reconsiders its decision not to punish a prominent admiral accused of retaliating against several whistleblowers.

The move by Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., escalates the pressure on Navy leaders to take action against Rear Adm. Brian L. Losey, the commander in charge of the elite SEAL teams and other elite units.

The Washington Post reported in October that the Navy was poised to promote Losey even though Pentagon investigators had determined that he illegally retaliated against staff members whom he mistakenly suspected were whistleblowers.

Losey is a prominent figure in the military’s secretive special operations forces who once commanded SEAL Team 6, the clandestine unit known for killing terrorist targets such as Osama bin Laden. He now leads the Naval Special Warfare Command and previously has served as a top military aide to the White House.

In a statement submitted to the Congressional Record, Wyden said he had placed a hold on the nomination of Janine Davidson, a former Pentagon official and Air Force pilot, from becoming the next Navy undersecretary.

Wyden said he didn’t have any concerns with Davidson, herself, but “with a larger matter concerning the Navy and its policies and practices with regard to retaliation against whistleblowers.” The lawmaker said he wanted “assurances” from the Navy that it will revisit the Losey case.

The Navy did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Wyden is among several lawmakers who have expressed concern over the Navy’s decision not to discipline Losey.

GAO: Delay funding for LCS

BY WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

A government watchdog agency has recommended that Congress delay funding the littoral combat ship project until the Navy completes testing on how well the ships endure attacks.

With six ships already delivered and 20 more under construction, the “actual lethality and survivability performance of LCS is still largely unproven through realistic testing,” concluded the Government Ac-

countability Office in a report released Friday. A classified version was completed in July.

The Navy’s Littoral Combat Ship/Frigate program aims to procure 52 LCSs and frigates. Two dozen LCSs have been funded since 2005, according to a report issued last week by the Congressional Research Service. The Navy’s fiscal 2016 budget requests procurement of three more LCSs at a cost of just over \$1.4 billion, the CRS report said.

Bloomberg News on Thursday reported that Defense Secretary Ash Carter advised

Navy Secretary Ray Mabus in a memo that the Navy should reduce the number of littoral combat ships and frigates being purchased from 52 to 40 — and invest instead in aircraft.

Friday’s GAO report said that since the LCS program was initially authorized and funded, costs have increased and “the Navy has further reduced the ship’s lethality and survivability requirements.”

Survivability is the ability of a ship to avoid, withstand and recover from damage.

olson.wyatt@stripes.com

DOD chief visits French, US warships

Associated Press

ABOARD THE CHARLES DE GAULLE — U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter met Saturday with naval commanders on U.S. and French warships in the Persian Gulf, saying that there will be more to come in the battle against Islamic State militants in Iraq and Syria.

Carter visited the French aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle, which is expected to begin

launching airstrikes against the Islamic State group soon.

He also talked to American troops on the USS Kearsarge, an amphibious assault ship that’s been supporting coalition missions in Iraq and Syria.

Carter’s visit to the Charles de Gaulle underscores France’s increased participation in the fight, in the wake of the Paris attacks last month. Islamic State militants claimed responsibility for the Nov. 13 at-

tacks that killed 130 people and wounded hundreds.

France’s only aircraft carrier was conducting 10 to 15 missions daily for about 10 days from the Mediterranean Sea before moving into the Persian Gulf on Friday. Cmdr. Lionel Delort, a French Navy spokesman on the carrier, said the ship will begin launching airstrikes into Iraq and Syria “in the coming hours or days.”

Wilson, Baldwin lighting up league

Associated Press

RENTON, Wash. — It might be time to add to the list of touchdown connections you've come to know. There's Manning-to-Beckham, Roethlisberger-to-Brown, Brady-to-Gronk.

Now how about Wilson-to-Baldwin?

Yes, as in the Seattle Seahawks quarterback and wide receiver.

Over the past three weeks there has not been a more productive and efficient duo in the NFL than Russell Wilson and Doug Baldwin. They've connected for touchdowns at a pace not seen since Steve Young was throwing TD passes to Jerry Rice more than 20 years ago and they've brought a new dimension to Seattle's offense.

"For those two guys in particular, they're really on it. The plays we're calling are not that much different than we've ever called them, but they're seeing it well, they're taking advantage of all the little nuances that need to be done to take advantage of what's happening on defense," coach Pete Carroll said. "Just a natural growth has happened there."

Wilson is on a run that statistically stands up among the best four-game stretches in NFL history. 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 passes and thrown 16 touchdown passes with no interceptions as the Seahawks have won their past four games.

For the last three games, Baldwin has been the favored target. Baldwin has 17 catches for 321 yards and eight touchdowns, becoming the first wide receiver since Rice in 1993 with eight TDs in three games.

For the season, Baldwin is on pace to be the first Seattle wide receiver with 1,000 yards since Bobby Engram in 2007. He has 11 touchdowns and 61 receptions already and done it in just 80 targets. Baldwin is one of five wide receivers in the NFL with double-digit touchdowns, but the only one that has fewer than 128 targets.

"If you look at it, this year again we're the most efficient receiving corps. Really, nothing has changed," Baldwin said. "We just get more opportunities. Obviously, if you get more opportunities you have more opportunities to do something with those chances. For us, we're getting more targets."

Seattle has looked for other primary receivers, whether it was the failed experiment with Percy Harvin or the addition of tight end Jimmy Graham this season. But whether consciously or not, Wilson seems to always come back to Baldwin.

Since Wilson's first start in September 2012 at Arizona, the duo have connected 206 times in the regular season.

That connection has been better than ever of late.

"I look at the tape and Russell's doing everything right," Baldwin said. "It's fun to watch, it's like a video game."

Baldwin will never be regarded as the fastest straight ahead wide receiver and that's not his strength. But Baldwin often has been described as quick by teammates and opponents. Quick in and out of his cut, quick in reading the defense and finding where he needs to go and quick in learning tendencies.

"You might not necessarily be as concerned about the fast receivers as you are the quicker ones," Seattle cornerback Richard Sherman said. "Because the quicker ones can get off of the press, and if the ball's delivered on time there's some separation there."

Quick is how Baldwin would describe what he adds to Seattle's offense. When the Seahawks changed some of their passing philosophy at the bye week, the long drop backs by Wilson we're mostly taken out and replaced by shorter routes and combinations where decisions needed to be made, well, quickly.

"That's my forte. That's what I'm supposed to be doing," Baldwin said. "That's part of my job, being quick."

McCaskey: 'Concussion' movie is a 'good thing'

Associated Press

LAKE FOREST, Ill. — Chicago Bears chairman George McCaskey sees good coming from the movie "Concussion," even if the NFL is portrayed in a controversial light.

The movie stars Will Smith in the role of forensic pathologist Bennet Omalu and focuses on chronic traumatic encephalopathy, a progressive degenerative disease found in the brains of athletes with a history of repetitive head injuries.

"The important part I think, is that any attention on player health and safety is a good thing," McCaskey said Friday as the Bears prepared for Sunday's game against Minnesota. "The NFL's made changes in recent years, rules changes, research is being funded, we need to improve the science, we need to improve the equipment and we need to improve the rules, need to improve the rules enforcement. And we think that the changes that we're making in the NFL will filter down to all levels."

McCaskey said the NFL has made 39 safety-related rule changes in the last 10 years, not all aimed at concussions.

"I think it would be a mistake to rely on any one aspect to improve safety," he said. "I think equipment is part of it. I think rules, and rules enforcement is part of it. I think coaching is a big part of it, especially at the youth level."

McCaskey's son, Conor, suffered a concussion playing high school football and needed several months to recover. McCaskey maintained youth coaches in any sport must be more involved in safety.

"I remember telling someone that when my son was playing soccer, the head coach picked me out of a group of parents and said, 'You're my assistant coach,'" McCaskey said. "And I said, 'I don't know anything about soccer.' He said, 'that doesn't matter, I need someone to help me keep an eye on all these kids.'"

One of the players portrayed in the movie is former Bears safety Dave Duerson, who committed suicide. Duerson was found to suffer from CTE. The Duerson family has expressed disappointment at his portrayal in the movie on several fronts.

"Well, I'll leave that to the Duersons and the producers of the film," McCaskey said. "We need to do what we can for our former players across the board. We owe it to them."

A federal judge has approved a \$1 billion plan to settle thousands of concussion lawsuits filed by former players and their families, including Duerson's. The deal has been appealed, with critics saying it protects some retirees more than others.

McCaskey said he's uncertain how many of his team's players will see the film, although he says he heard some discussing it they would see it in the team lunch room.

Bears coach John Fox said players are all aware of the situation regarding CTE.

"Our players have been educated tremendously," he said. "I don't know that a movie is going to help them that much, other than the story line. I think our guys are very well educated already."

Mount Union wins unprecedented 12th Division III national crown

Associated Press

SALEM, Va. — Mount Union is back on top of Division III football, and coach Vince Kehres finally has one of his own.

Taurice Scott threw three touchdown passes and ran for another score and Mount Union won its NCAA-best 12th football title, beating St. Thomas of Minnesota 49-35 on Friday night in the Division III championship game.

It was the Purple Raiders' 11th consecutive appearance in the game, but the first time in the last three years with Kehres as the coach that they came out on top.

"It means a lot," Kehres said after adding to the family lore that saw his father, Larry, guide the Purple Raiders to the first 11 titles. "I had the great mentor and a lot of mentors to get to this point. ... I think it feels great for a lot of us."

Logan Nemeth ran for 220 yards and two touchdowns for Mount Union (15-0), which took over by scoring 21 unanswered points in the third quarter, turning a 21-14 deficit into a 35-21 lead in a span of just over five minutes. And they did it while working against a wind that had limited them to 30 yards in the first quarter.

"The offensive staff wanted to be able to run the football in the third quarter going into that wind," said Kehres, who was part of 10 titles as a player and assistant coach under his father.

They did it with a fast-paced approach,

something they haven't used much in the playoffs.

"The offensive line did a great job and I think all that speed flying around had to mess with them a little bit," Nemeth said.

Jordan Roberts ran for 135 yards and two touchdowns for St. Thomas (14-1), which was appearing in the game for only the second time. The Tommies also played for the title in 2012, losing 28-10 to Mount Union.

"I've said it now for many years," coach Glenn Caruso said. "They are the standard in Division III."

The Purple Raiders took command with three four-play touchdown drives sandwiched around a turnover and a three-and-out by the Tommies. St. Thomas rallied with a fluky touchdown, but the Tommies had no answer for the big-play capabilities of the Purple Raiders.

"Three of the four times that we scored, they came right back and scored," Caruso said. "That's the sign of a championship team."

In the 21-0 third-quarter burst, Scott hit Roman Namdar for 63 yards to highlight the first drive, a fumble recovery set up the second, and Nemeth had a 42-yard run on the third drive before Scott's 18-yard scoring run.

St. Thomas got within 35-28 when Nick Waldvogel fumbled on run up the middle, and the ball bounced sideways and into the hands of quarterback John Gould, who outran the defense 55 yards.

Mount Union let Nemeth do most of the heavy lifting in the final quarter as it chewed time off the clock.

Unable to generate any offense moving into the stiff wind in the first quarter, Mount Union scored on its first two possessions of the second quarter with the wind at its back. Nemeth set up the first score with a 40-yard run, and Scott hit Lane Clark from 7 yards out for the touchdown. It was the 42nd touchdown pass of the season for Scott. He later hit Clark for another, from 13 yards, to make it 21-all.

After a three-and-out for the Tommies, Nemeth had runs of 15 and 3 yards, and Scott hit Namdar for 29 yards and the touchdown, his 20th scoring catch of the season.

The Tommies got help from a pass-interference call in converting a fourth-and-6 play from the Mount Union 30. After a holding call, Gould hit Charlie Dowdle for 25 yards. Dowdle initially bobbled the ball as he passed through the end zone, but a review ruled he gained possession in time for a touchdown and a 7-0 lead.

It was the largest deficit the Purple Raiders have faced this season, and the Tommies doubled it in the second quarter, again with help. It came in the form of a fake punt by Mount Union that failed, giving St. Thomas the ball at the Purple Raiders 34. Eight runs later, Jordan Roberts ran it in on fourth-and-goal from the 1.

It was Roberts' 33rd rushing touchdown, tops among NCAA players at all levels this season.



Ship's Store official new car program

Exclusive Navy at-sea offers:

www.navyauto.com or nasinfo@navyauto.com

Spurs still unbeaten at home

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — The San Antonio Spurs were upset with non-calls, became anxious as they struggled to overcome a rare deficit and grew tense as they fought to maintain a late lead against the Los Angeles Clippers.

And the Spurs enjoyed it all.

LaMarcus Aldridge had 26 points and 13 rebounds, Tony Parker scored 10 of his 21 points in the fourth quarter, and San Antonio held on for a 115-107 victory on Friday night to remain undefeated at home.

After winning their previous four games by an average of 26 points, the Spurs embraced the challenge of capturing and maintaining a lead in the final minutes.

"Clips are a hell of a team," San Antonio coach Gregg Popovich said. "Very experienced, obviously well-coached, they're disciplined (and) they're used to winning. So, when you can win a game like that, it gives you a good measuring stick."

Kawhi Leonard had 19 points and Tim Duncan added 14 for the Spurs, who are 15-0 at home this season.

Chris Paul had 27 points and 10 assists for the Clippers, who entered the game having won nine of 11. Blake Griffin added 25 points and DeAndre Jordan had 16 points and 17 rebounds.

The Spurs leads the league in several defensive categories, but offense dominated the first matchup between the teams since the Clippers eliminated the then-defending champions in the first round of last season's playoffs.

"It's just two very offensively powered teams," Paul said. "We are usually right up there at the top in the league in offense and they are usually right up there, too. Tonight both teams just made shots and it came down to whoever made the most stops."

San Antonio opened the final quarter on an 11-0 run, beginning with Patty Mills' layup on the fifth pass of the possession after the Spurs passed up three three-pointers. Parker's three-pointer closed the run and gave San Antonio a 96-88 lead with 9:17 remaining.

"I thought we still played all right (during the Spurs' run)," Clippers coach Doc Rivers said. "I just didn't think we executed well offensively and I thought it bled over to our defense. I thought we were frustrated from the offensive end in that stretch and then they scored every time."

The Spurs then resumed intentionally fouling Jordan, and it disrupted their offense as much as it limited the Clippers.

San Antonio didn't score until Parker hit another three-pointer with 6:08 remaining, but the Spurs were able to maintain a 99-93 advantage. Parker also drained a 15-footer with 1:19 remaining and ran down a long rebound off Manu Ginobili's miss with 53 seconds.

Warriors 121, Bucks 112: Stephen Curry scored 26 points and Draymond Green fueled a key fourth-quarter run that helped host Golden State avenge its only loss of the season by beating Milwaukee.

Six nights after handing the Warriors their first loss of the season and ending a 28-game, regular-season winning streak dating to last season, the Bucks nearly dealt Golden State its first home loss since Jan. 27 against Chicago.

Pistons 147, Bulls 144 (4OT): Andre Drummond had 33 points and 21 rebounds to help visiting Detroit outlast Chicago in four overtimes.

The Pistons scored the first seven points of the fourth OT and hung on.

Raptors 108, Heat 94: DeMar DeRozan scored 30 points and Kyle Lowry added 21 as visiting Toronto erased an 11-point, third-quarter deficit to beat Miami. Luis Scola scored 20 for the Raptors, who outscored Miami 58-39 after half-time. Bismack Biyombo had 15 rebounds.

Knicks 107, 76ers 97: Arron Afflalo had 22 points and seven rebounds and Derrick Williams scored 17 off the bench as visiting New York won its third in a row.

Jahlil Okafor scored 20 points for the Sixers in their ninth straight loss. They fell to 1-27.

Hawks 109, Celtics 101: Paul Millsap

scored 15 of his 20 points in the fourth quarter and Al Horford finished with 21 points and 10 rebounds as Atlanta rallied past host Boston.

Dennis Schroder scored 22 for the Hawks, including five during an 11-2 run midway through the fourth quarter that put them ahead for good.

Magic 102, Trail Blazers 94: Tobias Harris and Nik Vucevic each scored 25 points to propel Orlando past visiting Portland.

Alex Len added 19 points and 13 rebounds, including his first three-pointer of the season with 15 seconds to play.

Jazz 97, Nuggets 88: Gordon Hayward scored 26 points and Utah beat visiting Denver to snap a season-high four-game losing streak.

Trey Burke added 13 off the bench for the Jazz and Trevor Booker finished with 12.

Pacers 104, Nets 97: Paul George scored 23 points and reserve Jordan Hill added 14 points and 11 rebounds for host Indiana.

Rodney Stuckey had 15 points and seven rebounds off the bench in the Pacers' third consecutive win.

Mavericks 97, Grizzlies 88: Dirk Nowitzki scored 20 points, leading Dallas over visiting Memphis.

Chandler Parsons had 16 points and Zaza Pachulia got 10 points and 18 rebounds for the Mavericks.

Suns 104, Pelicans 88: Eric Bledsoe scored 29 points as host Phoenix led nearly the entire way in a victory over New Orleans.

Markieff Morris, playing for the first time in six games, scored 13 for Phoenix, which had lost both previous meetings with New Orleans this season.

Timberwolves 99, Kings 95: Andrew Wiggins had 32 points, 10 rebounds and six assists to lift host Minnesota.

Karl-Anthony Towns fought off foul trouble for 15 points and eight rebounds, and Shabazz Muhammad added 16 points and seven boards for the Timberwolves. Minnesota had lost eight of its previous nine games.

Felix set to race in 200, 400

Associated Press

American sprinter Allyson Felix's training is all geared toward the finish line in the 200 and 400 meters at the Rio Olympics. Schedule allowing, she hopes to be in the starting blocks for both races.

Problem is, those events are scheduled to happen 75 minutes apart.

To facilitate Felix's pursuit, USA Track and Field recently petitioned the governing body of the sport to amend the Olympic track program, which currently has the 200 preliminaries taking place just over an hour before the 400 final in Rio on Aug. 15.

That would leave little opportunity for the six-time Olympic medalist to recover.

She won't be deterred, though, should the rescheduling not happen. She still plans on attempting to make the U.S. squad in both events at the Olympic Trials in July and go from there.

"I think she can make the team in both. I think she's capable of medaling in both. I think she has a great opportunity to win gold medals in both," her longtime coach, Bobby Kersee said in a phone interview. "She's very dedicated to it. She's committed to the challenge."

A change to the schedule is not without precedent, even at this late date. Michael Johnson campaigned for a rearrangement of the 200 and 400 events leading up to the 1996 Summer Games in Atlanta. The program was altered, and he became the first male to win both at the Olympics.

International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach said four months ago that the Olympic track program remains flexible.

USATF CEO Max Siegel went to bat for the 30-year-old Felix by contacting the International Association of Athletics Federations to set the wheels in motion for a switch.

"Such an achievement would elevate the sport at the Games, and as a federation we owe it to her and to the sport as a whole to make the request," Siegel said in a statement.

They're currently in a holding pattern. An email was sent to the IAAF to determine the next step.

Sebastian Coe, the head of IAAF, said over the summer that the organization would be willing investigate such a schedule change.

This 200-400 undertaking by Felix has been in the works for the last five years. Felix tackled the sprint-distance double at the 2011 world championships in South Korea, winning silver in the 400. A few days later, she lacked her customary kick and was clearly exhausted in the 200, her signature event. She wound up with bronze.

Felix didn't attempt that endeavor at the 2012 London Games. Instead, she ran the 100 and the 200, winning gold in the latter. She also won gold in both relays.

She's much stronger now, Kersee said, pointing to her performance at worlds last summer in Beijing. Focusing on the 400, Felix won the event and then helped the relay teams to silver medals. Her leg of the 4x400 relay was particularly strong.

"Last season, she was (in her best shape ever)," Kersee said. "Barring injury, we can build off of that. We know we have a task ahead of us. We're committed to it."

"If we have an athlete that's capable of maybe wanting to try that, why not give them the opportunity? That's my Perry Mason argument."

Caps rally from 3 down, beat Lightning

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — After falling behind by three goals, the Washington Capitals needed some help. They found it with their power play.

Alex Ovechkin and T.J. Oshie both finished with two goals and two assists, and Marcus Johansson got the tiebreaking goal with 5:44 left as the Capitals used three power-play goals to rally past the Tampa Bay Lightning 5-3 on Friday night.

Washington has now won four straight games overall and seven straight at home. The Capitals fell behind 3-0 midway through the second period but scored the game's final five goals — including four in the third period — and the three extra-man goals proved crucial.

Washington finished 3-for-4 on the power play, finding numerous scoring chances.

Two of the third-period goals came in those situations as the Lightning could not stop the Capitals in the offensive zone or clear the puck.

Washington improved to 20-2-2 in its last 24 home games against the Lightning.

"Their power play obviously picked us apart pretty good tonight," Tampa Bay's Steven Stamkos said. "We give them some

life on the power play ... and it's just the same story in this building — the power play finds a way to beat us."

The Capitals also stepped up their intensity in the third period. Washington played more physical in the final 20 minutes and took command after trailing 3-1 heading into the final period.

"We talked about playing a little bit more heavy," Oshie said. "For the most part, I think as a group we're a little bit bigger than they are, and we felt they were winning a lot of puck battles on us. We talked about turning that around."

Johansson's goal was on the power play, and Ovechkin scored the team's other two with the man advantage. Oshie added an empty-netter.

Bruins 6, Penguins 2: Frank Vatrano scored three goals for his first career hat trick and Patrice Bergeron scored twice as visiting Boston beat Pittsburgh to sweep the teams' home-and-away series.

Loui Eriksson also scored for Boston, which is 4-0-1 in its past five games, 10-1-3 in its past 14 games. Ryan Spooner added three assists and Brad Marchand added two.

Senators 4, Sharks 2: Bobby Ryan had a goal and an assist, and Craig Anderson made 31 saves as Ottawa got its fourth

straight home win.

Ottawa has won just two of its past five games. Jean-Gabriel Pageau, Chris Wideman and Erik Karlsson also scored.

Canucks 4, Red Wings 3 (SO): Linden Vey, making his season debut, scored in the seventh round of the shootout to give visiting Vancouver a win over Detroit.

Jared McCann, Sven Baertschi and Radim Vrbata scored in regulation for the Canucks, who were without injured captain Henrik Sedin. Ryan Miller had 25 saves through overtime.

Jets 5, Rangers 2: Bryan Little scored two first-period goals, Blake Wheeler had four assists and host Winnipeg beat New York.

Little scored his 11th and 12th goals of the season in a 2:31 span for a 2-0 lead.

Panthers 2, Hurricanes 0: Roberto Luongo made 24 saves and Willie Mitchell scored 4:09 into the third period as visiting Florida beat Carolina for its third straight win.

Mitchell got his first goal of the season on a slap shot to put Florida up 1-0. He beat goalie Cam Ward to the glove side, and Jonathan Huberdeau and Aleksander Barkov picked up assists. It was just the 34th goal for Mitchell in 894 NHL games.