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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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6 US troops killed in Afghan blast

BY HEATH DRUZIN

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Six U.S. troops were killed Monday when a suicide bomber on a motorcycle plowed into a foot patrol near a major U.S. air base in Afghanistan, local officials and media reported.

The NATO-led coalition would not confirm the identities of those killed, but Abdul Shukor Qudoosi, governor of the district where the base is located, said all six were Americans. The Washington Post and the Reuters news agency each quoted a U.S. official as confirming they were U.S. servicemembers.

Two U.S. servicemembers and one Afghan were wounded, The Associated Press and NBC News reported.

The attack happened about

1 p.m., when the attacker targeted a joint patrol of coalition troops and Afghan National Police officers in Parwan province near Bagram Air Field, Qudoosi said.

Resolute Support, as the international military coalition in Afghanistan is known, confirmed that six of its troops had been killed in a “vehicle-borne improvised explosive device attack” near the base.

“On behalf of Gen. [John] Campbell and all of Resolute Support, our heartfelt sympathies go out to the family and friends of those affected by this tragic incident, especially during the holiday season,” Resolute Support spokesman Brig. Gen. Wilson Shoffner said in a statement.

The Taliban, who often exaggerate the effect of their attacks, quickly released a statement

claiming responsibility for the attack, confirming the details of what happened. It claimed that 19 troops were killed.

Bagram Air Field, located just north of the Afghan capital, Kabul, is the main hub for the roughly 10,000 American troops who remain in Afghanistan.

The attack comes as worries increase about the Taliban taking control of Helmand province, an opium-rich insurgent stronghold in southern Afghanistan. It has been the deadliest province for foreign troops during the 14-year war. A Pentagon report released last week found that security is deteriorating in Afghanistan, with the Taliban still a potent threat and Islamic State militants gaining strength.

Coalition deaths have

dropped significantly as foreign forces in the country have withdrawn troops and focused more on training the Afghan security forces, who have taken over most of the day-to-day fighting. While foreign troops are involved in far fewer combat missions, they still conduct force-protection patrols around NATO military bases.

Counting Monday’s attack, 26 foreign troops have been killed in Afghanistan this year, according to iCasualties.org. More than 3,500 international troops, including nearly 2,400 Americans, have been killed in connection with the 14-year military mission in Afghanistan.

Zubair Babakarkhail contributed to this article.
druzin.heath@stripes.com
Twitter: @Druzin_Stripes

Key Afghan district collapsing to Taliban

BY HEATH DRUZIN
AND ZUBAIR BABAKARKHAIL

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — A key district in one of Afghanistan’s bloodiest battlegrounds, Helmand province, is on the verge of collapse to the Taliban, officials said Monday.

Most of Sangin district, where scores of British and American troops died during the 14-year NATO-led military mission in Afghanistan, is under Taliban control, according to local officials and journalists. Government control has been reduced to just several buildings in the district center, and the provincial capital is also under increasing pressure.

Most of the local government

and security forces in Sangin have retreated to an Afghan National Army base in the district center, where they are surrounded, running out of ammunition, food and fuel, and unable to evacuate wounded and dead troops, Sangin district Gov. Suleiman Shah said when reached by satellite phone. The sound of gunfire could be heard in the background.

Shah said the insurgents were hiding in shops when helicopters came overhead, making airstrikes impossible, and that none of the helicopters had dropped desperately needed supplies to their compound.

“Now there is a very urgent need for support. We don’t have enough ammunition; we are running out, and it will be

chaos if support doesn’t arrive soon,” he said. “Everyone will get killed.”

That seemed to contradict Afghan Ministry of Defense spokesman Gen. Mohammad Radmanish, who said his forces had air-dropped supplies to Afghan security forces in the battle. “We have also carried out air attacks, and we are planning to get all the district secured very soon” he said.

Shah said he could hear the screams of a badly injured Afghan soldier desperate to be evacuated, and he hoped help would come before the insurgents, who he said have night-vision equipment, began their nighttime assault.

There were conflicting casualty reports, but local officials said dozens were killed and

many more were wounded in the past few days of fighting in Sangin. Shah said the compound he was in was littered with bodies.

A local Taliban commander said the district governor’s office and adjoining district police compound were surrounded by Taliban fighters.

On Saturday, Helmand provincial Deputy Gov. Mohammad Jan Rassouliyar took to Facebook in a personal plea to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani to send help to the province.

“I’m out of options, which is why I chose social media for this,” he wrote. “Helmand is standing on a precipice, and it needs your urgent visit.”

druzin.heath@stripes.com
Twitter: @Druzin_Stripes

Port visits resume for nuclear-armed subs

Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. — Nuclear-armed U.S. submarines that went more than a decade without calling on foreign ports are once again visiting other countries, a shift intended to underscore their global presence and to lift sailor morale.

A stop in September by USS Wyoming in the United Kingdom was the first of what are expected to be occasional visits to foreign ports.

Michael Connor, a retired Navy vice admiral who served until September as commander of the American submarine force, said in an interview with The Associated Press that the change reflects a desire to emphasize that the submarines are all over the world and also to give the crews an experience that is open to sailors on virtually all other Navy ships.

“The fact that a port visit is a possibility, even if it can’t be

delivered on every patrol, that is a big deal to the sailors. I know it was a big deal to me,” Connor said. He said port visits also promote professional development by reinforcing a crew’s ability to navigate and resupply their sub anywhere in times of crisis.

The Navy has 14 submarines with nuclear warheads that roam the oceans as part of the U.S. strategy to deter an enemy strike.

The crews that operate the Ohio-class ballistic-missile submarines, also known as “boomers,” typically deploy for 70 to 80 days at sea with limited opportunities to surface for training. The smaller attack submarines deploy for roughly six months with about four port visits.

Connor said retention rates for sailors on ballistic-missile subs are among the highest for Navy organizations, but lengthy internal Navy deliberations concluded the port visits are an important incentive.

Republican Sen. Graham ends bid for White House

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham ended his 2016 campaign for president Monday, saying he remains committed to working to achieve security for the American people and helping the GOP expand its base.

With just over a month to go until voting begins, the South Carolina senator — the only candidate from one of the four early voting states — posted a video telling supporters “we have run a campaign we can be proud of.” He noted his emphasis on national security and improving the nation’s balance sheet, saying he “put forth bold and practical solutions to big problems.”

In a taped interview broadcast later on CNN, the 60-year-old senator warned that the election is “not about 2016”

but instead “an election for the heart and soul of the Republican Party.” He warned that the current GOP front-runner Donald Trump cannot defeat a Democrat like Hillary Clinton “without some major adjustments.”

Having mustered little support in the polls, Graham’s exit will not have an immediate effect on the race in the final stretch before the Feb. 1 Iowa caucuses. But his decision could produce a ripple effect in his home state, which follows New Hampshire with a Feb. 20 primary.

By ending his campaign, Graham deprives the GOP field of perhaps its most aggressive military hawk — he said even before the June 1 launch of his campaign that more American servicemen and women “will die in Iraq and eventually in Syria to protect our homeland.”

Obama: Criticism of strategy legitimate

Associated Press

HONOLULU — President Barack Obama said criticism of his strategy to combat the Islamic State group is legitimate, and failure to keep the public informed has contributed to fears that not enough is being done.

In a year-end interview with NPR News, Obama said the most damage the group can do to the U.S. is to force Americans to change how they live or what they believe in.

“I think that there is a legitimate criticism of what I’ve been doing and our administration has been doing in the sense that we haven’t, you know, on a regular basis, I think, described all the work that we’ve been doing for more than a year now to defeat ISIL,” the president said in the interview, which was released Monday, referring to the Islamic State group by one of its acronyms.

Obama said that if people don’t know about the thousands of airstrikes that have been launched against Islamic State targets since August 2014, or

aren’t aware that towns in Iraq once controlled by the group have been retaken, “then they might feel as if there’s not enough of a response.”

“And so part of our goal here is to make sure that people are informed about all the actions that we’re taking,” he said.

To that end, Obama outlined the strategy against the Islamic State group in a nationally televised address from the Oval Office on Dec. 6, days after a radicalized married couple who had pledged allegiance to an Islamic State leader opened fire on the husband’s co-workers in San Bernardino, Calif., killing 14 and heightening people’s fears about homegrown extremism.

Obama also said that Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump is exploiting economic anxiety among workers, particularly among “blue-collar men” with some of his rhetoric. Trump has argued for temporarily banning Muslims from entering the United States, and has made inflammatory comments about Hispanics and others.

Driver plows into people on Vegas Strip; 1 dies

LAS VEGAS — The packed sidewalks on the Las Vegas Strip became a scene of horror as a woman deliberately plowed her car into groups of partiers and tourists, killing one person and injuring dozens of others, authorities said.

The woman in her 20s, who has not been identified, struck pedestrians as she drove onto the walkway in front of the Paris and Planet Hollywood casino-hotels on Sunday evening, police said.

Lt. Dan McGrath said investigators believe the woman driving a 1996 Oldsmobile in-

tionally “went up and off these streets, two or possibly three times.” A 3-year-old child was in the car with her but was not hurt, police said.

The driver sped away before the vehicle was found at a hotel and she was taken into custody, police said.

Authorities did not give a possible motive for the crash on a busy stretch of Las Vegas Boulevard across from the dancing water fountains of the Bellagio hotel-casino.

The woman was having her blood drawn and is being held in jail with charges pending.

The injured were taken to three different hospitals.

From The Associated Press

Giants' Beckham could be disciplined for antics

Associated Press

New York Giants star receiver Odell Beckham Jr. was not ejected for the way he attacked Carolina Panthers star cornerback Josh Norman — launching himself head-first for a violent helmet-to-helmet smash, for example, or delivering an open-handed smack to the facemask.

And Beckham never got yanked from the game by his coach, Tom Coughlin, who did acknowledge giving that “strong consideration.”

Now it's up to the NFL to decide whether Beckham needs to take a seat.

The league will review all of the WWE-style shenanigans, including what really did look like wrestling moves, that went on between Beckham and Norman during unbeaten Carolina's 38-35 victory over New York on Sunday.

“He did lose his composure,” Coughlin said about Beckham.

Norman's assessment?

“He's got the maturity of a little kid,” Norman said.

Beckham drew three penalties for unsportsmanlike conduct but never was

ushered off the field. That meant he was still in the game with less than 2 minutes left, when he caught the tying TD pass capping the Giants' rally from a 28-point deficit; the Panthers wound up winning on a final-play field goal to improve to 14-0.

“I hope the league offices get a chance to review the film and see what they can do, because players like that don't deserve to be in the game,” Norman said. “I mean, it's ridiculous.”

In case you missed it, here are the other top topics after the NFL season's 15th Sunday:

Wilson To Baldwin: For all the traits considered key to the Seattle Seahawks' consecutive Super Bowl appearances, high-powered passing game was not on the list. Look at them now. In a 30-13 win over Cleveland, Russell Wilson became the first QB with at least three TD passes and zero interceptions in each of five consecutive games, and Doug Baldwin joined Jerry Rice as the only wide receivers in NFL history with 10 TDs over a four-game span in a single season. “The efficiency of the offense,” Seahawks coach Pete

Carroll said after his team clinched a playoff berth, “is the best it's been since we've been here.”

Backups galore: So in this season of injury after injury, and hurt QB after hurt QB, the AFC South title might very well have been determined when Brandon Weeden — playing for T.J. Yates, who was playing for Brian Hoyer — outplayed Charlie Whitehurst — playing for Matt Hasselbeck, who was playing for Andrew Luck — and led Houston past Indianapolis 16-10. “Look, I'm not sure he has the whole offense down pat,” Texans coach Bill O'Brien said about Weeden, “but I think he has enough that he can go in there and function.” Talk about a ringing endorsement. Then again, Houston should be thrilled that, at 7-7, it is in first place, no matter who's taking the snaps. “We've been through, I don't know, maybe 45 quarterbacks in the last two years,” defensive end J.J. Watt said, exaggerating only slightly.

More officiating follies: Cardinals defensive end Calais Campbell is listed at 6-foot-8 and 300 pounds and yet, somehow, none of the officials in Arizona's

40-17 victory at Philadelphia at night noticed that he was standing up and trying to call timeout. The Eagles snapped the ball and got a 22-yard touchdown pass to tie the game midway through the second quarter — not that it mattered, in the end — prompting animated arguing by Cards coach Bruce Arians.

You like that! That's what Redskins fans were chanting — repeating a phrase made famous by Kirk Cousins earlier this season — as their QB helped pile on the points with four TD passes and a 13-yard scoring scamper as Washington beat Buffalo 35-25 to grab control of the NFC East. “You like that everybody's rolling with that,” said Redskins receiver DeSean Jackson, who scored a 77-yard touchdown on a pass from Cousins. After finishing last in six of the past seven years, Washington (7-7) can claim a division title by beating host Philadelphia (6-8) next Saturday night. Other playoff particulars from Sunday: Arizona (12-2) clinched the NFC West; Green Bay (10-4), Seattle (9-5) and Cincinnati (11-3) earned berths in the postseason.

Panthers escape Giants to remain perfect

Associated Press

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — Graham Gano's 43-yard field goal as time expired kept Carolina perfect this season with a wild 38-35 victory over the New York Giants on Sunday.

Cam Newton threw for five touchdowns in building a 28-point lead before New York stormed back to tie it with 1:46 remaining. The rally tied the NFL record set by San Francisco against New Orleans in 1980. The big difference: The 49ers won their game; the Giants lost.

Newton led the Panthers (14-0) to their 18th straight regular-season victory. He has thrown for 19 touchdowns in the last five games and a career-best 33 in this so-far special season.

Carolina visits Atlanta and hosts Tampa Bay to finish the schedule. All three previous NFL teams to reach 14-0 — Miami in 1972, New England in 2007 and Indianapolis in 2009 — made the Super Bowl.

The Giants (6-8) fell one game behind Washington in the NFC East.

Steelers 34, Broncos 27: Ben Roethlisberger passed for 380 yards and three touchdowns as host Pittsburgh rallied.

Antonio Brown caught 16 passes for 189 yards and two scores as Pittsburgh (9-5) moved into the AFC's second wild-card spot by dominating the NFL's best defense after spotting the Broncos 17-point lead.

The Steelers controlled the second half, finally taking the lead when Ryan Shazier intercepted Brock Osweiler to set up a 23-yard dart from Roethlisberger to Brown with 3:34 to go.

Osweiler threw for 296 yards with three touchdowns passing and another on the ground but struggled in the second half as the Broncos (10-4) lost their second straight and failed to lock up the AFC

West title.

Cardinals 40, Eagles 17: David Johnson ran for 187 yards and three touchdowns and Carson Palmer threw a TD pass as visiting Arizona beat Philadelphia to clinch the NFC West title.

The Cardinals (12-2) will earn a first-round bye with a win over Green Bay next week. They still have a chance to secure the No. 1 seed if they win out and Carolina loses its last two games. The Eagles (6-8) would win the NFC East title if they beat Washington at home and the Giants on the road.

Seahawks 30, Browns 13: Russell Wilson continued his record pace by throwing three touchdown passes, two to Doug Baldwin, and host Seattle clinched a playoff spot for the fourth straight season.

Seattle (9-5) won its fifth straight and, thanks to losses this week by Tampa Bay and the New York Giants, wrapped up a postseason berth.

Johnny Manziel threw a 7-yard TD to Gary Barnidge on the first drive for the Browns (3-11).

Bengals 24, 49ers 14: Jeremy Hill ran for a pair of 1-yard touchdowns to back AJ McCarron's first career start, and visiting Cincinnati clinched a fifth straight postseason berth.

As Andy Dalton watched from the sideline with a large cast over his broken right thumb, McCarron threw a 20-yard touchdown pass to Tyler Kroft just before halftime as the Bengals (11-3) forced three second-quarter turnovers by San Francisco (4-10) to take command.

Vikings 38, Bears 17: Teddy Bridgewater threw a career-high four touchdowns and ran for another, and host Minnesota took a big step toward clinching playoff spot.

Bridgewater completed 17 of 20 passes

for 231 yards without a turnover, connecting twice with Stefon Diggs for scores. Jerick McKinnon and Zach Line had the other touchdown catches on a remarkably productive afternoon for all of Minnesota's running backs.

Chargers 30, Dolphins 14: Danny Woodhead had his first career four-touchdown game and Philip Rivers recovered a fumble on a play that began with him throwing an interception in what might have been the final NFL game in San Diego.

Woodhead caught TD passes of 20, 9 and 9 yards, and scored on a 2-yard run for the Chargers (4-10).

It could all be over after 55 seasons if NFL owners allow Chargers Chairman Dean Spanos to move to an industrial suburb of Los Angeles and build a stadium with the rival Oakland Raiders.

Packers 30, Raiders 20: Aaron Rodgers threw a touchdown pass and Damarious Randall returned an interception for another score to help visiting Green Bay.

Green Bay (10-4) clinched a spot in the postseason in the first quarter when the New York Giants lost to Carolina. But the Packers still have their eyes set on a division title and remain one game ahead of Minnesota in the NFC North.

Redskins 35, Bills 25: Kirk Cousins equaled his career high with four touchdown passes and ran 13 yards for another score, helping host Washington win consecutive games for the first time in more than a year and stay atop the NFC East.

While the Redskins (7-7) moved closer to a playoff berth, the Bills (6-8) are now assured of missing the postseason for the 16th year in a row, the NFL's longest active drought.

Chiefs 34, Ravens 14: Kansas City capitalized on a variety of miscues by

host Baltimore, extended its winning streak to eight games and remained in the thick of the playoff picture.

Tyvon Branch returned a fumble 73 yards for a touchdown in the first quarter and Marcus Peters clinched the victory with a 90-yard interception return for a score with 4:36 left.

Texans 16, Colts 10: Brandon Weeden replaced injured quarterback T.J. Yates late in the first half and threw a go-ahead 8-yard TD pass to Jaelen Strong with 10:36 to play as Houston won at Indianapolis for the first time in 14 tries.

The Texans (7-7) took sole possession of the AFC South lead by snapping a two-game losing streak.

The Colts (6-8) have lost three straight and need help to make the playoffs.

Patriots 33, Titans 16: Tom Brady threw for two touchdowns to help host New England hold onto the top spot in the AFC in a game that saw Titans quarterback Marcus Mariota knocked out of the game with a knee injury in the first half.

The 2014 Heisman Trophy winner and the No. 2 overall pick in this year's draft, Mariota left and did not return after being sacked to end consecutive second-quarter drives.

Brady completed 23 of 35 passes for 267 yards.

Falcons 23, Jaguars 17: Julio Jones scored for the first time in seven weeks, and visiting Atlanta ended a six-game losing streak.

Jones finished with nine receptions for 118 yards and set the franchise record for catches in a season. He has 118, breaking teammate Roddy White's mark of 115 set in 2010.

The Jaguars (5-9) lost ground in the muddled AFC South and were all but eliminated in the division race.



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FIFA bans Blatter, Platini for 8 years

Associated Press

ZURICH — Banished from soccer's ruling body for eight years for unethical conduct, Sepp Blatter won't give up the presidency of his beloved FIFA without a fight.

"I will fight. I will fight until the end," Blatter said Monday at a news conference that started 90 minutes after he and former protégé Michel Platini were each banned by FIFA's ethics committee.

It was a stunning removal of world soccer's most powerful leaders over a \$2 million payment by FIFA to Platini, the president of UEFA, European soccer's ruling body. The payment is also the subject of a criminal investigation in Switzerland. "I'm sad. It can't go on this way. It's not possible," said the 79-year-old Blatter, who has spent more than half his life working for soccer's scandal-hit governing body. "After 40 years, it can't happen this way. I'm fighting to restore my rights."

Already serving a provisional ban, the elected FIFA president and his long-time likely successor were kicked out of the

sport just two months before 209 member federations elect a new leader.

Platini, a FIFA vice president whose bid to succeed Blatter on Feb. 26 now looks over, described the proceedings as a "true mockery."

Their offenses were judged to be conflict of interest and disloyalty to FIFA. They avoided life bans because corruption was not proven.

Platini's lawyer, Thibaud d'Ales, told The Associated Press it came as no surprise that the corruption charge had been dropped.

"They used it with the sole purpose of dirtying Michel Platini, although they knew from the start it was an untenable argument," d'Ales said.

Guilty verdicts were expected. So were the subsequent denials of wrongdoing and promises of urgent appeals to FIFA and the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

Blatter's defiant display was a bonus for international media summoned to FIFA's former headquarters, just hundreds of yards from the new building where he spent eight hours with four ethics judges last Thursday.

The choice of venue hinted at a vintage Blatter show. He did not disappoint.

Blatter invoked Nelson Mandela within a minute, pointing to the spot where the iconic South African leader had lifted the World Cup trophy 11 years ago, when his country was chosen as the host nation for the 2010 tournament.

Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech, the Nobel organization and the United Nations were also referenced in a spirited 52-minute performance as he held court with more than 100 journalists.

His last words were "I'll be back, thank you."

Blatter made it clear he regretted his current position but declared he was innocent of any wrongdoing.

"I am not ashamed," he said. "I am sorry that I am a punching ball. I am sorry for football. ... I am now suspended eight years, suspended eight years. Suspended eight years for what?"

Platini was also dismissive of the ethics commission's work.

He said its proceedings, which included a hearing earlier this month that he did not attend, had been "orchestrated ... by

governing bodies that I know well" to tarnish him.

"I'm convinced that my fate was sealed before the Dec. 18 hearing and that this decision is just a pathetic maneuver to hide a true will of taking me out of the football world," the Frenchman said.

"My behavior has always been faultless and I'm at peace with my own conscience."

Platini said he will also file a lawsuit in a civil court to seek damages for what he has endured during the ethics commission's proceedings. In a brief statement, UEFA said it was "extremely disappointed" with the ruling and supported its leader's right to clear his name.

FIFA's ethics judges decided that Blatter and Platini had broken ethics rules on conflicts of interest, breach of loyalty and offering or receiving gifts.

Platini took \$2 million of FIFA money in 2011 — a payment approved by Blatter as uncontracted salary for work as a presidential adviser from 1999-2002.

Irving returns in Cavs' win

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — As Kyrie Irving dressed following his first game in six months, LeBron James popped on some music.

With Chris Brown's "Picture Me Rollin'" filling the locker room, Irving, James and Iman Shumpert bobbed their heads in unison and did some small dance moves.

Close to full strength, the Cavaliers are grooving again.

Irving scored 12 points and played 17 minutes in his season debut and James had 23, leading Cleveland to a 108-86 victory Sunday over the lowly Philadelphia 76ers, who lost their 10th straight and fell to 1-28.

Back on the floor for the first time since breaking his left kneecap in Game 1 of the NBA Finals, Irving showed some rust but that didn't matter.

"Kind of been a long, long road, but finally getting out there with my teammates was a pleasure," Irving said.

The Cavs managed to open the season 17-7 without Irving. But Cleveland is more complete with the All-Star point guard running its offense and being a headache for opposing defenses. Now that Irving's back, the Cavs are as healthy as they've been since early in the playoffs last season.

"We're almost there," James said.

Matthew Dellavedova made four three-pointers and added 20 points for the Cavs, who improved to 12-1 at home and are eyeing a Christmas Day game against Golden State. James didn't play in the fourth quarter, logging a season-low 25 minutes.

Nerlens Noel had 15 points and 12 rebounds for the brutal Sixers, now 0-17 on the road and on their second double-digit losing streak.

The losing is taking its toll.

"Everybody's human," Noel said. "Everybody has their own frustrations, but you stay positive and do your best to keep working through it."

Irving received a warm ovation from the crowd during pregame introductions. He waved in appreciation and was cheered again as he dribbled up the floor for the first time, a sight Cleveland fans have been waiting months to see.

The Cavs ran a set play for him on their first possession, but Irving missed the layup.

"I didn't know I was going to be that open at the rim," Irving said before James reminded him of his gaffe.

"He tanked the layup!" James shouted. Irving smiled at the ribbing.

"As you can hear, I did trick the first layup but it's OK, I'm not worried," he said. "It feels good, just getting this one out of the way."

Irving missed his first five shots before scoring on an uncontested layup after James made a steal near midcourt and fed his teammate. Following the assist, James walked over to Irving patted him on the head and said, "Welcome back."

Heat 116, Trail Blazers 109: Chris Bosh scored 29 points, Hassan Whiteside shook off a slow first half to finish with 22 points and 11 rebounds, and host Miami beat Portland.

Dwyane Wade had 18 points and added seven assists for the Heat. They trailed by 12 at one point and were down 10 at the half.

The Heat shot 57 percent and played the final 13:37 without Goran Dragic. He was ejected for the first time in his career after arguing two foul calls.

Timberwolves 100, Nets 85: Karl-Anthony Towns had 24 points and 10 rebounds in the building where he was taken with the No. 1 pick in the June draft, and Minnesota beat host Brooklyn.

Gorgui Dieng added 20 points and 10 boards to lead a strong bench unit that blew the game open in the fourth quarter. Andrew Wiggins scored 16 points, and Ricky Rubio had 15 assists.

Hawks 103, Magic 100: Kyle Korver scored 13 of his 19 points in the fourth quarter and Atlanta rallied to beat host Orlando.

Korver had four three-pointers in the final period and six overall. Mike Scott added 15 points, and Al Horford and Jeff Teague scored 14 apiece in Atlanta's third straight victory.

Kings 104, Raptors 94: Rajon Rondo had 19 points and 13 assists, Rudy Gay scored 19 points against his former team and Sacramento beat Toronto to end a four-game road losing streak.

Omri Casspi added 15 points and 11 rebounds for the Kings.

Pelicans 130, Nuggets 125: Anthony Davis left after the first quarter with an illness only to return in the fourth and finish with 27 points, lifting visiting New Orleans past Denver.

Davis had a dominating first quarter, scoring 19 points before leaving after feeling sick. He returned early in the fourth and sparked the Pelicans.

Bucks 101, Suns 95: Khris Middleton scored 11 of his 26 points in the fourth quarter and Greg Monroe hit a spinning, go-ahead layup with 20.6 seconds left to lift visiting Milwaukee.

Phoenix's Eric Bledsoe had his potential tying layup blocked by Michael Carter-Williams with 7.9 seconds left, and Middleton hit four free throws in the final 5 seconds.

Capitals rally past struggling Rangers

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Justin Williams had two goals and an assist and Marcus Johansson had a goal and two assists as the Washington Capitals closed with six straight goals to beat the struggling New York Rangers 7-3 on Sunday night.

Washington trailed 3-1 after one period but rallied for its fifth straight win. The Capitals are 24-6-2 and tied with Dallas for the NHL lead with 50 points.

Evgeny Kuznetsov, T.J. Oshie, Alex Ovechkin and Jason Chimera also scored for the Capitals. Nicklas Backstrom added three assists and Braden Holtby made 33 saves.

The Rangers have lost three in a row and six of eight to fall to 19-12-4.

J.T. Miller, Chris Kreider and Dan Boyle scored for New York. Henrik Lundqvist made 19 saves before being pulled, and then Magnus Hellberg made four saves in his NHL debut.

Blackhawks 4, Sharks 3 (OT): Jonathan Toews scored at 2:21 of overtime to give surging Chicago a victory over visiting San Jose. Toews skated in with Patrick Kane for a 2-on-1 and tipped home a nice pass for his 11th goal.

Kane scored his 21st in the first period to help the Blackhawks win for the second straight day and seventh time in nine games overall. The star forward has two goals and two assists in three games since his 26-game point streak ended last Tuesday against Colorado.

Panthers 5, Canucks 4 (SO): Jaromir Jagr scored his 732nd goal to move past Marcel Dionne for fourth place in NHL history, and Aleksander Barkov tallied the winner in a shootout as host Florida beat Vancouver.

Barkov scored against Jacob Markstrom, who entered the game after Ryan Miller left with an injury after allowing a goal on two shots in the shootout.

Jared McCann scored in the shootout for Vancouver, but Roberto Luongo stopped Sven Baertschi to seal the win.

Bruins 2, Devils 1 (SO): Ryan Spooner scored the lone shootout goal and Jonas Gustavsson made 29 saves to lift host Boston over New Jersey.

Loui Eriksson had a goal in the first period for the Bruins, who improved to 11-1-3 in their last 15 games and pulled within one point of first-place Montreal in the Atlantic Division.

Lightning 5, Senators 2: Mike Angelidis scored his first NHL goal in almost four years, and Tampa Bay beat visiting Ottawa.

The Lightning also got a pair of goals from Steven Stamkos, including one of two late empty-netters. Nikita Nesterov and Alex Killorn had the other Tampa Bay goals.

Red Wings 4, Flames 2: Dylan Larkin and Brad Richards scored 45 seconds apart midway through the second period to put Detroit ahead of visiting Calgary.

Petr Mrazek made 26 saves for the Red Wings, winless in their previous three games.