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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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US troops back on patrol in Bagram

Military installation mourns 6 Americans killed in suicide-bomb attack

BY HEATH DRUZIN
Stars and Stripes

BAGRAM AIR FIELD, Afghanistan — It was a somber, snow-flecked morning at this U.S. military hub on Tuesday, a day after six American airmen died in the kind of suicide attack against foreign troops that has become rare in the past year.

The victims were attached to the Air Force's 455th Air Expeditionary Wing, military officials said. Three other Americans — two servicemembers and an interpreter — were injured in Monday's attack.

The Defense Department has not identified those killed, but New York City police Commissioner William J. Bratton announced that one was Joseph Lemm, a New York police detective who was serving with the New York Air National Guard.

The attack, by a suicide bomber on a motorcycle who plowed into a foot patrol, marked one of the deadliest days for U.S. troops in the past year and gave pause to all those still serving in what the White House describes as a "noncombat" mission.

"No matter what you want to call it, it's still Afghanistan," said Marine Lt. Col. Bradley Grosvenor, whose Bagram-based unit was one of the first on the scene after the bombing.

But despite the bloodshed, Grosvenor and his Marines rolled off the base Tuesday with their Georgian army counterparts to meet Parwan province's governor in the town of Charikar. On their way into the governor's compound, they passed the charred remains of the motorcycle used in the attack, which Afghan police had stored on the grounds.

Grosvenor said it was important to do the patrol to show friend and foe that they are not deterred.

"As leaders, we're just thinking about what to do to motivate our men," he said.

The runway at Bagram was shut down for part of the afternoon as hundreds gathered to honor the six slain troops in a ramp ceremony, during which their remains were loaded onto aircraft bound for the United States.

In a statement, U.S. Ambassador to

Afghanistan P. Michael McKinley condemned the attack.

"Today we mourn the loss of six U.S. servicemembers killed in a cowardly Taliban attack on U.S. and Afghan forces near Bagram Air Field," McKinley said. "Our deepest condolences go to the families of the six killed as they face such heartbreaking news during the holiday season."

In the year since NATO ended its combat mission, Afghan soldiers and police have taken over much of the day-to-day fighting in the country. Yet American troops still face many dangers.

It was not immediately clear what kind of mission the Americans were on Tuesday. Coalition forces regularly conduct patrols around the perimeter of bases, but Monday's attack occurred in the village of Bajawari, nearly 2 miles from Bagram Air Field, local officials said.

According to the Facebook page Remember Our Fallen Heroes, some of the victims of Monday's attack were part of the Air Force Office of Special Investigations, a military law enforcement agency.

Iraqi forces advance in battle to retake Ramadi

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Iraqi forces on Tuesday reported progress in the military operation to retake the city of Ramadi from the Islamic State group, saying they made the most significant incursion into the city since it fell to the militants in May.

Losing Ramadi — the capital of sprawling western Anbar province and Iraq's Sunni heartland — was a major blow to the Iraqi government. It was also the government's biggest defeat since Islamic State militants swept through areas in the country's north and west, including Iraq's second-largest city, Mosul, in the summer of 2014.

Iraqi forces announced a counteroffensive shortly after Mosul fell, but progress has been sluggish; clawing back territory from the militants has proven more difficult than expected.

On Tuesday, Iraqi spokesman Sabah al-Numan said troops crossed the Euphrates River north of the city and its Warar tributary to the west and pushed into downtown Ramadi.

From the south, troops led by the counterterrorism agency made progress in the Dubbat and Aramil neighborhoods, less than 2 miles from the city center, Gen. Ismail al-Mahallawi, the head of operations in Anbar

province, told The Associated Press. Sporadic clashes broke out, and Iraqi forces on the advance were forced to remove roadside bombs planted by the extremists, al-Numan added.

Dubbat saw heavy fighting, with one soldier killed and 14 wounded, said an official in the Anbar operations room, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to brief the media.

Al-Numan said no paramilitary forces — a reference to pro-government Shiite militias whose actions have raised concerns in Sunni territory — were taking part in the operation. The Iraqi air force and

the U.S.-led international coalition were providing air support to troops on the ground and bombing Islamic State targets, he said.

Since overrunning Ramadi, the Islamic State group has destroyed all the bridges around the city. It also demolished the Anbar operations command and fanned out into the city's residential areas to set up less conspicuous centers of command.

As the military operation continues, Ramadi's civilian population — estimated to be between 4,000 and 10,000 — remains mostly trapped inside the city.

Bergdahl enters no plea at arraignment

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

FORT BRAGG, N.C. — Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl sat stiff and upright Tuesday morning as he made his first appearance before a military judge, declining to enter a plea to charges of desertion and misbehavior before the enemy in Afghanistan that could send him to prison for life.

Dressed in a pressed blue Army service uniform with sergeant stripes on each arm, the former Taliban captive stared straight forward throughout most of the hearing, which lasted less than 15 minutes. He stood only to address the judge, Army Col. Christopher T. Fredrikson.

“Yes, sir. I do,” Bergdahl replied several times to Fredrikson’s inquiries, confirming he understood the charges against him and the future court-martial process.

Bergdahl, 29, also chose not to state whether he would face a jury of his peers or leave his fate to an Army judge. He’ll next appear in court at Fort Bragg on Jan. 12 before Col. Jeffery R. Nance, the judge

assigned to proceed over Bergdahl’s case.

The Army announced Dec. 14 that Bergdahl would face a general court-martial, with the possibility he could be imprisoned for the remainder of his life if convicted of the more serious charge of “misbehavior before the enemy by endangering the safety of a command, unit or place.” The second offense, “desertion with intent to shirk important or hazardous duty,” carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison.

Bergdahl spent five years as a Taliban captive after leaving a small outpost in eastern Afghanistan in 2009 and could face health problems for the remainder of his life as a result, according to his defense. Bergdahl has not spoken publicly since his release from the Taliban in May 2014 in a controversial exchange for the release of five senior-level Taliban detainees from Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. Portions of an interview he gave with a Hollywood screenwriter have been aired on the popular podcast “Serial,” in which Bergdahl admits leaving Observation Post Mest in order to create a crisis. He believed

it was the only way he, then a private first class, could gain an audience with a general officer to warn of issues in his chain of command that he saw as troubling.

Bergdahl will be represented by his civilian attorney, Eugene Fidell, during the court-martial. Army Lt. Col. Franklin Rosenblatt represented him Tuesday. Neither he nor his attorney spoke to reporters at Fort Bragg on Tuesday.

Fidell, who was not present at the arraignment, previously criticized the decision by Gen. Robert Abrams, commander of Army Forces Command at Fort Bragg, to send his client to a general court-martial.

Abrams’ decision went against the advice of the Army officer who oversaw Bergdahl’s Article 32 probable-cause hearing in September. In October, Lt. Col. Mark Visger recommended Bergdahl should be tried at a special court-martial on charges of desertion and misconduct. Penalties for convictions at those trials, on charges typically similar to misdemeanors, are capped at one year in prison and a bad-conduct discharge.

Suspect in Vegas crash says she was stressed

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — It wasn’t long ago that the woman arrested in the deadly Las Vegas Strip sidewalk crash seemed to be doing well for herself.

After a rough childhood that included a period of homelessness in high school, Lakeisha Holloway had become an award-winning high school graduate and caring mother.

That recent picture of success deepens the mystery of how the former Oregon woman wound up in a Las Vegas jail and on suicide watch. Holloway, 24, faces murder charges after authorities said she plowed her Oldsmobile into a sidewalk of tourists Sunday night, killing one person and injuring three dozen others while her 3-year-old daughter sat in the back seat.

After reviewing video surveillance footage, police said they believe Holloway drove up

on the sidewalk deliberately.

They say she was homeless, and out of money, sleeping in her car in parking garages. She might have been on her way to Texas to meet with the father of her daughter; the pair had split up some time ago.

After her arrest, Holloway “described a stressful period today where she was trying to rest/sleep inside her vehicle with her daughter but kept getting run off by security of the properties she stopped at,” a police report states.

“She ended up on the Strip, ‘a place I did not want to be,’” the report quoted her as saying. “She would not explain why she drove onto the sidewalk but remembered a body bouncing off her windshield, breaking it.”

She parked at a casino a few blocks from the crash site, told a parking attendant that she had run down people and asked the valet to call 911, Clark County Sheriff Joe Lombardo said.

No indictment in Texas jail death

HEMPSTEAD, Texas — A grand jury decided that neither sheriff’s officials nor jailers committed a crime in the treatment of a black woman who died in a Texas county jail last summer, but has not yet determined whether the state trooper who arrested her should face charges, a prosecutor said.

Prosecutor Darrell Jordan said Monday that the Waller

County grand jury will return in January to consider whether to indict the trooper who arrested Sandra Bland, 28, in July. The Chicago-area woman was pulled over July 10 for making an improper lane change. Dashcam video showed that the traffic stop quickly became confrontational, with trooper Brian Encinia at one point holding a stun gun and yelling at Bland, “I will light you up!” after she refused to get out of her car.

From The Associated Press

5 more cases of E. coli linked to Chipotle food

NEW YORK — The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Monday it is investigating a more recent batch of E. coli cases linked to Chipotle, and that it does not know yet if they are linked to a larger outbreak that began in October.

So far, the agency said five people have been reported sick in the new outbreak, with illnesses starting between Nov. 18 and Nov. 26. They include one

person in Kansas, one in North Dakota and three in Oklahoma. All five said they ate at a Chipotle the week before they got sick. The North Dakotan had traveled to Kansas and ate at the same Chipotle location as the Kansas resident who fell ill.

The development is the latest bad news for Chipotle Mexican Grill Inc., which saw its sales plummet after the emergence of the larger E. coli outbreak that has sickened 53 people in nine states.

From The Associated Press

Raiders' Woodson to retire

Associated Press

ALAMEDA, Calif. — Charles Woodson's return to Oakland began with hundreds of fans gathering at the team's facility urging him to come back.

The second stint will come to an end following an emotional farewell at the Oakland Coliseum.

Woodson announced Monday he will retire following his 18th NFL season, ending a career that included a Heisman Trophy, a Super Bowl title and numerous other honors.

Woodson said he realized late last month that he couldn't play another season and wanted to announce his decision before playing his final home game Thursday night against San Diego.

"I felt it was only right that Raiders fans, my fans, fans that have watched me play for a long time, I'd let them all know that this Thursday night would be the last time in the Coliseum I would be able to run out there in front of our fans at home," Woodson said at a news conference.

Woodson is one of the most accomplished defensive backs to play the game, ranking fifth all-time with 65 interceptions and tied for first with Rod Woodson and Darren Sharper with 13 defensive touchdowns.

He won the AP Defensive Rookie of the Year award in 1998, AP Defensive Player of the Year in 2009 and is a three-time, first-team All Pro selection.

"Charles Woodson is one of those players that comes along and reminds you why you love the game," general manager Reggie McKenzie said.

"He is truly a one-of-a-kind player that goes above and beyond his Heisman Trophy and future gold jacket. It has been an honor to have worked alongside Charles for so many years and have the confidence to call him what he truly is: the G.O.A.T. He is, without a doubt, the

embodiment of what it means to be a Raider."

Woodson is still playing at a high level at age 39, despite dealing with a shoulder injury he sustained in the season opener and forced him out for a few plays Sunday after a hard hit on former teammate Randall Cobb.

Woodson has played 965 defensive snaps this season and has five interceptions and three fumble recoveries, ranking second in the NFL with eight takeaways.

"There are so many players who play this sport and other sports who would like to go out that way, playing well, doing what they love to do," he said. "I feel very good about the way I performed not only this year but my whole career."

Despite dealing with several injuries early in his career, Woodson has played the second-most games of any defensive back in NFL history with 252.

Only Hall of Famer Darrell Green has more with 295 and Woodson will join Green in the Hall in Canton, Ohio, soon.

Woodson said he told owner Mark Davis, McKenzie and coach Jack Del Rio of his decision earlier Monday. He then told his teammates in an emotional meeting that he was retiring.

"Honestly, I think physically I could do it," he said. "My body has responded. But mentally, it's not there. It's not going to happen."

Those emotions will only be stronger Thursday night when Woodson takes the field at the Oakland Coliseum for the final time. The game might also be the final NFL contest in the Coliseum as the Raiders could move to the Los Angeles area after the season.

"Coming back here and playing for the second time we were able to rekindle something that we had years ago," Woodson said. "It was really fun coming back here and playing. It will be a pretty

emotional day."

Woodson burst onto the football scene as a college star at Michigan when he won the Heisman Trophy and helped the Wolverines win a share of the national championship in 1997.

He was then picked fourth overall by the Raiders and immediately made an impact, winning the defensive rookie of the year. He helped revive the Raiders and lead them to three straight playoff berths capped by an AFC championship in the 2002 season.

But the Raiders couldn't break through for a Super Bowl title, losing the AFC title game at home to Baltimore in the 2000 season, falling to New England in the "Tuck Rule" game the next season and then losing the Super Bowl to Tampa Bay the following year.

Injuries hampered Woodson the next three seasons and he left for Green Bay as a free agent in 2006. That revitalized his career as he had 37 interceptions his first six years with Green Bay, winning the Super Bowl following the 2010 season.

But the Packers cut him after the 2012 season and after getting little interest in free agency, he finally returned to Oakland. He arrived for a free-agent visit only to be greeted by fans begging him to come back.

"That day was pretty awesome to come here and pull up and see all of the Raider fans still having love for me," he said. "That was really cool."

The Raiders won just seven games his first two seasons before being competitive this season with a 6-8 mark heading into the final two games.

Woodson said he will miss standing on the field for the national anthem and traveling to road games with his teammates the most. But he decided he wanted to spend more time with his family, his winery and perhaps start a TV career.

Giants' Beckham suspended one game

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Losing control during Sunday's loss to the Panthers will cost Giants star receiver Odell Beckham Jr. one game.

The NFL on Monday suspended Beckham for next weekend's visit to Minnesota for his conduct against Carolina, when he drew three personal foul penalties. The league cited "multiple violations of safety-related playing rules."

Beckham has the right to appeal the suspension within three business days. Without him, the Giants (6-8) would be missing their best offensive weapon as they try to stay alive in the NFC East race.

Beckham and Panthers cornerback Josh Norman tangled from the beginning of the Panthers' 38-35 victory. At one point, Beckham delivered a diving helmet-to-helmet hit on Norman while blocking.

There was plenty of pushing, shoving, swinging, wrestling, late hits and trash talking between them.

Beckham, the 2014 Offensive Rookie of the Year, has 91 catches for 1,396 yards and 13 touchdowns, tied for the league lead. He has a base salary of \$893,000 and would lose \$55,813 for being suspended for Sunday night's game.

The suspension was imposed by NFL Vice President of Football Operations Merton Hanks, who ruled that Beckham's actions placed his opponents at unnecessary risk of injury and should have been avoided.

Lions top Saints for fourth win in 6 games

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Matthew Stafford and the Detroit Lions will have some fond memories of the way they came together this season, even if they regret it took them too long to get rolling.

With Stafford turning in one of the most efficient performances of his career, the Lions beat the Saints 35-27 on Monday night for Detroit's fourth victory in six games.

The Lions been competitive even in their two losses during that stretch, falling once on a last-second touchdown heave by Green Bay and losing by a touchdown against St. Louis.

"Guys are still excited and working hard," said Lions receiver Golden Tate, who caught two touchdown passes in New Orleans. "A lot of teams in this league get down and go into the tank and just look forward to the offseason. Our guys are looking forward to getting better. We know we're good."

Stafford was 22-for-25 passing for 254 yards and three touchdowns as the Lions

(5-9) raced to a 28-3 lead before holding off a late surge by the Saints (5-9).

"Obviously, if you complete 88 percent, that's rare," Lions coach Jim Caldwell said of Stafford. "It's very difficult to do that versus air. He was huge for us and spread it around quite a bit."

The Saints, meanwhile, are now guaranteed consecutive losing seasons for the first time since Sean Payton took over as coach in 2006. One more loss in their final two games would mark the first 10-loss season under Payton, who coached New Orleans to six playoff appearances and a Super Bowl title in his first eight seasons on the sidelines — not counting 2012, when he was suspended in connection with the NFL's bounty probe.

"For any coach to be somewhere for 10 years, that's very good. You have to respect that," Saints tight end Ben Watson said. "You're going to have losing seasons; everybody does."

Some things to know about the Lions' triumph in New Orleans:

Running better: The Lions entered the game ranked last in rushing but against

the Saints' NFL-worst run defense managed to gain 150 yards on the ground. Ameer Abdullah and Jaique Bell each ran for more than 70 yards and each scored a touchdown.

The Lions' ground game "also helped keep the ball out of (the Saints') hands" Caldwell said. "We certainly didn't want to give (quarterback Drew) Brees any more opportunities."

Prolific Brees: Brees passed for 341 yards and three touchdowns, becoming only the fourth quarterback to surpass 60,000 yards in a career while also eclipsing the 4,000-yard mark for the 10th straight season. Brees ranks behind only Peyton Manning (71,871), Brett Favre (71,838) and Dan Marino (61,361) in career yards passing. However, he also hurt his right foot in the second quarter and said he expected to have an MRI on Tuesday.

Quiet night: Lions star receiver Calvin Johnson, who's been nursing an ankle injury, had one catch for 19 yards, marking his second straight game with just one catch. Meanwhile, Lance Moore also had one catch, which gained 10 yards. It was

Moore's first game in the Superdome with a team other than the Saints, for whom he played eight seasons.

Rising youth: Saints second-year receiver Brandin Cooks made a career-high 10 catches for a career-best 124 yards receiving, including a 27-yard touchdown. Second year pro Willie Snead, who made his regular-season debut this year, made a career-high 10 catches for 76 yards.

Steady Stafford: While Stafford has proven his ability to connect deep down field, his night in New Orleans was characterized mainly by shorter, decisive, accurate throws. None of his three touchdowns went for more than 5 yards, with Tate catching scoring passes of 1 and 5 yards and fullback Michael Burton scoring his first career TD on a 4-yard pass. Looking increasingly comfortable in the scheme of Jim Bob Cooter, who was promoted to offensive coordinator in mid-season, Stafford did not turn the ball over and had much of his success throwing to tight ends and running backs.



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Durant helps Thunder edge Clippers

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — What Kevin Durant did to the Los Angeles Clippers was analogous to a baseball player hitting a go-ahead home run before robbing someone else of one.

Durant drained a 19-foot jumper with 5.8 seconds left before blocking a potential game-winning 18-footer by Chris Paul as time expired, and the Oklahoma City Thunder beat the Clippers 100-99 on Monday night.

"As a kid, I dreamed about hitting the game-winner," Durant said. "No doubt, the block was good for our team. But as a kid, I wanted to hit the game-winner all the time. So I'll take the game-winner over the block."

Russell Westbrook scored 33 points, Durant had 24 and Serge Ibaka added 17 for Oklahoma City. Coming off a 104-100 loss at Cleveland that snapped their six-game winning streak, the Thunder won for the 11th time in 14 games.

After a Clippers turnover and a subsequent foul by J.J. Redick following Westbrook's steal, Dion Waiters' inbound pass for Westbrook was intercepted by Paul, who quickly went in for a layup that put the Clippers ahead 99-98.

But Durant followed with his clutch shot from the right wing before making his game-saving defensive play on

Paul.

"I feel like my defense has grown," Durant said. "Since my first year, I never was a liability on that end. I just had to learn the skills. So I felt like I could always guard every position if I was locked in and being aggressive, and using my length to my advantage."

"I always felt like I was a smart player, but the coaches challenged me at the start of the year to just step it up to another level at the defensive end."

Paul had 32 points and 10 assists in another classic duel with Westbrook, who won his first NBA scoring title last season. Redick and Blake Griffin each scored 15 for the Clippers, whose third straight loss equaled their longest skid of the season.

Hawks 106, Trail Blazers 97: Dennis Schroder scored 18 points, and host Atlanta earned its fourth straight win.

Schroder, Atlanta's backup point guard, lost a cap bonded to a tooth in a collision early in the fourth period, but was 7-for-10 from the floor in a little more than 17 minutes on the court.

Spurs 106, Pacers 92: Kawhi Leonard had 24 points, and San Antonio improved to 16-0 at home.

San Antonio (24-5) is off to the second-best start in

franchise history. The Spurs have 21 wins by double figures.

Rockets 102, Hornets 95: James Harden scored 36 points, and host Houston squandered a double-digit lead in the fourth quarter before coming back for the win.

Nets 105, Bulls 102: Brook Lopez had 21 points and 12 rebounds, and visiting Brooklyn stopped a five-game losing streak.

Wizards 113, Kings 99: John Wall had a career-high 19 assists and also scored 12 points, leading host Washington to the victory.

Jazz 110, Suns 89: Gordon Hayward scored 24 points to help host Utah cruise to the win.

Celtics 113, Timberwolves 99: Kelly Olynyk scored 19 points, Jae Crowder had 18 and host Boston beat Minnesota while the crowd begged to see Kevin Garnett.

Minnesota coach Sam Mitchell said before the game that the 39-year-old Garnett, who used to play for Boston, would rest. The crowd loudly chanted "We want KG!" close to a dozen times.

Magic 107, Knicks 99: Nikola Vucevic tied his season high with 26 points and grabbed nine rebounds, powering Orlando to the road win.

WKU wins Miami Beach Bowl

Associated Press

MIAMI — Brandon Doughty's left arm is covered in tattoos. The skin on his right arm remains pristine.

There's a simple reason for that.

"I would never touch this arm like that," Doughty said after his right arm unleashed a 461-yard, three-touchdown effort to overcome an early deficit and carry Western Kentucky to a 45-35 win over South Florida in the Miami Beach Bowl on Monday — the final game of his six-year collegiate career.

"It's God-given."

Doughty finished the season with 5,055 yards for the Hilltoppers (12-2), the 14th time in FBS history that a quarterback has reached the 5,000 mark. His six-year career at the school — it took him three to become the starter — ended with these numbers: 1,023 completions, 12,855 yards and 111 touchdowns.

"It's been a heck of a run," Doughty said just before hoisting the bowl trophy.

He was probably even better than Willie Taggart thought he would be when he signed him in 2010. Taggart was Doughty's coach for his first game and the oppos-

ing coach for his last, and his Bulls (8-5) nearly stole the show from Doughty with a pair of fourth-quarter touchdowns that got them to 38-35.

But Anthony Wales' second touchdown of the day, a 42-yard scamper with 5:05 left, helped seal it for the Hilltoppers. Nicholas Norris hauled in touchdown passes of 69 and 55 yards in the third quarter for Western Kentucky, and Jared Dangerfield made a 26-yard TD catch over three defenders to cap a 28-point third quarter for the Hilltoppers.

"Brandon is a great quarterback," Taggart said. "Not only did he do it against us, he did it against everybody."

No one at the FBS level ever threw for more touchdowns in a two-year span than the 97 that Doughty piled up in 2014 and 2015, numbers that surely got him on some NFL Draft boards.

Quinton Flowers rushed for two touchdowns and threw for another for USF, finishing with 273 yards passing and 108 more on the ground. Marlon Mack rushed for another 108 for the Bulls, who were in a bowl for the first time since 2010 and rewarded Taggart with a three-year extension through 2020 earlier in the day.

USF lost for just the second time in its last nine games. The Bulls' 597 yards of offense was the program's most ever against an FBS opponent, topped only by 745 against Florida A&M in 2011.

"We came up short, but the future is bright for USF football," Taggart said.

Down 14-0 before finally getting on the scoreboard on Wales' touchdown run, the Hilltoppers — who put up 612 yards in a game that featured 1,209 yards of offense — seemed poised to tie the game in the second quarter after driving to the South Florida 6.

And then they punted.

That's right, they punted, after having first-and-goal.

Another year, another oddity in a bowl game for Western Kentucky. Last year the Hilltoppers won the Bahamas Bowl despite giving up five straight touchdowns to Central Michigan — including a three-lateral, 75-yarder as time expired, escaping with a 49-48 win only after the Chippewas' 2-point conversion try failed.

"We definitely do try to play an exciting brand of football," WKU coach Jeff Brohm said.

Providence routs UMass

Associated Press

AMHERST, Mass. — Preseason All-America Kris Dunn returned to the court Monday night, and Providence coach Ed Cooley could not have been any happier.

Back in action after missing the Friars' previous two games with a stomach virus, Dunn had 14 points and 11 assists in 24 minutes as No. 10 Providence blew past Massachusetts 90-66.

"Kris was about 80 percent today, maybe 85," Cooley said. "He was fine."

Ben Bentil enjoyed a big night for the Friars, who earlier Monday found themselves in the Top Ten for the first time in 38 years. The sophomore carved up the Minutemen's frontline with a career-best 32 points and pulled down 12 rebounds.

Bentil will head into the Big East portion of Providence's schedule as the team's leading scorer. A 29 percent shooter from three-point territory, Bentil had three of the Friars' 10 threes.

"Honestly, I thought our leading scorer this year would be (redshirt sophomore) Rodney (Bullock). To Ben's credit he's really developed and is playing with a purpose," Cooley said. "He's a tough matchup. Anybody who can go off the bounce and go inside and out...those are some scary numbers he put up today."

No. 7 North Carolina 94, Appalachian State 70: Brice Johnson scored 22 points to help the host Tar Heels.

North Carolina guard Marcus Paige played only 17 minutes, jamming his right ankle in the first half.

Justin Jackson and Isaiah Hicks added 12 points each for the Tar Heels (10-2).

Joel Berry II had 11 points and a career-high 11 assists as North Carolina scored at least 80 points for the eighth consecutive game.

Freshman Ronshad Shabazz scored 18 of his season-high 21 points in the first half to lead the Mountaineers (2-9).

No. 19 West Virginia 84, Eastern Kentucky 59: Jaysean Paige scored all of his 17 points in the first half and the host Mountaineers (10-1) won easily.

Paige was 6-for-12 from the field, including making 4 of 7 from behind the three-point line.

Stars score 4 straight to top Wild

Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Down by a couple of goals midway through the game, the Dallas Stars didn't panic. And by the time it was over, they had picked up two crucial points against a division foe.

Antti Niemi stopped 30 shots in relief and Dallas scored four straight goals to beat the Minnesota Wild 6-3 on Monday night.

Vernon Fiddler scored twice for the first-place Stars, who have won five of seven and are 8-2-2 in their last 12 games. Jordie Benn, Tyler Seguin, Antoine Roussel and Cody Eakin also had goals.

The Stars improved to 4-2-0 against division foes.

Last season, Dallas had the worst record within the division (8-14-7) and missed the playoffs. The Stars' next three games are home — Tuesday against Chicago and a home-and-home set with St. Louis after Christmas.

Jared Spurgeon, Charlie Coyle and Nino Niederreiter scored for Minnesota, which lost its second in a row after getting points in nine straight. Minnesota is 7-5-4 against the other six division teams.

Predators 5, Canadiens 1: Pekka Rinne made 35 saves for host Nashville, and Shea Weber had a goal and two assists.

Penguins 5, Blue Jackets 2: Evgeni Malkin and Phil Kessel each scored two goals, and host Pittsburgh ended a five-game losing streak.

Capitals 2, Hurricanes 1: Jason Chimera and Michael Latta scored, and visiting Washington beat Carolina for its sixth straight win.

Maple Leafs 7, Avalanche 4: Tyler Bozak scored three times in the third period, and visiting Toronto broke loose for four goals in the final 20 minutes.

Flyers 4, Blues 3: Evgeny Medvedev scored on a wrist shot with 3:13 left, helping host Philadelphia rally for the win.

Islanders 5, Ducks 2: John Tavares had two primary assists 43 seconds apart in the first period, leading host New York to the victory.

Oilers 3, Jets 1: Cam Talbot made 44 saves and Teddy Purcell had two goals and an assist as Edmonton earned its seventh consecutive home win.