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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Civilians killed in wave of attacks in Iraq

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — A wave of attacks across Iraq killed at least 15 civilians on Wednesday as government forces pressed on with their offensive to dislodge Islamic State militants from a major city west of Baghdad, officials said.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attacks, though they bore the hallmarks of the Islamic State.

In the Shiite-majority town of Khalis, about 50 miles north of the Iraqi capital, two explosives-laden cars were detonated. The first car was parked inside a bus station and that explosion killed three and wounded 10, a police officer said.

The second car bomb ex-

ploded at the town's outdoor grocery market, killing four civilians and wounding eight.

In and around Baghdad, five bombs went off in commercial areas, killing eight civilians and wounding 35, two police officers said. Three medical officials confirmed the casualty figures. All officials spoke on condition of anonymity, as they were not authorized to release information.

The attacks came a day after Iraqi security forces reported progress in recapturing some areas in the city of Ramadi, 80 miles west of Baghdad, from the Islamic State extremists who control large swaths of land in western and northern Iraq and in neighboring Syria. The Islamic State group has de-

clared a self-styled caliphate on the territory under its control.

On Wednesday, the Iraqi security forces' advance was slowed by snipers, roadside bombs and booby-trapped buildings, military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Rasool told The Associated Press. Rasool said some of the families that were trapped in Ramadi had managed to flee the city and reached safe areas.

In May, the Iraqi government suffered a major blow when Islamic State militants took over Ramadi, the capital of sprawling western Anbar province and Iraq's Sunni heartland. It was the government's biggest defeat since the Islamic State swept through areas in the country's north and west, including Iraq's

second-largest city of Mosul, in the summer of 2014.

On Tuesday, Iraqi counter-terrorism forces pushed into the Dubbat and Aramil neighborhoods, less than 2 miles from the city center, said Gen. Ismail al-Mahallawi, the head of operations in Anbar province. The Iraqi air force and the U.S.-led international coalition were providing air support to troops on ground and bombing Islamic State targets, he said.

Hours after the Iraqi government announced the gains, Col. Steve Warren, a spokesman for the U.S. military in Baghdad, said there were 250 to 350 Islamic State fighters in Ramadi, as well as several hundred outside the city on the northern and western perimeter.

Bergdahl rescue try led to risks, losses for SEALs

BY DIANNA CAHN

Stars and Stripes

The juxtaposition of two American military men who could come face to face in a courtroom in the coming months couldn't be set in more stark relief.

Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl faces a general court-martial for walking off of his base in eastern Afghanistan in 2009. Bergdahl spent five years in Taliban captivity, where he was tormented, before being freed in a controversial prisoner exchange last year.

James Hatch, a Navy SEAL senior chief who led a platoon into a fierce battle to try to rescue Bergdahl, was shot and badly wounded on that mission. Beside him, combat assault dog Remco lay mortally wounded, after running through a hail of bullets at two Taliban fighters

hiding in a ditch, exposing their whereabouts.

Bergdahl is charged with not only desertion but also misbehavior before the enemy — an archaic, rarely used charge that includes "endangering safety of a command, unit, place, ship, or military property" and has a maximum penalty of life in prison. It could help answer the question of whether Bergdahl betrayed his country intentionally or should be viewed as acting as a result of mental health problems.

Military officials won't confirm or deny the 2009 mission was a search for Bergdahl. An Army spokesman said Tuesday that the service maintains the position stated by then-Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel in 2014 that he did not know of any specific "circumstances or details of U.S. soldiers dying as a result of efforts to find and res-

cue Sgt. Bergdahl." An Army investigator and an officer who presided over Bergdahl's preliminary hearing earlier this year both recommended he be spared a general court-martial and prison time. But no one has denied servicemembers were hurt as a result of the search and an Army commander last week ruled against the investigator's recommendation and ordered Bergdahl face a general court-martial.

Hatch, his femur shattered, went through 18 surgeries in two years. He lost his military career and suffered from debilitating post-traumatic stress disorder. He nearly took his own life. His fate inextricably tied to Bergdahl's, Hatch said he would readily testify if he is called upon.

"I would tell them about the sacrifices of the group of individuals that went out with me

on the night I was wounded," Hatch said. "About the risks they took on behalf of Mr. Bergdahl because of his decisions."

"I would like Mr. Bergdahl and his family to hear what his decisions did to me and my family. I'd like to tell him about my injuries and about the difficulties my family and I continue to have."

When Hatch heard that Bergdahl would stand trial, he breathed a sigh of relief that the sergeant would be held accountable.

"I am just glad that in fact there was going to be a reckoning," he said. "I think it's really important as an American that he gets his day in court and gets to explain what was going on and to explain his actions."

"He deserves a fair trial," Hatch said. "That's what we fight for."

Fallen airmen remembered in Afghanistan

By HEATH DRUZIN
Stars and Stripes

BAGRAM AIR FIELD, Afghanistan — They were pioneers, leaders, practical jokers and mentors. The six airmen killed by a suicide bomber were remembered at an emotional ceremony Wednesday.

Fighting back tears, Air Force Special Agent Heather Garver addressed about 300 mourners who packed a clamshell tent at Bagram Air Field, near where the six were killed Monday.

“Our fallen leaders would want us to bounce back and continue with our mission,” she said.

Those killed in the attack were: Maj. Adrianna M. Vorderbruggen, 36, of Plymouth, Minn.; Staff Sgt. Michael A. Cinco, 28, of Mercedes, Texas; Staff Sgt. Peter W. Taub, 30, of Philadelphia; Staff Sgt. Chester J. McBride, 30, of Statesboro, Ga.; Tech. Sgt. Joseph G. Lemm, 45, of Bronx, N.Y.; and Staff Sgt. Louis M. Bonacasa, 31, of Coram, N.Y.

They were all part of the Air

Force Office of Special Investigations, a military law enforcement agency. The airmen were on what military officials have described as a “security patrol” Monday, when a suicide bomber plowed his motorcycle into their foot patrol and detonated his explosives. In addition to the dead, two U.S. airmen and an American interpreter were injured.

At the service Wednesday, the customary arrangement of helmet, rifle and boots were placed above photos of the slain airmen. After taps, a long procession of mourners lined up to touch their boots one last time and to say goodbye.

Some of the airmen’s friends and colleagues addressed the service with remembrances.

After repeal of the military’s “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy, Vorderbruggen was one of the first American servicemembers to marry in a same-sex ceremony. She is survived by her wife, Heather, and son, Jacob.

Garver described her as “eager” and “outgoing” and said she interacted with “wit”

and “candor.”

“She was a great leader and mentor,” she said.

Lemm, call sign “Maniac,” was a detective and a 15-year veteran of the New York City Police Department and served with the New York Air National Guard, NYPD Commissioner William J. Bratton said in a statement. He is survived by a son, Ryan.

His New York Air National Guard colleague, Bonacasa, call sign “Peacock,” “wanted to spread his wings and fly,” Master Sgt. Aaron Fredrick said during the memorial service. He is survived by his wife, Deborah, and daughter, Lilianna.

“Both of these men were warriors and defenders of the highest caliber,” Fredrick said.

Cinco was a “California guy” who sprinkled “bro” into his conversations, but his laid-back nature belied a sharp intelligence that always kept him “one step ahead,” Garver said. He is survived by his wife, Veronica.

“His vocabulary has been infectious, with the entire unit using ‘bro,’” Garver said.

McBride “hard-charged to

chase his dream,” had a master’s degree and had been accepted to the FBI Academy, which he was to start in the summer, Garver said.

And Taub made everyone laugh, recently musing about how to sneak a live sheep onto base to prepare for Thanksgiving dinner, Garver said. He is survived by his wife, Christina, and daughter, Penelope.

“He had an uncanny ability to make even the toughest situations tolerable,” Garver said.

The deaths were a rarity in this phase of the war, with foreign troops more focused on training and advising their Afghan counterparts than conducting combat operations. But the attack is also a reminder that, despite the White House’s calling the current U.S. mission here “noncombat,” troops still face grave dangers.

The deaths in Monday’s attack marked the biggest single loss of life due to hostile fire suffered by the U.S. military since the NATO combat mission ended last year.

Upside-down weather in US linked to El Nino

SEATTLE — A weather pattern partly linked with El Nino has turned winter upside-down across the U.S. during a week of heavy holiday travel, bringing spring-like warmth to the Northeast, a risk of tornadoes in the South and so much snow across the West that even skiing slopes have been overwhelmed.

In a reversal of a typical Christmas, forecasters expect New York to be in the mid-60s on the holiday — several degrees higher than Los Angeles.

Bob Oravec, lead forecaster with the National Weather Service, laid the credit with a strong El Nino pattern, the warming of surface waters in the Pacific Ocean near the equator. That’s helped drive warm air west to east and has kept colder air from the Arctic at bay, he said.

Door saves man after 67 hours in landslide

BEIJING — Squeezed into a narrow room under piles of debris for 67 hours, a young man was saved by a door that trapped his foot but gave him space to survive. Rescuers on Wednesday pulled him from the massive mudslide that hit part of a major manufacturing city in southern China.

In a feeble voice, migrant worker Tian Zeming, 21, told rescuers his name and that another person was buried near him, according to authorities. But medical and rescue staff found the second person had not survived. More than 70 people are still missing after the mountain of construction waste material and mud collapsed Sunday and flowed into an industrial park in Shenzhen.

From The Associated Press

Afghans seek air support in fight for Sangin district

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — The Afghan military has rushed reinforcements to a besieged southern district threatened for days with takeover by the Taliban, the country’s defense minister said Wednesday as he appealed for stepped-up NATO assistance and military support.

In a besieged army base in the embattled district of Sangin, an Afghan soldier described a dire situation, saying a handful of Afghan troops inside were fighting to the last, trying to keep the Taliban out.

As fighting in the southern Helmand province continued, Afghan army and police ar-

rived to help security forces pinned down for days in the area, said the minister, Masoom Stanekzai. Speaking to reporters in the Afghan capital, Kabul, Stanekzai said that the country’s overstretched security forces need the international military coalition’s help, especially air support.

Sangin is an important poppy-growing district in Helmand, which borders Pakistan and sits on transport routes for drugs, arms and other lucrative contraband. The Taliban, whose intensified war against Afghan forces has not slowed down with the colder season, have been besieging it for days and have nearly completely run over the district.

Akron edges Utah St. in Potato Bowl

Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho — When Akron placekicker Robert Stein lost his scholarship after his freshman year, he didn't quit. Instead, he fought his way back to the top of the depth chart without the free ride.

And after Stein made three field goals and earned MVP honors in leading Akron to a 23-21 victory over Utah State in the Famous Idaho Potato Bowl on Tuesday, coach Terry Bowden was delighted Stein stuck it out.

"He wasn't getting the job done during spring practice going into his sophomore year, so I told him that I was giving his scholarship to a freshman," Bowden said. "There were tears that day — from both of us. But he stayed with us and took his job back. And the next season when I knew I had to give him his scholarship back, he told me to let the other kicker keep it."

Stein endeared himself to Bowden for his sacrifice — he also became the school's all-time scoring leader with a 46-yard field goal with 8:15 remaining in the fourth quarter that proved to be the difference. He finished his career with 268 points.

Akron (8-5) finished with eight wins for the first time since moving up to FBS in 1987. The record came four years to the day after the school hired coach Terry Bowden.

While Stein provided the difference in scoring, it was Akron's defense that made the lead stick.

Utah State (6-7) mounted a comeback behind senior quarterback Chuckie Keeton, who threw a 2-yard touchdown pass to Hunter Sharp with 1:12 remaining to pull to 23-21. But Akron recovered the onside kick and then stopped one final flea flicker play by Utah State as time expired.

While Akron averaged less than 200 yards passing per game this season, the Zips turned to the air to score the game's first points.

After an incompletion, Zips quarterback Thomas Woodson hit A.J. Coney on a 42-yard pass play. On the next play, Akron dug into its bag of tricks, scoring when receiver Tyrell Goodman hit Woodson with a 14-yard pass for the 7-0 lead.

Andrew Pratt set a career high with nine receptions for 94 yards to lead the Zips. Hunter Sharp had 11 catches for 93

yards.

Devante Mays led Utah State on the ground with 124 yards on 12 carries, while Woodson rushed for 47 yards to lead Akron

Boca Raton Bowl

Toledo 32, No. 24 Temple 17: A pile of players wrestled to recover the onside kick at midfield, and the Temple Owls celebrated when an official signaled the ball was theirs.

Then the referee changed the call, and possession was awarded to Toledo.

"I thought we had the onside kick," Temple coach Matt Rhule said. "I still think we had it."

The ruling halted the Owls' comeback bid, and Temple lost to Toledo.

Temple (10-4) sputtered offensively for much of the night and lost for the fourth time in seven games after starting 7-0.

Toledo's Phillip Ely threw for 285 yards and two touchdowns, including an 80-yarder to Cody Thompson. The Rockets (10-2) positioned themselves to crack the final Top 25 for the first time since 2001,

the last season they won 10 games.

Frequent driving rain hampered both offenses, but Ely went 20 for 28 with no turnovers.

Linebacker Ja'Wuan Woodley's jarring tackle sent the ball squirting backward 15 yards through the end zone for an early safety, and the hits kept coming from the Rockets, who blitzed on virtually every play. Temple came into the game averaging 31 points but didn't reach the end zone until less than three minutes remained.

Jahad Thomas, who came into the game with 1,257 yards rushing for Temple, hurt his knee late in the first half and didn't return.

Thomas was held to 5 yards on eight carries, and his fumble led to the safety.

Toledo entered the game ranked third in the nation in red zone defense, and three times the Rockets held Temple to short field goals.

The Rockets were nursing a 12-9 lead in the final period when they started at their 20 following a 71-yard punt. Thompson slipped behind the secondary, caught Ely's pass in stride at his 40 and veered untouched to the end zone.

No. 1 Spartans need OT vs. Oakland

Associated Press

AUBURN HILLS, Mich. — Bryn Forbes responded just the way Denzel Valentine expected. If they couldn't win a big game together, as they had so often, Forbes would have to do enough for the two.

Behind Forbes' career-high 32 points, No. 1 Michigan State outlasted Oakland 99-93 in overtime on Tuesday night, the Spartans' first game since Valentine had minor knee surgery on Monday.

"A lot of guys stepped up," Forbes said. "A lot of guys did things they had to do."

No. 1 on that list was Forbes, who hit seven threes in nine attempts, including one in overtime that he celebrated by slapping hands with former Michigan State star Mateen Cleaves.

Eron Harris added 27 points for the Spartans (13-0), who locked up the best start in school history after trailing by as many as 15 points in the first half.

Kay Felder, the nation's No. 2 scorer, had 37 points and nine assists for the Golden Grizzlies (7-4). With his 38 points in a win at Washington, Felder had 75 points in less than 72 hours.

"I was just out there trying to play Oakland basketball the whole time," said Felder, who fouled out with 49 seconds left in overtime.

The Spartans trailed 50-37 at halftime but surged to a five-point lead late in regulation.

It took big plays at both ends from Matt Costello and a key basket from Deyonta Davis to get the job done for Michigan State in the extra 5 minutes. Costello finished with 10 points and 11 rebounds, while Davis had 11 points.

Jalen Hayes had 16 points and 11 rebounds for Oakland, which shot 50 percent from the field in the first half but just 26.9 in the second. The Golden Grizzlies didn't have a basket in seven attempts in the overtime.

No. 5 Virginia 63, California 62 (OT): London Perrantes is starting to make himself a third offensive threat for No. 5 Virginia's opponents.

The junior guard made a three-pointer with 10 seconds remaining in overtime Tuesday night and the host Cavaliers survived a poor shooting night and beat California for their ninth consecutive victory.

No. 2 Kansas 70, San Diego St. 57: Perry Ellis scored 14 of his 20 points in the first half. Kansas (10-1) outmatched the Aztecs (7-6) from the start.

No. 3 Oklahoma 88, Washington State 60: Buddy Hield scored 25 points as Oklahoma cruised in a quarterfinal-round game of the Diamond Head Classic in Honolulu.

No. 6 Xavier 78, Wake Forest 70: Trevon Bluiett scored 14 of his 17 points in the second half, and Xavier won in the Skip Prosser Classic.

Freshman Edmond Sumner added 13 of his season-high 21 points after halftime for the Musketeers (12-0). Debuting at the highest national ranking in school history, they trailed by 18 in the first half and 15 at halftime before shooting 59 percent in the second half.

No. 8 Arizona 85, Long Beach St. 70: Freshman Allonzo Trier scored 20 points to lead six Arizona players in double figures and the host Wildcats won

their final warmup before opening the Pac-12 season.

Arizona (12-1) won its 47th consecutive home game, the longest active streak in the country.

No. 9 Butler 88, S. Utah 52: Roosevelt Jones had 12 points and 10 rebounds for host Butler. Jones was one of four Bulldogs to score in double digits as Butler (10-1) shot 63 percent from the field (37-for-58) and led by as many as 41 points.

No. 11 Iowa State 81, No. 22 Cincinnati 79: Abdel Nader hit a three-pointer with 11 seconds left that put visiting Iowa State ahead, and Cincinnati missed three shots in the closing seconds, allowing the Cyclones to hold on.

The Cyclones (10-1) led by 13 points early in the second half before Troy Caupain led the Bearcats back. Kevin Johnson's 15-foot jumper gave Cincinnati (10-3) its first lead with 4:22 left.

No. 13 Miami 95, La Salle 49: Ivan Cruz Uceda scored 20 points and Tonye Jekiri had 10 points and 14 rebounds to lead visiting Miami (10-1) in a rout of La Salle.

The Explorers were handed the worst loss in the history of a program that started in the 1931-32 season.

No. 14 Purdue 68, Vanderbilt 55: A.J. Hammons had 21 points and 10 rebounds as host Purdue rallied to defeat Vanderbilt.

Rapheal Davis added 14 points and Caleb Swanigan had 13 for the Boilermakers (12-1), who extended their Mackey Arena winning streak to 15 games.

No. 16 Louisville 75, Missouri-Kansas City 47: Trey Lewis scored 17

points, Damion Lee added 14 and host Louisville (10-1) pulled away.

No. 17 Villanova 78, Delaware 48: Josh Hart had 18 points and 14 rebounds, freshman Jalen Brunson added 13 points and host Villanova (9-2) relied on stingy defense and timely three-point shooting to defeat Delaware.

No. 18 SMU 90, Kent State 74: Larry Brown returned from a nine-game suspension and SMU (10-0) remained unbeaten with a win in the Las Vegas Classic.

Brown was suspended after the NCAA ruled in September that a former men's basketball administrative assistant completed online course work for a student to meet eligibility requirements.

DePaul 82, No. 20 George Washington 61: Billy Garrett Jr. scored 20 points and Eli Cain added 16 to lead host DePaul to an upset of George Washington (10-2).

Aaron Simpson added 15 for the Blue Demons (6-6).

No. 24 Utah 105, Delaware State 58: Jordan Loveridge scored 14 points as the host Utes (10-2) romped past Delaware State.

No. 25 South Carolina 75, St. John's 61: Duane Notice scored 20 points to lead South Carolina (11-0) at Mohegan Sun Arena.

Navy 62, Furman 47: Tim Abruzzo scored a career-high 16 points with a career-high five three-pointers as host Navy used a big first half to beat Furman.

Tilman Dunbar scored 13 points, Jace Hogan added 10, and Will Kelly had three blocks for Navy (9-4).



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Panthers land 10 on Pro Bowl roster

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Cam Newton and the Carolina Panthers are two wins away from a perfect regular season. They are also a perfect 10 when it comes to the Pro Bowl.

The Panthers led the NFL with 10 players selected for the game on Tuesday.

Newton was picked for the third time, and five of the quarterback's teammates were first-time selections, including cornerback Josh Norman and linebacker Thomas Davis.

"It's truly an honor to be selected to the Pro Bowl," Davis said. "All the hard work and dedication I've put into the game has paid off. I'm extremely excited and I couldn't be more thankful to the fans who took their time to vote me in, as well as my fellow players and coaches.

"To have 10 guys selected says a lot about our team. It says a lot about our fans and how highly they thought of us this season, and I think it says a lot about the way our season has gone. I'm excited and thankful to be part of the 10."

Joining them will be center Ryan Kalil, who was picked

for the fifth time, and linebacker Luke Kuechly, who earned his third selection.

Seattle, Arizona and New England each had seven players selected. Cincinnati and Kansas City each had five players.

Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson was the only member of the offense picked. The rest of the selections were defensive end Michael Bennett, safety Kam Chancellor, special teamer Tyler Lockett, cornerback Richard Sherman, safety Earl Thomas and linebacker Bobby Wagner.

Patriots star Tom Brady was selected for the 11th time, most of any player this year. Among the other Patriots honored were tight end Rob Gronkowski and cornerback Malcolm Butler, whose last-minute interception clinched New England's Super Bowl win over Seattle.

NFC West champion Arizona was paced by quarterback Carson Palmer, receiver Larry Fitzgerald and cornerback Patrick Peterson. In addition, safety Tyrann Mathieu was selected, but will miss the game after tearing his ACL in Sunday's win over Philadelphia.

Wide receiver A.J. Green, defensive tackle Geno Atkins,

tight end Tyler Eifert, safety Reggie Nelson and offensive tackle Andrew Whitworth were selected from Cincinnati. It's the most Bengals selected since the 2005 season.

"I'm excited for our players who have been voted in," Bengals coach Marvin Lewis said. "They are both thrilled and honored to be recognized. It's a tribute to their teammates and the organization to have the number selected today and the high alternates."

Raiders safety Charles Woodson, who announced on Monday that he will retire after the season, was selected for the ninth time.

Twenty-five players selected were first-timers, including three rookies: the Rams' Todd Gurley, Lockett and the Chiefs' Marcus Peters. Peters was one of five Chiefs honored, including linebackers Tamba Hali and Justin Houston and safety Eric Berry, who was diagnosed with lymphoma and had to step away from the game late in the 2014 season.

Hall of Famers Jerry Rice and Michael Irvin will serve as alumni team captains for their Pro Bowl teams. The draft will be on Jan. 27. The game is Jan. 31 in Aloha Stadium in Honolulu.

Kobe lifts Lakers over Nuggets

Associated Press

DENVER — Kobe Bryant's turnaround was unstoppable, just like it was years ago. He played suffocating defense on the hot shooter, same as he did years ago.

For a night, Bryant was vintage Bryant again. No second thoughts about retirement, though.

"Zero. Not even an inkling," he said.

Bryant tied a season high with 31 points after missing a game with a sore right shoulder, and the Los Angeles Lakers rallied from a 21-point, first-half deficit to beat the short-handed Denver Nuggets 111-107 on Tuesday.

Bryant also had five assists and played stellar defense to help bottle up hot-shooting Will Barton, who had 23 points in the first half and finished with 25.

"I can still play a little bit," said Bryant, who was on the court for 32 minutes in the first game of a back-to-back. "It was a great test for me tonight to see if I could still play both ends of the floor."

The 37-year-old Bryant announced last month he would retire after the season. He received plenty of cheers during his

penultimate game in the Mile High City, including chants of "Kobe! Kobe!" in the waning seconds.

Up 103-100 with 1:23 remaining, Bryant hit two free throws and then a jumper to seal the Lakers' fifth win of the season.

"He's still a guy that sees the floor better than everybody," coach Byron Scott said. "He sees it in slow motion."

But that defensive performance. Now that impressed Scott.

"Barton was tearing us up in the first half," Scott said. "I asked Kobe if he wanted to guard him. He's like, 'Yeah, I got him.' Two points after that. He just did a fabulous job."

Raptors 103, Mavericks 99: DeMar DeRozan scored 28 points and Bismack Biyombo had a career-high 20 rebounds, leading host Toronto to the victory.

Kyle Lowry added 17 points, 10 rebounds and seven assists for the Raptors, who swept the two-game season series against Dallas.

Dirk Nowitzki led the way for Dallas with 20 points and seven rebounds.

Pistons 93, Heat 92: Kentavious Caldwell-Pope's jumper with 55.5 seconds left put Detroit ahead to stay, and the Pistons rallied from 18 points down for the road win.

Reggie Jackson led the Pistons with 18 points, while Stanley Johnson and Caldwell-Pope each had 14. The Pistons were 15-for-29 from three-point range, outscoring Miami 45-12 in that department.

Dwyane Wade finished with 19 points, and Hassan Whiteside had 16 points and 16 rebounds for Miami.

Grizzlies 104, 76ers 90: Marc Gasol scored 19 points for visiting Memphis, and Mike Conley had 18 points and six assists.

The Grizzlies had five players score in double figures. Courtney Lee had 15 points, reserve Zach Randolph added 14 points and eight rebounds, and Matt Barnes finished with 12 points and 10 boards.

Jahlil Okafor scored 18 points and Hollis Thompson contributed 16 for Philadelphia, which lost its 11th straight game. Now the 76ers start a six-game trip, and they have lost 22 in a row on the road.

Osweler gets start

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. — The Denver Broncos are sticking with Brock Osweler.

Coach Gary Kubiak informed the team Wednesday that Osweler will make his sixth straight start Monday night.

Denver (10-4) hosts the Cincinnati Bengals (11-3).

Peyton Manning hasn't played since Nov. 15 because of a torn plantar fascia in his left foot. Manning returned to practice last week but spent his two days on the field doing individual drills and running the scout team. He didn't practice Friday.

The Broncos are 3-2 with Osweler, who's been victimized by a leaky line and big drops in back-to-back losses.

Pats sign RB Jackson

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — The New England Patriots have signed veteran free agent running back Steven Jackson.

The 32-year-old hasn't played an NFL game all season and participated in his first practice with the team on Tuesday.

Jackson helps to bolster a depleted backfield after season-ending injuries to LeGarrette Blount and Dion Lewis.

Jackson was the 24th overall pick of the St. Louis Rams in the 2004 draft. In nine seasons in St. Louis, he became the franchise's leading rusher with 10,138 yards and had 56 rushing touchdowns.

In 2013, Jackson signed a multi-year deal with the Atlanta Falcons. Jackson had 1,250 yards and 12 touchdowns over two seasons in Atlanta before he was released on Feb. 25. He's 18th on the NFL's rushing list with 11,388 yards and has 68 rushing touchdowns.

Franchione retires

SAN MARCOS, Texas — Dennis Franchione, who started the turnaround at TCU before sudden departures as coach at Alabama and Texas A&M, retired quietly Tuesday after his second stint at Texas State.

Franchione, 64, spent the last five of his 30 seasons as a head coach at Texas State, where he returned after a three-year hiatus following his abrupt resignation the night the Aggies beat rival Texas in his final game in College Station in 2007.

"My heart and appreciation goes out to our football players at Texas State, and all of those I have been fortunate enough to coach during my career," Franchione said. "I feel very strongly about what this game does for young people."

From The Associated Press

Blues blank Bruins before 3-day break

Associated Press

BOSTON — The St. Louis Blues were still smarting when they got to Boston after blowing a three-goal lead a night earlier. They didn't want to have to think about that during the extended holiday break.

Jake Allen stopped 32 shots for his fifth shutout, Vladimir Tarasenko and Robby Fabbri scored third-period goals and the Blues rebounded by cooling off the Bruins with a 2-0 victory Tuesday night.

"It always fun to go win before the holidays and go have a little egg nog with a smile on your face," Blues wing Ryan Reaves said. "Especially after yesterday's loss, you definitely don't want to go into the holidays thinking about that."

The Blues lost 4-3 in Philadelphia on Monday night. They stuck to their system and beat Boston to head into a three-day Christmas break with a victory before they have a home-and-home set with Dallas — the Western Conference's top team.

Stars 4, Blackhawks 0: Patrick Sharp had a goal and an assist in his first regular-season game against his former team, leading host Dallas to a victory against Chicago.

Sharp scored 11 seconds into the third period to give the Stars a 2-0 lead in what had been a game with few chances between the highest-scoring teams in the Western Conference.

Sharks 5, Kings 3: Joe Pavelski scored the tying and go-ahead goals 92 seconds apart in the third period, and defenseman Brent Burns had two goals and an assist to help visiting San Jose beat Los Angeles.

Wild 2, Canadiens 1: Jason Pominville and Charlie Coyle scored as host Minnesota hand Montreal its fifth straight loss.

Rangers 3, Ducks 2 (OT): Mats Zuccarello scored a power-play goal at 2:37 of overtime and slumping New York beat visiting Anaheim for its fourth win in 15 games.

Canucks 2, Lightning 1: Daniel Sedin scored the go-ahead goal in the third period, Jacob Markstrom made 26 saves and Vancouver downed host Tampa Bay.

Devils 4, Red Wings 3: Kyle Palmieri had a goal and an assist, Cory Schneider made 25 saves and New Jersey defeated host Detroit.

Panthers 2, Senators 1: Aleksander Barkov scored the winning goal in a shootout to lift streaking Florida over visiting Ottawa.

Coyotes 3, Maple Leafs 2: Shane Doan scored twice in a 14-second span of the first period and assisted on the go-ahead goal, leading host Arizona over Toronto.

Flames 4, Jets 1: Johnny Gaudreau had his second hat trick of the season and Calgary beat Winnipeg, tying a franchise record with its 10th straight victory at home.