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Afghan official tells of revenge beheadings

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Fighters from the Islamic State group and a militia controlled by a prominent lawmaker have beheaded a total of eight men in tit-for-tat revenge killings in the eastern border province of Nangarhar, an Afghan official said Sunday.

Four men from each side had been decapitated after being caught by the opposing side during battles Saturday, Ghalib Mujahid, the governor of the Achin district, said.

During a fight with gunmen affiliated with the Islamic State group, he said, four members of a militia loyal to Zahir Qadir,

deputy speaker of parliament, were taken hostage and beheaded.

In revenge, four of five Islamic State group gunmen held by Qadir's militia were beheaded, Mujahid said. Their heads were placed on piles of stones along a main road through Achin, he said.

It is not unusual for powerful figures in Afghanistan to control personal militias, though the central government and international organizations such as the United Nations have expressed concern about a proliferation of armed groups that are not part of the government's security force.

Achin is one of four districts that Afghan officials say has come under Islamic State control in recent months. Government forces have returned to the area to try to dislodge the extremists, who also fought fierce battles with the rival Taliban in the region during the summer months.

The Islamic State group has a presence in other volatile regions of Afghanistan, but Nangarhar appears to be their main power base.

Mujahid said the decision to behead the Islamic State gunmen had been made by Qadir's militia leaders.

"We condemn the act of

Daesh, and of course we condemn the act of Qadir's men here," he said, using an alternative name for the Islamic State group. "It is not acceptable for either side to act like this."

Meanwhile, in southern Helmand province — where the Taliban are fighting government forces for control of a number of districts — a roadside bomb killed a local police commander and two of his bodyguards, said provincial police spokesman Shah Mahmood Ashna.

He said two other police officers were wounded in the explosion in the provincial capital of Lashkar Gah.

Toy drones interfering with military operations

The Washington Post

The Air Force revolutionized drone warfare. Now it's finding itself on the defensive. Rogue toy drones are starting to interfere with military operations at several bases across the country. With sales of consumer drones expected to approach 700,000 this year, military officials say they are worried about the potential for an aviation disaster.

Last month, an Air Force A-29 Super Tucano aircraft reported a near-collision with a small rogue drone over the Grand Bay Bombing and Gunnery Range in Georgia, Air Force officials said.

In June, an Air Force KC-10 aerial refueling tanker flying over the Philadelphia suburbs at 3,800 feet was forced to take evasive action and barely avoided striking a football-sized drone that passed within 10 feet of its right wing, officials said.

There have been at least 35 cases of small drones interfer-

ing with military aircraft or operating too close to military airfields in 2015, according to reports filed with the armed forces or the Federal Aviation Administration.

Cmdr. William Marks, a Navy spokesman at the Pentagon, said Navy pilots or air-traffic controllers at U.S. bases reported close calls or encounters with unauthorized drones 12 times in the past three months.

One airfield that has experienced multiple risky encounters with drones is the Marine Corps Air Station in Yuma, Ariz.

In May, a Marine Corps Harrier jet coming in for a landing at Yuma reported a small blue drone about 100 feet off its right side. In July, a Navy T-45 Goshawk training aircraft flew within 100 feet of a drone about 5 miles west of Yuma, according to FAA records.

Prior to last year, close encounters with rogue drones

were almost unheard of. But rapid advances in technology and falling prices have led to a boom in sales — and a corresponding surge in reports of air-traffic chaos.

Under FAA guidelines, drone pilots flying for recreation are supposed to keep their aircraft below 400 feet and at least 5 miles away from airports. Regulators, however, have been largely unable to enforce those guidelines.

The FAA on Monday began requiring all recreational drone owners to register online with the agency and affix identification numbers on their aircraft.

More than 45,000 people registered in the first two days, overwhelming the system and forcing the FAA to take it offline temporarily for repairs. The FAA said as many as 400,000 small drones could be sold during the holidays.

The Air Force last week began to educate its pilots, flight crews and air-traffic control-

lers about the hazards posed by small drones.

Steven Pennington, the Air Force's director of bases, ranges and airspace, said many consumer drones are only 2 or 3 feet in diameter. Pilots usually can't see them until they're within 600 feet, giving the pilots just a second or two to react.

According to a contract solicitation, the Air Force Global Strike Command wants to buy jammers that would interfere with drones' navigational signals and force them to return to where they launched from.

Pennington likened the aviation threat posed by small drones to those of large birds, which can weigh anywhere from 2 to 15 pounds. The difference, he said, is that drones contain hard plastic or metal, like their lithium battery packs.

If a drone were to get sucked into a military jet engine, he said, "we're relatively certain it would be a significant problem."

Militants slow Iraqi advance on Ramadi

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Islamic State fighters are putting up a tough fight in the militant-held city of Ramadi, slowing the advance of Iraqi forces, a senior Iraqi commander said Sunday.

Iraq launched the long-awaited operation to retake the Anbar provincial capital, which was captured by Islamic State militants in May, but after an initial push across the Euphrates River their progress stalled.

Gen. Ismail al-Mahlawi,

head of the Anbar military operations, told The Associated Press that the advance was hampered by suicide bombers, snipers and booby traps.

Iraqi troops will “need days” to get to the city’s central government complex, said al-Mahlawi, adding that the troops were about a half-mile from the complex Sunday.

Al-Mahlawi said he could neither confirm nor deny media reports that Islamic State fighters had pulled out of the government complex by nightfall

Sunday. But he cited residents in the area as telling his troops that the Islamic State militants had withdrawn from the neighborhood of Albu Alwan, adjacent to the complex.

Another officer said the Iraqi army has yet to gain full control of a single Ramadi neighborhood. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to reporters.

On Tuesday, Iraqi security forces reported progress in recapturing some areas in the western city of Ramadi, 80 miles west of Baghdad, from

Islamic State militants.

The extremists control large swaths of land in western and northern Iraq and in neighboring Syria. The Islamic State group has declared a self-styled caliphate on the territory under its control.

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

Fort Hood’s ‘hug lady’ dies

The Washington Post

She was known as the “hug lady,” and for a generation of soldiers deployed from Fort Hood, Texas, to Iraq and Afghanistan, the diminutive grandmother was a steadying presence over the past 12 years.

Elizabeth Laird doled out hundreds of thousands of hugs, embracing soldiers as they shipped off and then greeting them when they arrived back home. She made her hugs available at all hours of the day, regardless of the weather, becoming a military legend.

“This is my way of thanking them for what they do for our country,” Laird told FoxNews.com last month. “I wasn’t hugging in 2003. I used to just shake their hands. But one day, a soldier hugged me, and that’s the

way it started.”

For much of that time, Laird was quietly waging a battle of her own against breast cancer, as The Washington Post’s Colby Itkowitz reported after Laird was hospitalized in early November. On Thursday, Laird succumbed to her illness, passing away at Metroplex Hospital in Killeen, Texas, according to Fox News. She was 83.

Col. Christopher C. Garver, a military spokesman, released a statement that read in part:

“It is with heavy hearts that we express our gratitude for Elizabeth, not only for her service with the U.S. Air Force, but also in recognition of her tireless efforts to show her appreciation for our Soldiers and her recognition of their many sacrifices.”

Texas now in eye of storm

Associated Press

GARLAND, Texas — Tornadoes that swept through the Dallas area caused substantial damage and at least 11 people died either from the storm or related traffic accidents. Dozens of people were injured in the storms as well.

It’s the latest of a succession of freakish winter-weather events across the country that could include heavy snow and massive flooding Sunday from north Texas through eastern Oklahoma, eastern Kansas, western Arkansas and parts of Missouri. Days of tumultuous weather in the Southeast have led to 29 deaths overall — those in Texas plus 18 total in Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee and Arkansas.

The full extent of damage in

Texas isn’t yet known along a nearly 40-mile stretch from 20 miles south of Dallas to northeast of the city, though there were reports of it blowing the roofs off homes, mangling vehicles, damaging churches, downing power lines and toppling trees.

National Weather Service survey teams headed out Sunday to determine the number and strength of the tornadoes, of which meteorologist Matt Bishop believed there were multiple.

Garland Police Lt. Pedro Barineau said Sunday morning that eight people have died and 15 were injured in Garland, which is about 20 miles northeast of Dallas. That death toll went up by three since Saturday night.

Analysts: Design changes likely to delay N. Korean missile

BY AARON KIDD

Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Design changes to a North Korean missile capable of reaching the U.S. mainland should increase its reliability but are likely to delay deployment for at least five years, according to a Washington-based

think tank.

The KN-08 intercontinental ballistic missile, which was publicly displayed during an October military parade, has been shortened and simplified, according to 38 North, a website run by Johns Hopkins University’s School of Advanced International Studies that monitors North Korean activities. A

blunt warhead that is more likely to survive re-entry replaces a narrow, pointed design, and the missile’s three stages have been reduced to two.

“The underlying technology is mostly the same — a blend of North Korean engineering and Cold War leftovers from the Soviet Union — but the structural design has been substantially

improved,” the report said.

The new KN-08 would have a range similar to its predecessor — about 5,600 miles, enough to reach the U.S. West Coast — with an estimated success rate of 50 to 60 percent, the report said. The previous model’s rate was estimated at 30 to 40 percent.

Redskins clinch NFC title

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Wearing his “NFC East Champions” hat, Kirk Cousins made sure he got the last word.

Cousins finished his news conference, turned on his way out and screamed: “How many of y’all picked us to win the division?” It sounded like his “You like that?” rant two months ago.

The Washington Redskins are division champions, thanks to Cousins and his right arm.

Cousins threw four touchdown passes and had a season-high 365 yards and the Redskins beat the Philadelphia Eagles 38-24 on Saturday night to win their first division title in three years, completing a worst-to-first season.

“This is the most satisfied I’ve been as a player,” Cousins said. “It’s a big accomplishment. Now we need to build from here.”

Only 4-12 in 2014, the Redskins (8-7) began their turnaround when Cousins rallied them from a 24-0 first-half deficit to a 31-30 win over Tampa Bay on Oct. 25. After that game, he yelled at reporters: “You like that?” It’s become a rallying cry for the Redskins and their fans, who continued the chant for several minutes after the game.

“We felt like we were an up-and-com-

ing football team and could compete with anyone,” coach Jay Gruden said.

The Redskins have won three straight for the first time since a seven-game winning streak helped them secure the division in 2012 in Robert Griffin III’s rookie year.

DeAngelo Hall returned DeMarco Murray’s fumble 17 yards for a momentum-changing TD in the third quarter. Cousins threw TD passes to Chris Thompson and Pierre Garcon and a pair to Jordan Reed.

The Eagles (6-9) entered the game in control of their playoff hopes. They needed to beat the Redskins and Giants next week to win the East. Washington’s win also eliminated New York (6-8).

“I think we’re good enough,” Coach Chip Kelly said. “We just have to put them in better position to make plays. It’s 100 percent on my shoulders. It’s unacceptable.”

Two teams have clinched division crowns in Philadelphia in six days. Arizona won the NFC West with a 40-17 win over the Eagles last Sunday night.

While the Redskins head to the playoffs, the Eagles and Kelly face a challenging offseason. Kelly took control of personnel decisions last year and overhauled a team that went 10-6 in each of his first two seasons.

It clearly didn’t work out.

Meanwhile, Gruden made a gutsy call

in August to bench Griffin and give the starting job to Cousins.

It paid off.

Cousins was outstanding down the stretch with 16 TD passes and only two interceptions in the last seven games. He showed resolve after a mental blunder at the end of the first half cost the Redskins at least three points.

Cousins took a knee with no time-outs and 6 seconds left from the Eagles 6 with a 16-10 lead. He realized his mistake and tried to spike the ball, but the clock ran out. He made up for it in the second half.

“I’m very proud of Kirk,” Gruden said. “He came in and kept his composure just like he has all year. Put his nose to the grindstone.”

Cousins tossed a 12-yard touchdown pass to Thompson to give Washington a 23-10 lead. He converted three third-down passes on the series after Jaylen Watkins dropped an interception.

The Eagles missed a chance to take the lead early in the second quarter when Sam Bradford overthrew a wide-open Zach Ertz on third-and-9. It would’ve been a 60-yard TD.

They missed another opportunity on the following series when Nelson Agholor dropped a 28-yard TD pass and settled for Caleb Sturgis’ 34-yard field goal that cut it to 13-10.

Manning denies report he used HGH

(c) 2015, *The Washington Post*

Denver Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning defended his reputation Sunday, vehemently denying an Al Jazeera report that he obtained human growth hormone from an anti-aging clinic through his wife as he was recovering from multiple neck surgeries in 2011 as a member of the Indianapolis Colts.

In an interview Sunday morning, a breathless Manning, whose throwing workout was interrupted, told ESPN’s Lisa Salters: “I think I rotated, Lisa, between being angry, furious ... but disgusted is really how I feel, sickened by it. I’m not sure I understand how someone can make something up about somebody, admit that he’d made it up and somehow it gets published in a story. I don’t understand that. Maybe you can explain it to me, somebody else can.”

“It’s completely fabricated, complete trash, garbage — there’s more adjectives I’d like to be able to use. It makes me sick that it brings Ashley into it, her medical history, her medical privacy being violated. That makes me sick. I don’t understand that.”

Ari Fleischer, the former White House press secretary who now heads a sports communication company and has been hired as an adviser to Manning, told the Denver Post on Saturday night that the report, which was part of a probe into doping in international sports, was “junk journalism.”

Meanwhile, Major League Baseball and the NFL have indicated they will investigate the claims in the report, which also names baseball players Ryan Zimmerman of the Washington Nationals and Ryan Howard of the Philadelphia Phillies, as well as NFL players James Harrison, Clay Matthews, Mike Neal and Julius Peppers.

The report, which was shared in advance with the Huffington Post, alleged that Manning received HGH, which has been banned from the NFL since the 2011 collective bargaining agreement, from an Indianapolis anti-aging clinic, and had it delivered to his wife, Ashley, to keep his name off the shipments. The accusation came from British hurdler Liam Collins, who, working undercover, spoke with Charlie Sly, an Austin, Texas, pharmacist who worked at the Guyer Institute. Sly allegedly named Manning and other high-profile athletes as recipients of HGH.

Sly has since recanted, saying Collins secretly recorded him without his knowledge or consent and telling ESPN that Collins had used information he had “made up.” On Sunday, he told ESPN that “I was trying to pull one over on Collins to see if he had any idea of what he was talking about.”

“There’s no truth to it,” Fleischer told the Denver Post. “What they have is a well-known con man from England who secretly recorded a former intern.”

Nebraska powers to Foster Farms win

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Tommy Armstrong Jr. threw a touchdown pass and ran for another score to help Nebraska cap a losing season by beating UCLA 37-29 in the Foster Farms Bowl on Saturday night.

The Cornhuskers (6-7) scored 30 straight points after falling behind 21-7 early to overpower the Bruins (8-5) and provide a happy ending to coach Mike Riley’s first season.

Stanley Morgan Jr. gave Nebraska the lead for good with a one-handed, 22-yard catch in the third quarter and Imani Cross, Terrell Newby and Andy Janovich all ran for scores for the Cornhuskers.

Armstrong completed 12 of 19 passes for 174 yards and ran for 76 more to lead the way for Nebraska, which had a season high with 326 yards rushing.

Josh Rosen threw for 319 yards and two touchdowns for the Bruins.

Independence Bowl

Virginia Tech 55, Tulsa 52: At Shreveport, La., Michael Brewer threw for 344 yards, Isaiah Ford had 227 yards receiving and Frank Beamer won in his coaching finale, leading Virginia Tech past Tulsa.

The 69-year-old Beamer announced in November he would retire following the season. He finished with a 238-121-2 record at Virginia Tech over 29 seasons.

The 107 points were the most in Independence Bowl history. Ford’s 227

yards receiving on 12 catches set an Independence Bowl record.

Pinstripe Bowl

Duke 44, Indiana 41 (OT): At New York, Ross Martin kicked a 36-yard field goal in overtime, and Duke won a bowl game for the first time in 54 years with a victory over Indiana in the Pinstripe Bowl at Yankee Stadium.

After Martin made his kick on the first possession of the extra period, the Hoosiers’ Griffin Oakes missed a 38-yard attempt to hand the Blue Devils their first bowl victory since the 1961 Cotton Bowl.

Oakes’ try sailed over the right upright and was ruled wide. Oakes protested that it was good, but the kick could not be reviewed, and Duke’s players poured onto the field to celebrate.

Sun Bowl

Washington State 20, Miami 14: At El Paso, Texas, Luke Falk threw two touchdown passes to lead Washington State past Miami in the snowy Sun Bowl.

Erik Powell added field goals of 30 and 25 yards to help the Cougars (9-4) win a bowl game for the first time since the 2003 Holiday Bowl.

Miami (8-5) lost its sixth consecutive bowl game.

Washington State led 20-7 at the half and looked in total control, limiting Miami to three first downs over the second and third quarters.

The Hurricanes rallied in a blizzard in the fourth. Braxton Berrios’ 60-yard end-

around run set up Mark Walton’ 5-yard scoring run that cut it to 20-14 with 13:10 left.

Miami had a 3-yard touchdown pass from Brad Kaaya to Stacy Coley called back on a penalty with 5:14 to play. Two players later, Washington State’s Marcellus Pippins recovered Walton’s fumble at the 5. After a Cougars punt, the Hurricanes were at the Washington State 28, but an end-over-end halfback pass from Joe Yearby was easily intercepted by Shalom Lunai with 2:58 to play.

Heart of Dallas Bowl

Washington 41, Southern Miss 31: At Dallas, Myles Gaskin broke a third-quarter tie with an 86-yard run and had a season-high 181 yards and four touchdowns to help Washington beat Southern Mississippi.

Gaskin’s other scores came on 2- and 1-yard runs in the first quarter and a 13-yarder in the fourth. On the 86-yarder, the freshman took a handoff inside, broke to the left sideline and shook off one final defender at the Southern Miss 35.

St. Petersburg Bowl

Marshall 16, UConn 10: At St. Petersburg, Fla., Chase Litton completed 23 for 34 passes for 218 yards and a touchdown in Marshall’s victory over Connecticut in the St. Petersburg Bowl.

Nick Smith made three field goals for Marshall (10-3), the last a 32-yarder with 1:44 to play that capped a 13-play, 80-yard drive that lasted 6:35.



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Sixers get 2nd win of season

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Ish Smith was just traded from New Orleans to Philadelphia, so he knows each win is special. And this one came against one of his former teams.

Smith scored 14 points in the first game of his second stint with the lowly 76ers, who beat the Phoenix Suns 111-104 on Saturday night for just their second win of the season.

"I didn't come from a situation where we were winning a lot in New Orleans, either," Smith said. "For me a win is a win and we have to keep coming closer together, through wins, through losses. If we do that, we will put us in a good position to win games."

Smith, who played 25 games for Philadelphia last season and averaged 12 points and six assists, got the start and was 6 for 15 from the floor. He was acquired in a trade with the Pelicans on Christmas Eve.

Isaiah Canaan scored 22 points and reserve Nik Stauskas had 17 for the 76ers, who went 12 for 27 from 3-point range. Carl Landry added 16 points, and Nerlens Noel added 14 points and 11 rebounds.

Philadelphia (2-30) snapped a 12-game losing streak with its first win since Dec. 1. The Sixers also stopped a 23-game road slide dating to last season.

The Suns lost leading scorer Eric Bledsoe to a sprained left knee in the first half. Coach Jeff Hornacek said Bledsoe had already left the arena for an MRI after the game but added team doctors didn't think it was a torn ACL.

Brandon Knight led Phoenix with 21 points. Rookie Devin Booker scored a career-high 19 points, and Jon Leuer had 14 points and nine rebounds. The Suns have lost four in a row and six of seven.

Bledsoe got hurt with 7:40 left in the second quarter and had to be helped to the locker room. He entered Saturday averaging 20.9 points and had four when he left the game.

The Sixers built a 16-point lead in the fourth quarter. The Suns got it down to a six-point deficit twice in the last two minutes, but Philadelphia was able to hang on.

Trail Blazers 105, Cavaliers 76: Allen Crabbe scored a career-high 26 points, and host Portland held LeBron James to just 12 points.

Crabbe scored 21 in the first half, helping Portland (12-20) stop a five-game

losing streak. He was 4-for-6 from three-point range for the night.

C.J. McCollum had 16 points for the Trail Blazers, while Mason Plumlee had 11 points and 14 rebounds.

Mavericks 118, Bulls 111: J.J. Barea made a career-high seven three-pointers and finished with 26 points coming off his first 30-point game, powering host Dallas to the win.

Derrick Rose led the Bulls with 25 points, including nine in the fourth quarter, but had a key turnover before getting called for a 5-second violation when Chicago had a chance to tie in the final 11 seconds.

Clippers 109, Jazz 104: Playing without an injured Blake Griffin, J.J. Redick scored 25 points and Paul Pierce had 20 to lead Los Angeles to the road victory.

The Clippers learned before the game that Griffin, their leading scorer, had a partially torn left quadriceps tendon and is expected to miss at least two weeks.

Pelicans 110, Rockets 108: Anthony Davis had 24 points, 13 rebounds and three blocked shots for host New Orleans, and Tyreke Evans stole Trevor Ariza's inbounds pass in the final seconds.

Eric Gordon scored 26 for the Pelicans, hitting six three-pointers as New Orleans shot 13 of 24 from long range. Ryan Anderson scored 16, and Evans finished with 11 points and 13 assists.

James Harden scored 25 points for Houston.

Wizards 111, Nets 96: John Wall had 22 points and 13 assists, Marcin Gortat scored 25 points, and visiting Washington earned its fourth straight victory.

Rookie Jarell Eddie made four three-pointers and scored 12 points in the fourth quarter of his NBA debut, helping the Wizards blow open what was a two-point game after three.

Hawks 117, Knicks 98: Paul Millsap scored 22 points, Al Horford added 19 points and host Atlanta won its sixth straight game.

Carmelo Anthony, returning after missing one game with a sprained right ankle, finished with 18 points and 12 rebounds for the Knicks. New York has dropped three straight and seven of 11.

Spurs 101, Nuggets 86: Kawhi Leonard had 20 points, and San Antonio rebounded from a rare loss.

The Spurs extended their franchise record for consecutive wins at home to 26, including a record 17 straight to open this season.

LaMarcus Aldridge had 12 points and

nine rebounds for the Spurs, and Boris Diaw had 16 points.

Hornets 98, Grizzlies 92: Kemba Walker scored 11 of his 22 points in the fourth quarter, and Charlotte held on for the home victory.

Nicolas Batum had 20 points and 11 rebounds for the Hornets, who trailed 81-76 early in the final period. P.J. Hairston added 14 points, and Jeremy Lin had 13.

Heat 108, Magic 101: Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh each scored 24 points, leading visiting Miami to the victory.

Goran Dragic added 22 points as Miami won for the third time in four games, including a 94-88 overtime victory against New Orleans on Christmas. Gerald Green scored 15 points, and Bosh also had 10 rebounds.

Nik Vucevic led Orlando with 22 points and 10 rebounds.

Celtics 99, Pistons 93: Avery Bradley scored 18 points, Isaiah Thomas had 17 points and nine assists, and Boston got the win on the road.

Each of Boston's starters scored in double figures, and reserve Evan Turner added 13 points.

Detroit pulled within five in the last minute, and Turner was called for an offensive foul with 36 seconds left. Reggie Jackson's three-pointer then trimmed Boston's lead to 95-93, but former Piston Jonas Jerebko hit a baseline jumper with 10.7 seconds left.

Raptors 111, Bucks 90: DeMar DeRozan scored 22 points and Terrence Ross had 21, leading Toronto to the road win.

Luis Scola had 17 points and 11 rebounds for the Raptors, and Bismack Biyombo added 14 points and 12 rebounds. DeMarre Carroll, who missed the last nine games with a bruised right knee, scored seven points as Toronto won its third straight over Milwaukee.

Pacers 102, Timberwolves 88: Monta Ellis had 22 points and six rebounds to help visiting Indiana rally for the victory.

Paul George scored 18 points on 7 of 16 shooting for Indiana, and reserve Jordan Hill scored 12 points. The Pacers snapped a three-game skid.

Karl-Anthony Towns had 24 points and eight rebounds for Minnesota.

Ulis, Ky. knock off Louisville

Associated Press

LEXINGTON, Ky. — Kentucky's shortest player led the Wildcats past their biggest rival.

Point guard Tyler Ulis scored 21 points, and No. 12 Kentucky held off 16th-ranked Louisville's rally for a 75-73 win Saturday to give John Calipari his 200th victory as the Wildcats' coach.

"It was a great team performance and really a good win," Ulis said. "We played with a lot more enthusiasm from the start."

Damion Lee, who led the Cardinals with 27 points, was well off on a potential winning three-point attempt at the buzzer. Kentucky (10-2) led by 16 points early in the second half before Louisville came almost all the way back.

"The first half, we gave up a lot of baskets, a lot of offensive rebounds, a lot of threes," Lee said. "We weren't really playing our game. We came back. We fought back. It was a very, very close game against a great team. We just didn't execute down the stretch."

The Cardinals (11-2) had a chance to tie or take the lead with less than a minute left, but Trey Lewis was called for traveling. The Wildcats then committed a shot-clock violation to give Louisville one more chance.

Kentucky had not played since a 74-67 loss to Ohio State last week.

"I really believe having Christmas off for these guys was great," Calipari said. "(It) cleared their minds."

Alex Poythress scored 14 points for Kentucky. Dominique Hawkins added 13 and Jamal Murray had 12.

Kentucky's second-leading scorer, Isaiah Briscoe, sat out after hurting his ankle during pregame warmups.

Freshman guard Charles Matthews started in place of Briscoe, who averages 11.5 points, but it was Hawkins who gave the Wildcats a spark in his absence. Hawkins hit a clutch three-pointer and made two free throws in the final three minutes to keep the Wildcats in front.

Twice after Louisville pulled within two in the last five minutes, Kentucky hit a big three-pointer — one by Ulis and another from Hawkins.

Holtby, Caps down struggling Canadiens

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Coming out of the Christmas break, the Washington Capitals were determined to sustain the momentum they achieved before the four-day vacation.

They were also intent on keeping Montreal from emerging from its December funk.

The Capitals achieved both those objectives Saturday night, jumping to an early lead and riding the solid goaltending of Braden Holtby to a 3-1 victory.

Holtby stopped 29 shots and Jason Chimera contributed a goal and an assist in the Capitals' seventh straight victory.

The key goal, however, just might have been the one from Evgeny Kuznetsov that enabled Washington to take a 1-0 lead into the locker room after the first period.

"We had a successful run before we had this break and we wanted to extend it," Capitals coach Barry Trotz said. "On the other hand, Montreal hasn't been going well. Sometimes a break can be cleansing a little bit, so we talked about trying to win the first period."

The Canadiens never pulled out of the first-period deficit and lost their sixth straight. Montreal has been outscored 22-6 during the skid and has dropped 10 of 11 since Dec. 1.

"We need to come in this room after the first period and not be in a hole," forward Max Pacioretty said. "That's the truth. If we're not scoring goals, we can't get scored on. It sounds simple, but we need to come into this room after the first period and feel good about ourselves."

Off to the best start in franchise history, Washington leads the Eastern Conference

with a 26-6-2 record and has won eight straight at home. Jay Beagle also scored for the Capitals, who are 19-1 when scoring first and 12-0 when leading after the first period.

Blues 3, Stars 2 (SO): David Backes scored in the ninth round of a long shootout to lift host St. Louis over Dallas.

Alexander Steen and Robby Fabbri scored in regulation and Jake Allen made 22 saves for the Blues, who earned their second win over the Stars this season.

Sabres 6, Bruins 3: Jack Eichel scored twice in his return to Boston, Jamie McGinn had the go-ahead goal with 5:36 left and Buffalo rallied from a two-goal deficit in the third period.

Red Wings 3, Predators 2: Brendan Smith had a goal and an assist to lead Detroit past host Nashville.

Lightning 5, Blue Jackets 2: Steven Stamkos had two power-play goals and an assist during the second period and host Tampa Bay beat Columbus.

Kings 4, Coyotes 3 (OT): Anze Kopitar scored 36 seconds into overtime to give Los Angeles a victory over host Arizona.

Penguins 3, Wild 1: Sidney Crosby had a goal and an assist in his return from a one-game injury absence, and visiting Pittsburgh defeated Minnesota.

Hurricanes 3, Devils 1: Justin Faulk scored the go-ahead goal 8:17 into the third period to lift Carolina over visiting New Jersey.

Canucks 2, Oilers 1 (OT): Jannik Hansen scored his second goal of the game at 4:01 and host Vancouver edged Edmonton for its first overtime victory this season.