

STARS AND STRIPES®

Wednesday, December 30, 2015

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Campbell: More troops in Afghanistan

By TOM VANDEN BROOK

USA Today

WASHINGTON — Afghanistan's security situation is so tenuous that the top U.S. commander there wants to keep as many U.S. troops there as possible through 2016 to boost beleaguered Afghan soldiers and may seek additional American forces to assist them.

Army Gen. John Campbell said in an interview with USA Today that maintaining the current force of 9,800 U.S. troops to train Afghan forces and conduct counterterrorism raids is vital, and that the scheduled reduction to 5,500 by Jan. 1, 2017, should be put off as long as possible.

"My intent would be to keep as much as I could for as long as I could," Campbell said by telephone from Kabul. "At some point it becomes physics. I'm

going to have to get them out."

News from Afghanistan in 2015, when American troops ended their daily combat mission after 14 years, has been grim. Taliban insurgents stormed the northern provincial capital of Kunduz in October and were pushed out after fierce fighting that included an inadvertent attack by a U.S. warplane on hospital that killed 42 civilians.

In the south, Taliban insurgents have battered Afghan troops in Helmand province; an al-Qaida training camp was also discovered there and destroyed. Islamic State fighters have set up outposts in the east. Last week, six U.S. airmen were killed by a suicide bomber outside Bagram Air Field.

The Pentagon's own quarterly assessment of security in Afghanistan this month noted that in "the second half of 2015,

the overall security situation in Afghanistan deteriorated with an increase in effective insurgent attacks and higher (Afghan security force) and Taliban casualties."

Campbell will be in Washington soon to brief senior leaders on the security situation in Afghanistan and troop levels required for their missions. He declined to offer specifics on his recommendations, saying they were classified.

"Some of them will not go over well with people," Campbell said. "Some of them will get approved."

In October, President Barack Obama announced that he was reversing his decision to withdraw all but embassy personnel by the end of 2016. Instead, 9,800 U.S. troops will remain through most of 2016. After that, the residual force of 5,500, Obama said, will be a key part

of a counterterrorism network stretching west into Africa.

The long-term U.S. commitment by Obama encouraged Afghan leaders, troops and neighboring Pakistan, Campbell said. Still, Campbell said he won't hesitate to ask for more troops for Afghanistan if necessary. He has commanded all NATO forces there since August 2014.

Michael O'Hanlon, a military analyst at the Brookings Institution who recently traveled to Afghanistan, said a contingent of 12,000 U.S. troops would be able to advise Afghan forces involved in the toughest fights and to battle terrorists. At that level, in teams ranging from dozens to hundreds, U.S. troops could provide the sort of expertise they offered Iraqi forces in retaking Ramadi this week from Islamic State fighters, he said.

Iran accused of conducting rocket test near warships

By CHRIS CHURCH

Stars and Stripes

MANAMA, Bahrain — The Iranian navy launched several unguided rockets near U.S. and coalition warships as well as commercial vessels as they transited the Strait of Hormuz late last week, the U.S. Navy said Wednesday.

The narrow waterway between Iran and Oman — the shipping lanes are only 6 miles wide — is the sea route for about one-fifth of the world's oil supply.

It is also the entry point to the Persian Gulf, where the U.S. 5th Fleet has its headquarters in Bahrain.

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps fired the rockets from a fast inshore attack craft

about 1,500 yards from the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman, 5th Fleet spokesman Cmdr. Kevin Stephens said. Also nearby were the destroyer USS Bulkeley, French frigate FS Provence and commercial traffic.

The rockets were fired away from the passing coalition and commercial ships, Stephens said.

The Iranian actions "were highly provocative," Stephens said in a statement. "Firing weapons so close to passing coalition ships and commercial traffic within an internationally recognized maritime traffic lane is unsafe, unprofessional, and inconsistent with international maritime law."

The Iranians announced the live-fire exercise over radio

communications only 23 minutes beforehand, Stephens said. The rockets were fired from within the shipping lanes.

U.S. Navy Seahawk helicopters from the Truman closely observed the Iranian forces during the event, he said.

The U.S. Navy hasn't changed operations in the region as a result of the incident, Stephens said. The Truman moved forward into the Gulf and is now launching sorties against Islamic State group targets in Iraq and Syria.

This is the third such incident since October 2014, Stephens said, but this one was much closer to the carrier strike group and merchant traffic and "encroached on the internationally recognized maritime traffic lanes and Omani territo-

rial waters."

In April, Iran launched 11 unguided rockets about 5 nautical miles from the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt and its carrier strike group.

In October 2014, a Seahawk from the aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush saw Iranian small boats launch several unguided missiles about 8 nautical miles away.

In May of this year, U.S. Navy warships began accompanying U.S.-flagged vessels through the Strait of Hormuz after Iranian ships seized a commercial ship flying the flag of a U.S.-protected island nation.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.
church.chris@stripes.com
Twitter: @CChurchStripes

Army expects JLENS claims to balloon

The Baltimore Sun

BALTIMORE — The Army has received more than \$300,000 in claims from a dozen people who say their property was damaged when one of the massive surveillance balloons anchored at Aberdeen Proving Ground escaped in October.

The payout requests await review by Army officials, spokesman Dov Schwartz said. He did not release details of the claims.

The unmanned balloon, which carries radar designed to spot airborne threats targeting Washington, broke free of its moorings Oct. 28 and drifted 160 miles north. It trailed 6,700 feet of cable as it traveled at an average speed of 40 mph.

The military scrambled jets to track the errant aircraft, and people on the ground joined in the exercise, filling the Internet with photos and comments.

It snapped power lines as it floated across rural Pennsylvania, and communities along its path reported power outages. It finally came to rest in Moreland Township, north of Harrisburg.

Claims could increase. People have up to two years to file, Schwartz said, and PennLive.com reported that a Pennsylvania power company expects to lodge a request.

The balloon and its twin were stationed at Aberdeen Proving Ground as part of a three-year test of the system's ability to identify and direct fire toward incoming cruise missiles and other threats. Both are now grounded indefinitely while the Army investigates why one broke free.

JLENS — the Joint Land Attack Cruise Missile Defense Elevated Netted Sensor System — was designed to protect the United States. But after \$2.7 billion in funding and more than a decade of research, it has yet to show conclusive results.

Congress cut the program's budget significantly in the spending bill.

Deadly floods slam Missouri

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Though the Mississippi River and its tributaries didn't top the 19 vulnerable levees that federal officials were monitoring, the dangers from a rare winter flood remained throughout Missouri and parts of Illinois on Wednesday.

Swollen rivers and streams pushed to near-record heights, which a day before caused an unknown number of inmates to be transferred out of an Illinois state prison and prompted a disaster declaration by Illinois' governor in seven counties and the activation of the National Guard by Missouri's governor to help divert traffic from submerged roads.

At least 20 deaths over several days in Missouri and Illinois were blamed on flooding, mostly involving vehicles that drove onto swamped roadways, and at least two people were still missing

Wednesday. Some parts of interstates in Missouri reopened, while others were still covered by water.

In southwestern Missouri, residents of about 150 duplexes and homes in the tourist town of Branson had to evacuate Wednesday when flooding from a manmade lake threatened.

Record flooding was projected in some Mississippi River towns after several days of torrential rain that also caused sewage to flow unfiltered into waterways.

Across the river, in Alton, Ill., dozens of volunteers helped place sandbags ahead of where water is expected to rise.

The normally docile Bourbeuse River reached the roofs of a McDonald's, QuikTrip and several other businesses in the eastern Missouri town of Union, where the river reached an all-time high Tuesday.

Cosby charged with sex assault

Associated Press

NORRISTOWN, Pa. — Bill Cosby was charged Wednesday with drugging and sexually assaulting a woman at his home 12 years ago — the first criminal charges brought against the comedian out of the torrent of allegations that destroyed his good-guy image as America's Dad.

The case sets the stage for perhaps the biggest Hollywood celebrity trial of the mobile-all-the-time era and could send the 78-year-old Cosby to prison in the twilight of his life and barrier-breaking career.

Cosby was charged with aggravated indecent assault, punishable by five to 10 years

behind bars and a \$25,000 fine, and awaited an afternoon arraignment.

Prosecutors accused him of rendering former Temple University employee Andrea Constand unable to resist by plying her with pills and wine, then penetrating her digitally without her consent, when she was unconscious or unaware of what was happening.

She was "frozen, paralyzed, unable to move," Montgomery County District Attorney-elect Kevin Steele said in announcing the charges. He said it is unclear what type of pills Constand was given, but he noted that Cosby has admitted giving Quaaludes to women he wanted to have sex with.

Cosby acknowledged under oath a decade ago that he had sexual contact with Constand but said it was consensual. Calls to his attorneys were not immediately returned.

The charges came down just days before the 12-year statute of limitations for bringing charges was set to run out. The case represents an about-face by the district attorney's office, which under a previous district attorney declined to charge Cosby in 2005 when Constand first told police that the comic violated her by putting his hands down her pants at his home in the Philadelphia suburb of Cheltenham.

Prosecutors reopened the case over the summer.

N. Korean official said killed in car crash

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea's top official in charge of relations with South Korea has died in a traffic accident, the country's state media announced Wednesday, potentially dimming the prospect for ties between the rival countries. He was 73.

Kim Yang Gon, head of the

United Front Department at the ruling Workers' Party, died Tuesday morning, the Korean Central News Agency reported. It said a state funeral will be held Thursday but gave no further details about his death.

While North Korea's road conditions are poor, the lack of detail helped feed speculation in South Korean media that Kim's death was suspicious, though South Korean officials declined to comment. Similar speculation

arose in past years following reported traffic deaths of high-level North Korean officials. It's almost impossible to verify what is exactly happening among the North's secretive, authoritarian ruling elite.

Before his death, there had been no signs that Kim Yang Gon was engaged in any major factional feuding with other officials.

From The Associated Press

Orange Bowl to feature offense

Associated Press

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — No one will be tuning in to the Orange Bowl looking for a defensive slugfest.

Clemson's Deshaun Watson is used to lighting up the scoreboard. Oklahoma's Baker Mayfield has shredded one helpless defense after another.

"People love seeing high-powered offenses and guys slinging the ball around," said Clemson linebacker Ben Boulware, sounding a bit gloomy as he looked ahead to Thursday's national semifinal game. "The viewers want to see Deshaun throw for 600 yards and Mayfield throw for 600 yards."

While no one is ready to bury the old adage that defense wins championships, it needs a bit of tweaking with these teams.

Clemson (13-0) gave up more than 30 points in its last two games, but Watson & Co. made sure it didn't ruin the perfect season. The Tigers held off South Carolina 37-32 in their regular-season finale, then survived a 45-37 track meet with North Carolina to capture the Atlantic Coast Conference championship.

Oklahoma (11-1) followed a similar path to the College Football Playoff. The Sooners gave up at least 20 points in eight games, more than 30 a couple of times. It cost them only once — an upset loss to Texas.

Despite all those shaky performances, neither defense is lacking bravado.

"I know what we've got," Oklahoma outside linebacker Eric Striker said Tuesday during media day at Sun Life Stadium. "We know what it takes to win the game. One thing about the media: They've got to talk, they've got to come up with stuff."

The media has nothing to do with the national statistics, which have Oklahoma outside the top 20 in all four major defensive categories. The Sooners are tied for 22nd in points allowed (20.8 per game).

Clemson has been stingy when it comes to defending the pass, but a bit leaky against the run. The Tigers are giving 20.2 points a game, tied for 18th nationally.

"It's about getting the W," Clemson cornerback Mackensie Alexander said. "It ain't always gonna be pretty. When I hear people say, 'Aww, you guys gave up all these points,' I'm like, 'We're the number one team in the country.' Everybody is gonna play us hard, have tricks, do everything they can. For the last six weeks, everybody has been throwing everything at us, everything they've got."

Only two teams in the last 30 years have won national titles while allowing at least 20 points a game, but both have come in the last five seasons — mirroring the game's ever-increasing emphasis on offense.

Ohio State won the championship a year ago despite giving up 22.0 points per contest, ranking 26th nationally. Cam Newton-led Auburn finished No. 1 in 2010 while surrendering an average of 24.1 points, which placed a mediocre 53rd in the national rankings.

Of course, it's still a better bet that a team will claim the title by stopping the other team from scoring. Between Auburn and Ohio State, three straight national champions (Alabama in 2011-12, Florida State in 2013) ranked No. 1 in points allowed. In the last three decades, just five other champions finished higher than 10th nationally in points allowed.

None of that seems to faze these teams.

"We've very flexible on defense," Alexander said. "What we're able to do on defense, nobody can match that. There are defensive coordinators in college football who are like, 'Man, I wish I could be coaching you guys.' We've got a lot of great players."

Playing in the run-and-gun Big 12 Conference, Oklahoma is used to facing dynamic offenses.

This might be their toughest challenge yet. Start with Watson, a Heisman Trophy finalist and probably the most dangerous two-way threat in the country. He can beat you with his arm (3,512 yards passing, 30 touchdowns), he can beat you with his legs (887 yards rushing, 11 TDs). He has weapons all around, including running back Wayne Gallman (1,332 yards rushing, 10 TDs) and nine players with double-figure receptions led by Artavis Scott (84 receptions).

Mayfield and the Sooners are just as daunting. The junior quarterback has passed for 3,389 yards with 35 touchdowns and just five interceptions. He, too, can take off and run, which led Boulware to describe him as "kind of Manzielesque" — a nod to former Texas A&M star Johnny Manziel. Three Oklahoma receivers have hauled in more than 40 passes, while Samaje Perine has rushed for 1,291 yards and 15 TDs.

Hard to see this being a defensive struggle.

That's not to say it won't come down to a big defensive play.

"Whenever you've got two great offenses," said Clemson linebacker B.J. Goodson, "it's always gonna be about who's making big stops in big moments."

Goff, Cal roll over Air Force

Associated Press

FORT WORTH, Texas — Air Force coach Troy Calhoun waved his arms angrily when secondary anchor Weston Steelhammer was ejected for targeting on the Falcons' third defensive play in the Armed Forces Bowl against pass-happy California.

He held back in the postgame setting with reporters.

"Just help me," Calhoun said as questions kept coming back to that moment after the Falcons gave up six touchdown passes to Cal's Jared Goff in the Bears' 55-36 victory Tuesday. "Who in here thought it was? Who thought it was not?"

Even after getting a reporter to say it didn't appear to be targeting, Calhoun wouldn't commit.

"I didn't see the replay," Calhoun said after the Falcons (8-6) lost for the fourth time in five Armed Forces appearances. "If that's the call, that's the call."

Steelhammer, Air Force's leader in tackles and interceptions at safety, was ejected after hitting Bryce Treggs moments after a pass had gone by the Cal receiver. The junior dropped his head and went into a crouch as the announcement was made.

"I'm not a huge fan of the targeting rule," Treggs said. "Because it's not like he was literally aiming for my head."

Goff threw for 467 yards and took records away from Aaron Rodgers and Marcus Mariota as the Bears (8-5) won in the postseason for the first time in seven years.

The 6-foot-4 Goff was already the season leader two times over in passing yards and touchdowns at Rodgers' alma mater.

Now he has Mariota's Pac-12 record for touchdowns with 43 a year after the former Oregon star threw 42 in leading the Ducks to the national championship game before going No. 2 overall in the NFL Draft to Tennessee.

Not enough? OK, how about breaking Rodgers' Cal record for passing yards in a bowl game — 394 yards in a 52-49 win over Virginia Tech in the 2003 Insight Bowl. That was a full season before Green Bay drafted Brett Favre's eventual replacement in the first round.

"He is definitely a good guy to idolize," Goff said of Rodgers.

As for the obvious question, Goff says he will discuss the NFL decision with the parents and "should know soon." Cal fans were chanting "One more year!" while celebrating the victory.

"I was chanting that, too," coach Sonny Dykes said, drawing laughter from reporters in the postgame news conference.

"It's funny," Goff said. "I was one of those kids chanting for DeSean Jackson about 10 years ago. It's funny how that comes all the way around."

Goff had three of his scoring tosses in a span of five plays in the second quarter as the Bears broke a 14-14 tie and cruised while setting a school postseason scoring record in a rematch of the 2007 Armed Forces Bowl, also won by Cal (42-36).

Cotton Bowl set to be 3-stars vs. 5-stars

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Shilique Calhoun was a basketball player at heart until his senior season in high school. The fifth-year senior arrived at Michigan State as a three-star recruit and eventually blossomed into one of the best defensive ends in college football.

Cam Robinson came to Alabama in 2014 as the No. 1 recruit in the country and started at left tackle as a freshman. If the sophomore keeps progressing, one more season with the Crimson Tide should be enough to make him a first-round NFL Draft pick.

Calhoun vs. Robinson is Michigan State vs. Alabama in a nutshell. The three-star vs. the five-star. The hidden gem vs. crown jewel.

The third-ranked Spartans (12-1) face the No. 2 Crimson Tide (12-1) in the College Football Playoff semifinals Thursday night at the home of the Dallas Cowboys.

The rise of the Spartans under Mark Dantonio has been all about exceeding expectations and player development.

In the last five years, Michigan State has never had a recruiting class ranked better than 22nd in the nation, according

to the composite rankings compiled by 247 Sports. The Spartans' average class rank in that time is 29th. By comparison, Alabama has had the No. 1 class in the country each of the last five seasons under coach Nick Saban.

"When it comes down to it stars don't matter for anything," Michigan State senior offensive tackle Jack Conklin said Tuesday during Cotton Bowl media day at AT&T Stadium. "You can't tell with an 18-year-old kid how he's going to play when he's 21 or how he's going to develop. If he's going to be able to take coaching."

Conklin, from Plainwell, Mich., has gone from walk-on to a potential first-round NFL draft pick during his four seasons at Michigan State. Star quarterback Connor Cook was a three-star from Hinkley, Ohio, whose other scholarship offers were from Mid-American Conference schools.

It's become a familiar story in East Lansing, Mich., during Dantonio's nine seasons leading the Spartans.

"Le'Veon Bell or Darqueze Dennard, a lot of people didn't want them but our coaches saw something," Conklin said, referring to two NFL players.

The Spartans love being overlooked. They view themselves as a team that can-

not be outworked because no team has worked harder to get here.

"I always joke with Riley [Bullough] and Jon [Reschke], we work in the weight room to get the bodies we have, we weren't just born with them," said linebacker Darien Harris, a three-star recruit.

Three stars put a player way down the list in a typical Alabama recruiting class. The Crimson Tide has 18 five-star recruits on its roster, including Heisman Trophy winner Derrick Henry, defensive end A'Shawn Robinson and linebacker Reuben Foster.

The only player on Michigan State's roster who was a consensus five-star recruit is sophomore defensive tackle Malik McDowell.

All that talent is enviable, but it does come with some issues to be managed by Saban and his staff.

"Even though a great expectation is created for them by [recruiting rankings], we try to emphasize development, that football is a developmental game," Saban said. "You're going to be a better player three years from now than when you're a freshman. You need to focus on what you can do to be the best player you can be."



Ship's Store official new car program

Exclusive Navy at-sea offers:

www.navyauto.com or nasinfo@navyauto.com

Iowa topples No. 1 Spartans

Associated Press

IOWA CITY, Iowa — A one-point loss at No. 11 Iowa State was a clear indication that Iowa could play with anybody in the country.

The Hawkeyes put it all together Tuesday night, knocking off No. 1 Michigan State in surprisingly easy fashion.

Mike Gesell scored a career-high 25 points and Iowa won 83-70, handing the Spartans their first loss of the season.

Peter Jok had 19 points for the Hawkeyes (10-3), who toppled a No. 1 team for the first time in 16 years.

"We really sustained effort and paid attention to the details," said Iowa coach Fran McCaffery, whose Hawkeyes lost 83-82 at Iowa State earlier this month. "I think we disrupted their offense quite a bit."

Iowa never trailed in pounding a Spartans (13-1) team that had beaten it 14 of the last 15 times. The Hawkeyes led by as many as 19 points in snapping a nine-game losing streak against Michigan State.

"It was one of the rare times in my career I thought we got, for (lack of a better choice of words, punked," Michigan State coach Tom Izzo said. "We got out-hustled."

Eron Harris scored 21 points to lead the Spartans, who were playing their second game without Denzel Valentine — their leader in scoring, rebounds and assists — and their first since coach Izzo's father Carl died Monday.

But Izzo refused to use Valentine's absence as an excuse, pointing instead to what he called a "disappointing effort."

"That had something to do with not making baskets. But it had nothing to do

with the effort you give," Izzo said.

Still, Michigan State struggled mightily in its first game without Valentine, needing overtime to hold off mid-major Oakland 99-93. The Spartans looked so underwhelming minus Valentine, who is out likely through next week after arthroscopic surgery on his left knee, that the unranked Hawkeyes were actually a slight favorite.

From the opening tip, it was easy to see why.

Iowa kept Michigan State off the scoreboard for nearly 6 minutes, and Dom Uhl's banked 3 put the Hawkeyes up 31-17 — despite having star Jarrod Uthoff on the bench with foul trouble — with just over 5 minutes left in the first half.

"They just got bucket and bucket, and we couldn't stop them," said Michigan State's Matt Costello, who had 17 points.

The Spartans trailed by double digits at halftime for the second straight game. Iowa led 37-23 following Michigan State's lowest-scoring first half of the season.

But the Hawkeyes aren't Oakland — and the Spartans simply couldn't keep up.

Consecutive 3s from Jok made it 58-39 with 11 minutes left, and Iowa cruised to its first win over a No. 1 team since beating Connecticut in former coach Steve Alford's debut in 1999.

"I think it's big, but the other thing we have always seen in this league, is that you want to win your home games if you can. It's not always easy, depending upon who you're playing," McCaffery said.

No. 2 Kansas 78, UC Irvine 53: Perry Ellis had 14 points and Frank Mason III added 13 as host Kansas pulled away in the second half.

The Jayhawks (11-1) sleepwalked

through much of the game, and trailed 26-22 late in the first half.

No. 13 Miami 76, Princeton 64: Angel Rodriguez scored 14 points and host Miami withstood an upset bid.

Davon Reed finished with 13 points and Ja'Quan Newton scored all of his 13 in the second half for the Hurricanes (11-1).

No. 14 Purdue 61, Wisconsin 55: A.J. Hammons scored 24 points and Dakota Mathias hit two threes in the final 1:19 for visiting Purdue.

The Boilermakers (13-1, 1-0 Big Ten) snapped a four-game losing streak to the Badgers (8-6, 0-1).

No. 17 SMU 81, Tulsa 69: Shake Milton, a freshman from the Tulsa suburb of Owasso, had a spectacular homecoming, scoring a career-high 24 points and going 7-for-8 from three-point range.

Nic Moore added 23 points for the Mustangs (12-0, 1-0 American).

No. 20 Texas A&M 82, Cal Poly 63: Freshman Tyler Davis matched his season high with 18 points on 8 of 9 shooting for host Texas A&M (10-2).

Temple 77, No. 22 Cincinnati 70: Quenton DeCosey scored 19 points and hit three free throws in the closing seconds to help visiting Temple (6-5, 1-0 American) pull away for its first win over a ranked team this season.

No. 23 Baylor 72, Texas Southern 59: Al Freeman scored 21 points and ignited a key run that finally put host Baylor (10-2) in control.

James' 34 lift Cavs by Denver

Associated Press

DENVER — On nearly 31-year-old legs, LeBron James found a little more elevation for all his emphatic dunks.

Has to be the thin air of Denver, he concluded.

"When the air is thick, it kind of holds me back a little bit when I jump," James joked. "I was trying to put a staple in the game."

James scored 34 points on the eve of his birthday, Iman Shumpert added a season-high 16 and the Cleveland Cavaliers beat the Denver Nuggets 93-87 on Tuesday.

This win was the perfect early gift as the Cavaliers finish off a four-game West Coast swing with a 2-2 mark. But what James really wants for a present? Time with his family. That and maybe a couple of actual presents because, contrary to popular belief, he doesn't have everything.

"It's become an excuse," James playfully said of his family and friend not knowing what to get him. "They're like, 'What do we get someone who has everything?' That's what I hear."

Cavaliers coach David Blatt has the ideal gift for his star player.

"Peace and quiet," Blatt said. "That's what I would give him. Even a day, where nobody bothers him."

The Cavaliers rested Kyrie Irving on the second night of a back-to-back as he works his way back from a fractured left kneecap. No trouble as Kevin Love helped pick up the slack with eight points and 14 rebounds in Cleveland's fourth game in five nights.

Reserve Will Barton had 29 for the injury-riddled Nuggets, who've now dropped six of seven. They were once again without Danilo Gallinari (sprained left ankle) and rookie Emmanuel Mudiay (sprained right ankle).

Hawks 121, Rockets 115: Al Horford had 30 points and 14 rebounds to lead visiting Atlanta.

The Hawks trailed by 19 early in the game before rallying for the victory.

Thunder 131, Bucks 123: Russell Westbrook scored 27 points and Kevin Durant added 26 to lead host Oklahoma City.

Enes Kanter added 23 while rookie Cameron Payne had a career-high 16 for the Thunder.

Knicks 108, Pistons 96: Carmelo Anthony scored 24 points and Derrick Williams added 18 to lead six Knicks in double figures as host New York snapped a four-game losing streak.

Jose Calderon added 15 points, Kyle O'Quinn had 12, Robin Lopez scored 11, and Kristaps Porzingis finished with 10.

Grizzlies 99, Heat 90 (OT): Marc Gasol scored seven of his 23 points in overtime to help host Memphis pull away in the extra period.

Zach Randolph added 17 points for the Grizzlies. Mike Conley and Jeff Green had 16 apiece, and Mario Chalmers scored 12 points. Gasol added eight rebounds, six assists and four blocks, including a pair of rejections in the closing minutes.

Panthers top Habs for 7th straight win

Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. — The Florida Panthers feel like a first-place team.

Aleksander Barkov had two goals and Jaromir Jagr scored the 733rd of his career to lead the streaking Panthers past the Montreal Canadiens 3-1 on Tuesday night for their seventh straight victory.

Roberto Luongo stopped 27 shots and the Panthers leapfrogged Montreal for first place in the Atlantic Division. The winning streak is their longest since March 2008 and it matches the franchise record.

"It's a lot of fun. We're pretty confident. We know how to play the game and how to win the game," Barkov said.

The Panthers have won 13 of their past 16.

Max Pacioretty scored for Montreal, but the slumping Canadiens have lost seven of their past eight games and 11 of 13.

Ben Scrivens made 27 saves in his first NHL action since April 11 last season. Scrivens was in net for the first time since being acquired from Edmonton on Monday.

Barkov's second goal stretched the lead to 3-1 during 4-on-4 play. Barkov took a pass from Erik Gudbranson in front and poked the puck past Scrivens with 11:07 to play.

Barkov also had an assist on Jagr's goal. He has 10 points in his last seven games and two goals in back-to-back games.

Jagr gave the Panthers a 2-1 lead 1:16 into the second.

Jonathan Huberdeau made the feed to Jagr in front and he made some nifty

moves before putting the puck over Scrivens' shoulder.

Huberdeau leads the Panthers with 21 assists.

Montreal took a 1-0 lead on Pacioretty's power-play goal. Pacioretty took a shot from the slot that beat Luongo on the glove side at 12:39 of the first. The goal was Pacioretty's team-leading 15th but just his second in the past 13 games.

"We played against a very good team. They have a lot of talent, they're big, and they've matured as a team," Montreal coach Michel Therrien said. "They and the Capitals are probably the two best teams in our conference, so it was tough."

Barkov tied the score 1-all on a power-play goal at 16:28 of the first. His one-timer from the left circle got past Scrivens, who was screened on the play.

Blackhawks 7, Coyotes 5: Patrick Kane scored a goal, assisted on two others and raised his NHL-leading point total to 53 in helping Chicago beat host Arizona. Andrew Desjardins scored twice for the Blackhawks, who overcame Shane Doan's hat trick and set a season high for goals in a game.

Blue Jackets 6, Stars 3: Nick Foligno and Brandon Dubinsky each had three assists as last-place host Columbus beat NHL-best Dallas. Curtis McElhinney made 39 saves, and 11 players had at least one point for the Blue Jackets.

Kari Lehtonen allowed three goals on 14 shots in the first period and was replaced by Antti Niemi to start the second.

Bruins 7, Senators 3: Jimmy Hayes scored three goals, and Patrice

Bergeron and Matt Beleskey had two apiece as host Boston beat Ottawa to end a three-game losing streak.

Islanders 6, Maple Leafs 3: John Tavares was one of six New York players to score in a victory over host Toronto for a split in the home-and-away series.

Devils 3 Hurricanes 2: David Schlemko's tiebreaking goal with 3:05 left in the third period gave New Jersey a victory over visiting Carolina.

Blues 4, Predators 3 (OT): Alexander Steen scored 4:01 into overtime to give St. Louis a home win over Nashville.

Steen got the puck from Paul Stastny and scored on a wrist shot in the slot, beating backup goalie Carter Hutton. It was his 13th goal of the season.

Jets 4, Red Wings 1: Jacob Trouba scored twice and Bryan Little had three assists as host Winnipeg beat Detroit.

Kings 5, Oilers 2: Dustin Brown and Trevor Lewis each had a goal and two assists as visiting Los Angeles scored three times in 96 seconds during a victory over Edmonton.

Ducks 1, Flames 0: Shawn Horcoff scored in the second period and John Gibson made 14 saves for his third shutout this season as Anaheim ended Calgary's home winning streak at a club-record 11 games.