

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Ex-Navy official gets 6 years for bribery

The Washington Post

A retired U.S. Navy official was sentenced Friday to six years in federal prison after he admitted taking more than \$350,000 in bribes and sexual favors from an Asian defense contractor.

Paul Simpkins, a former contracting supervisor based in Singapore, is the sixth Navy official to receive prison time in a massive corruption scandal that has rattled the maritime service since the first defendants were arrested in 2013. Another half-dozen current and former Navy officers have pleaded guilty but are still waiting to learn their sentences. More arrests are expected; prosecutors have said 200 people have been placed

under investigation.

In exchange for the bribes, Simpkins, 61, of Haymarket, Va., steered multimillion-dollar Navy business deals to Leonard Glenn Francis, a Singapore-based contractor known as “Fat Leonard,” according to court records. Francis’s company, Glenn Defense Marine Asia, held contracts for more than 25 years to resupply and refuel Navy ships and submarines at ports across Asia.

Court records show that Simpkins and Francis met in a Singapore hotel bar in 2006 to discuss how to rig the awarding of lucrative contracts to provide service to Navy vessels in Thailand. Prosecutors have said Francis first gave the Navy

official an envelope stuffed with \$50,000 in cash. In subsequent months, according to the plea agreement in the case, Francis wired another \$300,000 in bribes to a Japanese bank account controlled by Simpkins’ wife.

Prosecutors said that Simpkins received more money in bribes than any other Navy official charged in the scandal. “Simpkins valued and sold his office to Francis in the same manner as an automobile dealer sells used cars,” they wrote in a court filing.

Besides steering contracts to Glenn Defense, Simpkins acted as a secret enforcer of the company’s interests. According to the plea agreement,

he ordered other Navy officials to stop reviewing fraudulent invoices from the firm, and blocked the installation of special equipment that would have detected a scheme by Francis to overcharge the Navy for pumping wastewater from its ships. On another occasion, he overruled a recommendation from a junior officer to cancel one of Glenn Defense’s contracts for poor performance.

Simpkins also had a fondness for prostitutes that Francis exploited, court records show. After his retirement from the Navy, Simpkins returned to Singapore for a visit in 2012 and emailed the contractor with a request for “some clean, disease-free wome[n].”

Trump breaks with tradition, speaks to Taiwan’s president

Associated Press

BEIJING — In a break with decadeslong diplomatic tradition, President-elect Donald Trump spoke directly with the president of Taiwan, a move that drew an irritated response from China and could cast uncertainty over U.S. policy toward Asia.

It is perhaps unprecedented for a U.S. president or president-elect to speak directly with a leader of Taiwan, a self-governing island the U.S. broke diplomatic ties with in 1979. China said it lodged a stern complaint with the U.S. and reiterated its commitment to seeking “reunification” with the self-governed democratic island.

In initial comments apparently meant to downplay the significance of the call, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said Saturday that the contact between Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen and Trump was “just a

small trick by Taiwan” that he believed would not change U.S. policy toward China, according to Hong Kong’s Phoenix TV.

Taiwan’s official Central News Agency said Edwin Feulner, former president of the Heritage Foundation, was a “crucial figure” in setting up communication channels between the sides, leading to the call.

Feulner had met with Tsai in October when he led a Heritage Foundation delegation on a trip to Taiwan, according to a release at the time from Taiwan’s presidential office.

After the phone conversation, Trump tweeted that Tsai “CALLED ME.” He also groused about the reaction to the call: “Interesting how the U.S. sells Taiwan billions of dollars of military equipment but I should not accept a congratulatory call.”

Fanning: Ban on women in combat should be reinstated

The Sacramento (Calif.) Bee

Hundreds of young women are on track to join Army infantry units during the next year. Those numbers are among the reasons why outgoing Secretary of the Army Eric Fanning believes President-elect Donald Trump would have trouble undoing the policy of allowing women to serve in ground-combat units.

“It’s hard to roll these things back,” he said. “A lot of work has been put in place, and you already have servicemembers serving.”

As Trump fills out his Cabinet, advocates for women in uniform are watching closely to see if he will overturn Defense Secretary Ash Carter’s December 2015 order that opened all military positions to women.

Fanning has a hand in the transition, meeting with Trump

advisers to help them be ready when Trump takes office Jan. 20.

“We will do whatever they need us to do to make sure they feel prepared,” Fanning said.

Trump on the campaign trail derided President Barack Obama’s “PC” military, but he has not said explicitly whether he plans to reverse Carter’s order opening ground combat assignments to women.

On Thursday, Trump picked retired Marine Gen. James Mattis to be his defense secretary.

Mattis, a highly respected commander from the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, has acknowledged that women likely will meet the physical demands of serving in front-line positions, but he has questioned whether it’s in the military’s best interest to place women in the most dangerous posts.

Sailor with ties to Flint claims retaliation over wife's advocacy

The (Norfolk) Virginian-Pilot

NORFOLK, Va. — A Norfolk, Va., sailor with ties to the water crisis in Flint, Mich., said he suffered from a hostile working environment that deteriorated further after he complained in June about high levels of lead detected in his military housing.

Petty Officer 1st Class Dennis Walters filed complaints in November with the Department of Defense, the Navy and Rep. Scott Rigell's office alleging he was targeted by his command at the Sewells Point Police Precinct at Norfolk Naval Station, in part because of his wife's advocacy in Flint, where the couple previously lived.

The couple said in an interview Friday that their children were sickened by lead poisoning after that city changed its municipal water source — a change that led to a crisis that embroiled Flint.

Walters said he received orders to Norfolk in 2015. His problems began in March, when he was denied a request to be temporarily assigned for three weeks to a Michigan Navy support center so he could ac-

company his wife, Lee-Anne Walters, to a public hearing on the water crisis before a state committee and to help with water sampling.

He was told he'd have to take personal leave for reasons including the length of the absence, the "sensitive issue in Flint" and because the Navy did not want to "allow him to be potentially used to undermine the efforts of the" Environmental Protection Agency, according to his request.

Walters said that beginning in April, he was forced to work excessive hours, with little time off. Walters said superiors repeatedly denigrated his wife, asking, "How could she be a Navy wife? Her job is to support you, not to be a crusader out in Flint."

By June, Walters requested and received a transfer within the unit. Around the same time, the couple sampled the water in their off-base military housing in the Ben Moreell community, operated by Lincoln Military Housing.

They found it contained 16.6 parts per billion of lead, according to a Virginia Tech analysis.

Walters said things got worse after he reported his water findings to his superiors.

He was denied training, and stress caused him to lose 20 pounds. He said he also has been threatened with psychiatric evaluations and discharge. His complaint includes a request to be transferred to another unit.

Phillip Winslow, director of water and wastewater compliance for the Navy Mid-Atlantic Region, said Friday that the Navy tests for lead and copper from on- and off-base sample sites every three years.

Corrective actions are required if four of those 30 samples — or more than 10 percent — reveal lead on a first draw in excess of 15 parts per billion, Winslow said.

None of this year's samples exceeded that limit, he said, adding that one of the sample sites was in the Ben Moreell community.

Kelly Wirfel, a Norfolk Naval Station spokeswoman, said the Navy is investigating Walters' complaints and will take action if necessary to correct lead problems.

Hazardous chemical spill downplayed

Associated Press

PUEBLO, Colo. — About 450 gallons of hazardous wastewater leaked from a tank at a Colorado plant where chemical weapons are being destroyed, the Army said Friday.

There was no threat to workers nor to nearby communities from the Nov. 20 spill at the Pueblo Chemical Depot, officials said. The wastewater was confined to a containment area and was cleaned up, site Project Manager Gregory Mohrman said in a written statement.

The wastewater was primarily salty water called hydrolysate, produced when mustard agent is neutralized with hot water and a caustic chemical, said Sandy Romero, a spokeswoman for Bechtel Corp., the lead contractor on the project.

The waste contained no mustard agent, she said.

The wastewater leaked when seals on a tank failed, Mohrman said. The plant shut down while the cause of the failure is investigated, and no startup date has been set. The highly automated, \$4.5 billion plant is destroying about 780,000 shells filled with 2,600 tons of mustard agent under an international treaty.

Mustard agent can maim or kill by blistering skin, scarring eyes and inflaming airways. It is a thick liquid, not a gas, as commonly believed. It is colorless and almost odorless but got its name because impurities made early versions smell like mustard.

Separately, officials said they were investigating how rainwater leaked through a liner in another containment area at the plant on Nov. 23. The area was not in use at the time.

The rainwater did not get into the plant's neutralization process, Romero said in an email.

Mohrman said state officials were notified at the time of each incident. Asked why the broader public was not notified until Friday, Romero said officials initially thought the plant would resume operations sooner.

Militants' car bomb use in Mosul passes 600

The Washington Post

IRBIL, Iraq — The Islamic State group has launched 632 vehicle bombs against Iraqi forces since their offensive to reclaim the city of Mosul began six weeks ago, a senior military official said Thursday.

The widespread use of vehicle-borne bombs — at a pace that amounts to 14 per day — has helped make the battle for the militants' largest stronghold in Iraq particularly treacherous. Local troops are taking significant losses as they face a well-armed adversary in close-range firefights, while civilians

bear the brunt of relentless militant shelling.

The stakes are high for the Iraqi government and its U.S. backers as they orchestrate a massive, multipronged attack on a large, densely populated city that has been under extremist control for 2½ years.

In a recent televised update, Lt. Gen. Abdul Amir Yarullah, who commands the ongoing operation, described some of the challenges that Iraqi fighters had encountered. Explosive-laden vehicles — including cars, trucks, armored personnel carriers and even armored bulldozers — have been a hallmark of

the militants' effort to hold off advancing forces.

While Iraqi troops have disabled many of the bombs before militants could set them off, some of the vehicles have struck their targets with deadly results. An Islamic State video released last month showcased a variety of such attacks, some of which set off massive explosions and sent Iraqi forces fleeing for their lives.

While insurgent car bombs are nothing new, countering those attacks has become much more difficult within the narrow streets and tightly packed homes of Mosul.

Recount efforts in 3 states challenged

The Washington Post

Supporters of President-elect Donald Trump are moving aggressively to challenge Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein's push for a recount in three Midwestern states, filing legal challenges and criticizing the effort as quixotic and ill-conceived.

Trump and his backers have filed challenges the past two days in Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, which were critical to Trump's surprise victory last month because they punctured the so-called blue wall of states expected to carry Democrat Hillary Clinton to victory. Trump narrowly won the trio of Midwestern states.

Michigan Attorney General Bill Schuette, a Republican, on Friday tweeted that Stein's request was "an expensive & a risky threat" as he announced he had filed an emergency motion with the Michigan

Supreme Court to stop it.

Stein, who has raised millions of dollars from supporters to help pay for the costly recount efforts, blasted back at what she called "a politically motivated attempt by Bill Schuette to side with Donald Trump in opposition to a fair and accountable voting system." She added in a statement that "citizens in Michigan and across the country of every political party have expressed their concerns around our voting system and deserve to have their votes counted."

Stein has raised concerns about possible hacking or other voting irregularities in the three states but has presented no evidence of malfeasance. Election officials in all three states have expressed confidence in their results, and voting rights experts have said the effort is highly unlikely to overturn the results that are sending Trump to the White House.

Clinton's campaign has joined Stein's recount effort, though her team has said it does not expect the outcome of the election to change. The Clinton campaign had no immediate comment on Friday.

In Wisconsin, where Trump defeated Clinton by a percentage point, a recount is underway. But Great America PAC and Stop Hillary PAC, both pro-Trump groups, said Friday they had filed a legal challenge a day earlier in federal court in conjunction with a Wisconsin voter to stop the new count. Stein's team said Friday that it will fight the challenge.

"Citizens in Wisconsin and across the country have made it clear that they want a recount and deserve to see this process through to ensure integrity in the vote," Stein attorney Matthew Brinckerhoff said in a statement.

Pentagon chief pick popular among troops

The Washington Post

Marine Lance Cpl. Andrew Gitto was less than two weeks removed from his 20th birthday when a Taliban sniper hit him two times at a checkpoint in Marjah, Afghanistan, in April 2010. One round grazed his left hand and lodged in his shoulder, while the second buried in his lung, collapsing it.

Six days later, Marine Gen. James Mattis, then the head of U.S. Joint Forces Command, was standing at the end of Gitto's hospital bed in Bethesda, Md., talking quietly with the Marine's mother, JoAnn. Gitto, now 26 and a sheriff's officer in New Jersey, does not remember much of his drug-addled, 14-day hospital stay, but he recalls Mattis visiting and giving him a signed copy of Steven Pressfield's novel "Gates of Fire."

"He didn't treat me like a guy who's been shot," Gitto said. "He talked to me like we've known each other for years. He shook my hand, looked me in the eye and told me, 'Heal back up and head back.' And that's what I did."

President-elect Donald Trump announced Thursday that Mattis, 66, will be nominat-

ed as his secretary of defense.

Gitto's story is one of many about Mattis that, along with his bluntness and success on the battlefield, have made him perhaps the most popular senior officer of the modern generation with his own troops.

Some critics, however, have argued that the appointment could give former military officers too much sway over foreign policy.

Loren DeJonge Schulman, a former Pentagon and National Security Council staff member, said that while she has no concerns about Mattis individually, she wonders what his appointment could do to the role of Pentagon chief.

"He is being praised as a war fighter, and that's a great experience to be able to bring to the Office of Secretary of Defense, but that is in no way the role of the office," said Schulman, now the deputy director of studies at the Center for a New American Security. "It would be extremely damaging of the [civilian-military] dynamic if that became the perception of the role."

Mattis, who declined to comment for this article, led combat

troops in the early salvos of the war in Afghanistan in late 2001 and Iraq in spring 2003, before returning to Iraq a second time to lead bloody street fighting in the city of Fallujah in 2004. He continued to rise through the ranks afterward, becoming one of the military's top strategists before retiring as the chief of U.S. Central Command in 2013.

One issue has emerged that would not be faced by most candidates for defense secretary: past decisions on the battlefield. A former Special Forces officer, Jason Amerine, wrote a long Facebook post Friday in which he accused Mattis of leaving his men to die in Afghanistan in December 2001, when the general was a one-star commander overseeing an amphibious task force in Kandahar province. Mattis' unit was nearby when Amerine's was hit with a friendly-fire bombing and initially declined to send helicopters to rescue those who were wounded, Amerine said.

"Thanks to Facebook mob mentality, there has been a revisionist history of the man who left us to die but is now compared to Patton due to his

juvenile quotes that demean all of us as service members," Amerine wrote in the post, which went viral.

But Jeremiah Workman, a Marine veteran who served in Iraq, said that not only do the general's past successes speak for themselves but also that Mattis has gone out of his way to assist those who struggle after coming home from war.

Workman recalled being surprised when he received a phone call from Mattis when he was a sergeant in 2007 at Quantico, Va. Workman had received the Navy Cross for valor in Iraq but later lost his job as a drill instructor at Parris Island, S.C., while coping with post-traumatic stress.

"When I think of a leader, I think of genuine care and concern, and that's him," said Workman, who is now a Department of Veterans Affairs employee at Quantico. "Just the fact that General Mattis was a three-star general who was reaching out to a sergeant in the Marine Corps who was hurting and needed help — that speaks volumes for him as a person."

Many dead, dozens missing in Calif. fire

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — At least nine people died in a blaze that broke out during a party in a converted warehouse late Friday night in the San Francisco Bay Area, according to fire officials.

Oakland fire Chief Teresa Deloach Reed said at least another 25 people are unaccounted for as of Saturday morning. Authorities are working to verify who was in the building when the fire broke out.

Deloach Reed said the roof collapsed, and fire investigators will have to search through debris to find any remaining bodies.

Authorities are working to verify who was in the building when the blaze broke out at about 11:30 p.m. Friday. It tore through the building during an event featuring musician Golden Donna's 100% Silk West Coast Tour, the East Bay Times reported.

Oakland firefighters tweeted video of flames pushing through

the roof. The fire chief said what started the fire is unclear, but there did not appear to be sprinklers in the building.

Authorities told KTVU-TV about 50 people were inside the building, which houses a group of artists and their studios.

"It was too hot, too much smoke. I had to get out of there," Bob Mule, a photographer and artist who lives at the building and suffered minor burns, told the East Bay Times. "I literally felt my skin peeling and my lungs being suffocated

by smoke. I couldn't get the fire extinguisher to work."

People used a Facebook page Saturday to post and seek information on family and friends who may have been in the building.

Oakland police urged those concerned about missing people to call the Alameda County Sheriff's Coroner's Bureau.

The office said the coroners were also at the scene Saturday morning and unavailable for comment.

Comments lead to calls for OSU official to be fired

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — An administrator at Ohio State University is being criticized for calling for compassion for the Somali-born student who injured 11 people in a car-and-knife attack on campus before he was shot to death by police officers.

Stephanie Clemons Thompson, an assistant director of residence life at the university, urged people on Facebook to stop sharing photos of 18-year-old Abdul Razak Ali Artan's dead body and to not celebrate

his death. "I pray you find compassion for his life, as troubled as it clearly was," she wrote earlier this week. "Think of the pain he must have been in to feel that his actions were the only solution."

Those comments have sparked anger on social media, with people starting an online petition calling for her to be fired.

Thompson has since removed the post. She didn't immediately return messages left at her office Friday.

Ben Johnson, a university spokesman, said Thompson's comment is not an official

university statement and instead represents her personal viewpoint.

Authorities are investigating whether the attack by Artan on Monday was terrorism.

The FBI has said Artan might have been inspired by the Islamic State group and a former al-Qaida leader who was killed in a 2011 U.S. drone strike in Yemen.

Artan was in his first semester at Ohio State and came to the United States in 2014 as the child of a refugee after living in Pakistan for years.

Man found dead in SUV covered in pile of parking tickets

(Fort Lauderdale, Fla.) Sun Sentinel

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — For four days, city parking officers slapped tickets on an SUV parked three blocks from the Broward County Courthouse. When Carolyn White noticed the pile of citations, she wondered what was going on. So she peeked inside.

"Oh my God, please tell me this man is not dead," White thought.

Inside the Isuzu Axiom was the body of Jacob Morpeau, 62, of Miami. He was sitting in the driver's seat, and his upper body lay face down over the SUV's center console. His hand held a credit card, White said.

The Broward County Medical Examiner's office said Morpeau died from natural causes

and had been ill with hypertensive cardiovascular disease. It's not known how long Morpeau's body had been in the Isuzu.

The medical examiner could not pinpoint the date of death.

The SUV was issued tickets from Nov. 12 through Nov. 15, the day Morpeau's body was found. If he was inside the Isuzu when the tickets were put on the windshield is also not known.

An email from the assistant clerk said the city dismissed the \$160 in parking fees, "due to extenuating circumstances."

Morpeau's family had not heard from him for a few days before his body was discovered, according to a Fort Lauderdale police report.

Morpeau's son, Alain Danier, one of six adult children, said his

father immigrated to the United States from Haiti and had been the owner of a car sales lot in Miami. He was retired.

"He was a good man," Danier, 34, said of his father, who was cremated. "He raised all of us and gave us everything we needed."

Morpeau last spoke with friends about 8 p.m. Nov. 11, the son said. He said he wondered whether parking officers ever spoke with his father.

Two of the tickets were written within three minutes, and just six hours before White saw Morpeau's body inside the SUV.

White said about seeing the tickets and looking into the car, "I was being nosy. I never let the meter man catch me. I never got a parking ticket, and I wanted to know why somebody

else got caught. And that's what made me look inside.

She said she saw a walker in the back seat of the Isuzu and was curious about why someone who needed it would leave it behind. And, she said, she wonders why a parking officer didn't see what she saw.

"I can understand why the meter person probably didn't see him from the driver's side," said White, who had been parked nearby, waiting for a friend who had business at the courthouse.

"He was underneath the steering wheel; his head was in the middle of the seat, between the two seats," White said. "But you could see him on the passenger's side. That's how I seen him, from the sidewalk."

The Isuzu had tinted windows.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Family suspects dog started house fire

IA LU VERNE — A north Iowa family suspects their dog, Sammy, of starting a fire that destroyed their kitchen.

Mike Nilles of Lu Verne told the Mason City Globe Gazette he found 3-foot flames climbing up his kitchen cabinets Nov. 23.

Nilles turned off the stove and alerted his wife, Lynzie.

The couple then helped their 2-year-old daughter and four dogs escape.

The fire gutted the kitchen and left a coat of soot in the living room.

Nilles said he can't be sure, but he suspects their 7-year-old Weimaraner Sammy of jumping onto the gas stove.

The stove's knob was pushed to the ignite position and was still clicking in the empty kitchen when Nilles smelled smoke.

Standing Bear statue eyed for Lincoln mall

NE LINCOLN — Nebraska officials are looking to erect a statue of a famous Native American chief on Lincoln's Centennial Mall.

The sculpture of Ponca chief Standing Bear would stand 9 feet tall near the University of Nebraska-Lincoln College of Journalism and Mass Communications.

The Lincoln Journal Star reported that a private donor agreed to foot the bill.

The proposal is still in its infancy but drew nods of approval Thursday from Nebraska Capitol Environs Commission members.

Standing Bear led his people on a march to Oklahoma

in 1877 after the federal government forced them from Nebraska.

He was captured by the Army after returning to bury his son, but fought for his freedom in court. In 1879, he became the first Native American to be legally recognized as a person.

School nurses to be equipped with Narcan

NJ TOMS RIVER — Ocean County has become the first county in New Jersey to supply all of its high school nurses with Narcan, the drug that is used to reverse opioid overdoses.

County prosecutor Joseph Coronato said he made the decision to equip nurses with the life-saving antidote after hearing about a recent overdose at a high school in a neighboring county.

Nurses at county schools received training on administering the drug from the Ocean County Prosecutor's office Thursday.

Ocean County has had the most overdose deaths among New Jersey counties with 180 so far this year.

Since January, more than 440 people have been revived using Narcan in Ocean County.

A bill under consideration by the state legislature would require all of New Jersey's schools to have Narcan on the premises.

Group tries to restore holiday decorations

MO PARKVILLE — A campaign is underway to restore holiday decorations that were removed from trees along a suburban Kansas City highway.

KMBC-TV reported that the decorations were taken down after the Missouri Department of Transportation received a complaint. For 30 years, a group has decorated the trees along Missouri 9.

Now, a group called Save 9 Highway Christmas Trees is working with MoDOT and a state lawmaker to file a special permit.

Campaign organizers say they want to put up even more decorations than before, although they may need to go in a different location. The group has also promised to take them down after the holidays.

Indictment: Man used FedEx to deal drugs

AL BIRMINGHAM — Federal prosecutors say a 39-year-old Tuscaloosa man is under indictment for trafficked cocaine, and used FedEx to help him do so.

Al.com reported a four-count indictment charges Thomas Blanks II with conspiracy to distribute cocaine from March through May of this year in Tuscaloosa County.

According to the indictment, which was issued on Wednesday, Blanks distributed 500 grams or more of cocaine on May 17 using FedEx, a corporation involved in interstate commerce, to promote illegal distribution of drugs.

Additionally, U.S. Attorney Joyce White Vance said Blanks was a twice-convicted felon who, during the drug transactions, was in possession of a .390-caliber pistol and 9 mm ammunition.

City to open new sites to house homeless

WA SEATTLE — The city of Seattle has announced plans to open three

new homeless camps early next year.

Seattlepi.com reported that the city's Human Services Department said in a Thursday news release the camps will have space to house more than 200 people combined. The sites will be in Georgetown, Highland Park and North Seattle.

Two of the three new homeless camp locations will be sponsored by the Low Income Housing Institute, Nickelsville and SHARE. The organizations already sponsor several camps and tiny house villages around Seattle.

Each of the new sites will feature 50 housing units with room for up to 70 people. Two of the locations have been described as tiny house villages, while the other will be a tent encampment.

State has new rules for amateur MMA

WV MORGANTOWN — West Virginia is poised to put new rules into effect governing mixed martial arts for both professionals and recently legalized fights for amateurs.

The detailed regulations, subject to review starting Sunday by lawmakers, prohibit fighters under age 18 and require blood tests for both pros and amateurs.

They set insurance minimums and professional licensing fees and require doctors at the cage matches.

Amateurs can turn pro after four matches where they show they can compete.

The state legalized pro fights with the mix of punching, kicking and grappling in 2011.

From wire reports

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Washington captures Pac-12 crown

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Washington's opportunistic defense and dominant running game most likely ended any debate about whether the Huskies' weak nonconference schedule would keep them out of the College Football Playoff.

Taylor Rapp returned one of his two interceptions for a touchdown and Myles Gaskin ran for 159 yards to help No. 4 Washington strengthen its case for a playoff berth with a 41-10 victory over No. 9 Colorado in the Pac-12 championship game Friday night.

"We think we have a heck of a team and we think we belong in there," coach Chris Petersen said. "I think they'll do what they should do, which is the right thing. ... These guys have done everything they're supposed to do."

With the Huskies (12-1, No. 4 CFP) only narrowly ahead of two-loss Michigan in the latest playoff rankings, there were

some questions about whether they could be passed by the Wolverines or even the eventual Big Ten champion for the final playoff spot because of a nonconference schedule of Rutgers, Idaho and Portland State.

But the Huskies dominated the Buffaloes (10-3, No. 8 CFP) much more thoroughly than Michigan did in September in the most convincing closing argument possible. Now they need to just wait for the final verdict to come in on Sunday before beginning preparations for the playoff.

"That's up to them," quarterback Jake Browning said. "I'm happy with being Pac 12 champs right now. Whatever they decide, they decide. We've created a pretty good situation for ourselves. Worst comes to worst, we're playing in the Rose Bowl. That's pretty nice."

The Huskies broke open a close game when Rapp intercepted Sefo Liufau's passes on the first two drives of the second half for a touchdown and to

set up a field goal that made it 24-7.

Washington rolled from there to its first conference title since 2000.

"We didn't play this game for the playoff committee," receiver John Ross said. "We played this game because this is what we worked for."

It was a rough day for Liufau, who was knocked out of the game after twisting his right ankle on a sack on the Buffaloes' first drive of the game. He returned to start the second half and threw three interceptions, including one on the first play from scrimmage that Rapp returned 35 yards for a score.

Liufau threw another interception on the ensuing drive and Colorado could never recover.

"We just didn't execute as an offense," Liufau said. "It's probably the most frustrating part, especially as one of the captains and one of the leaders and your group isn't performing to the level it should be."

The takeaway

Colorado: From the opening kickoff that went out of bounds, little went right for the Buffaloes, who were unable to cap an impressive turnaround season with a conference title. Liufau's injury didn't help the cause. Steven Montez went 5-for-12 for 60 yards in the first half and was unable to generate any consistent offense and Liufau was even worse when he returned. He threw as many interceptions in the third quarter (3) as he had all season and was just 2-for-12 for 12 yards after coming back into the game.

Washington: The usually efficient Jake Browning struggled throwing the ball but it didn't matter as the Huskies dominated the game with 265 yards on the ground behind Gaskin and Lavon Coleman (101 yards). Browning went just 9-for-24 for 118 yards but did throw two TDs to give him 42 on the season, one shy of Jared Goff's Pac-12 record.

Western Michigan wins MAC, remains undefeated

Associated Press

DETROIT — With a conference championship finally in tow and his team's unbeaten record still intact, P.J. Fleck stopped holding back.

Before he was even asked about it, the Western Michigan coach made it clear where he thought his team should be headed next.

"We deserve to be in the gosh darn Cotton Bowl," he said. "Period. Write it down."

The 13th-ranked Broncos might indeed end up there, but only after holding on for a dramatic 29-23 victory over Ohio on Friday night in the Mid-American Conference title game. WMU wrapped up its first MAC championship since 1988 when Robert Spillane intercepted a pass with 51 seconds remaining.

The Broncos (13-0, No. 17 CFP) led 23-7 at halftime, but

Ohio rallied and had the ball in WMU territory in the final minute when Spillane intercepted Greg Windham's pass over the middle. Spillane immediately took a knee at his own 30, then was mobbed by teammates as a Ford Field crowd full of Broncos fans roared.

Ohio (8-5) never led and didn't do much on offense until the final quarter, but the Bobcats still came achingly close to their first MAC championship since 1968.

Instead, WMU became the first undefeated team to win the MAC title game since Marshall in 1999. The question is whether the Broncos have done enough to make it to the Cotton Bowl. WMU is trying to earn the Group of Five bid to a New Year's Six bowl.

When asked previously about the playoff committee and its perception of his team, Fleck

had been diplomatic, refusing to do too much lobbying. That changed after Friday's win, especially when he was asked about whether he'd be paying attention to Navy this weekend.

The Midshipmen, two spots behind WMU in the most recent playoff rankings, are another contender for the Cotton Bowl, and they played Temple for the American Athletic Conference title Saturday.

"I don't think there's anybody to pay attention to," Fleck said, becoming animated. "Who are we paying attention to? Why are we paying attention to anyone? We are 13-0. We're the best Group of Five team in the country. We didn't lose a game. Whoever they put on our schedule, we beat. There's two undefeated teams in the country — us and Alabama. There is no argument. My TV will be off. We will be recruiting (Sat-

urday). I'm not going to watch anybody, period."

The takeaway

Ohio: The Bobcats can hold their heads high after giving WMU by far its toughest game against a MAC opponent all season. Ohio's defense held firm early, when a couple of fumbles by the Bobcats gave WMU a chance to break it open.

"They felt they had the talent to be in this game, and so did I," Ohio coach Frank Solich said. "They were pretty driven to get some things done."

WMU: The Broncos may end up sweating out the bowl announcements Sunday, but WMU can celebrate a truly special season no matter what happens. The Broncos nearly let it slip away in the second half, but their first conference title in nearly three decades was an accomplishment to savor.

Brown, Beckham try to one-up each other

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — They are millionaires, good friends, arguably the best in the world at their chosen profession and hardly apologetic for their “look at me” exuberance.

Get your popcorn ready — and while you’re at it your excessive celebration flags, meme-generators and unmarried kicking nets, too — for Antonio Brown versus Odell Beckham Jr.

The two superstar wide receivers will be in the same stadium for the first time on Sunday when Beckham and the streaking New York Giants (8-3) visit Heinz Field to take on Brown and the resilient Pittsburgh Steelers (6-5). And yes, while the final score is important, the drive to put up the gaudier numbers is very real.

“Ultimately I would like to do better than him,” Beckham said. “But if he does better and we win, that’s a battle that I may have lost one but I won the other.”

Of course, finding a way to win both would be preferable for two players whose competitiveness has driven them to the NFL’s elite even if the paths they took to get there couldn’t be more different.

Brown is an overachiever, a former sixth-round pick whose relentless work ethic transformed him into one of

the league’s most productive players. The 28-year-old became the fastest player in NFL history to reach 600 career receptions when he crossed the plateau against Cleveland last month. He backed it up by scoring a career-high three touchdowns on Thanksgiving against Indianapolis and — in typical fashion — drew another in an increasingly long list of unsportsmanlike conduct penalties for his choreographed dance with running back Le’Veon Bell.

Beckham entered the league with higher expectations as the 12th overall selection in the 2014 draft and has somehow exceeded them. He’s spent the last two-plus seasons generating GIF-able catch after GIF-able catch in New York, at least when he’s not ripping off his helmet to show off his shock of blonde hair, tossing around whatever happens to be within arm’s reach when he’s frustrated or jousting with nemesis Josh Norman.

Are they divas? Maybe. Do they care? Not really.

“We don’t listen to media people,” Brown said. “We are solely consumed with being our best selves and representing ourselves at a high level and making plays and helping our team win in the way we desire to do it.”

The more spectacular, the better. They don’t take much

time to study most of their peers but keep close tabs on each other during the season, with Brown playing the role of mentor.

“I talk to him, critique him,” Brown said.

And he may be one of the few who can get away with it. The normally brash Beckham turns reflective when talking about Brown. The two hooked up last spring while Brown was filming “Dancing With The Stars” and also spent time together in Brown’s native Miami.

“He kind of just showed me the ropes,” Beckham said. “He was showing me pretty much everything of what he does. You take that and you put it into your own agenda and schedule. You kind of just go with it from there.”

Statistically at least, Brown has the upper hand at the moment. His 82 receptions lead the league and his 10 touchdowns are tied with Tampa Bay’s Mike Evans for the NFL high. Beckham isn’t far behind in catches (65) or touchdowns (eight) and the Giants are starting to find new ways to get him the ball. He returned four punts last week in Cleveland, though he’s got some work to do to catch Brown’s four career punt returns for scores.

That’s fine by Beckham. He figures he’s borrowed so much from Brown as a receiver that mimicking him as a returner is

just the next step.

“I watch a lot of film on him and probably stole a lot of stuff from him to make it my own,” Beckham said.

The fact Brown allowed Beckham into his tightly guarded inner circle is a victory in and of itself. Brown is notoriously vague when pressed about his workout regimen, though Brown’s ever active social media accounts drop hints at countless off-the-field training sessions and teammate Darrius Heyward-Bey relayed a story about walking out of dinner with Brown last year and Brown asking him if he wanted to go to the gym. It was well after 10 p.m.

And maybe that’s why Brown and Beckham remain so intent on squeezing as much joy out of their accomplishments.

“I don’t think people really take in what you sacrifice each and every day to go out there and play for just 60 minutes,” Beckham said. “That’s really all you get and you don’t even get that. Like to enjoy it and have fun.”

What’s on the line for Brown and Beckham Sunday besides the chance for their teams to continue to build some playoff momentum? Pride. Bragging rights, oh, and one more thing.

“Probably some dance moves,” Brown said. “That’s about it.”

Morgan leads Indiana past SIU-Edwardsville

Associated Press

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. — Indiana coach Tom Crean doesn’t have a timetable for OG Anunoby’s return from a sprained ankle.

For now, the 13th-ranked Hoosiers are going to have to step up and even overcompensate on some nights to make up for the absence of one of their biggest playmakers. On Friday night, it was Juwan Morgan who answered the call.

“Juwan rebounded for two

tonight,” Crean said. “He came out and brought it. When you take OG (Anunoby) out of the lineup, you take so much athleticism, versatility, you take shooting, take the rebounding, the defense out. I thought our guys tried to do a really good job of making up for that. And Juwan did even more there.”

Morgan scored a career-high 18 points on 8-for-8 shooting and finished with 10 rebounds, De’Ron Davis scored 14 points and Indiana rolled to an 83-60 victory over

SIU-Edwardsville.

The Hoosiers didn’t start the game firing on all cylinders. Indiana (6-1) didn’t make its first basket until 16:12 remaining in the first half, missing its first eight attempts. Trailing 4-0, the Hoosiers shook off the slow start when Zach McRoberts hit a three-pointer from the corner that ignited Indiana. The Hoosiers finished the final 15 minutes of the half outscoring SIU-Edwardsville 40-17.

Led by Morgan, the Hoosiers’ efforts on the glass

eliminated opportunities for SIU-Edwardsville (4-4) to score second-chance points. Indiana grabbed 30 defensive rebounds. Indiana’s 15 offensive rebounds led to the Hoosiers outscoring the Cougars 17-5 in second-chance points. But the Hoosiers’ second-chance points opportunities were nonexistent if Morgan was shooting the ball. The sophomore didn’t miss all night, making each of his eight shot attempts and the only three-pointer he attempted.

Jones helps Sharks keep Habs in check

Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Martin Jones came within 80 seconds of a shutout. Sometimes, that's the sort of stingy performance it takes to beat Canadiens goalie Carey Price.

Brent Burns and Joe Pavelski scored in the first period, Jones stopped 31 shots and the San Jose Sharks extended their mastery of Montreal at home by beating the Canadiens 2-1 on Friday night in a matchup of division leaders.

"You know you're not going to score four or five goals on him," Jones said, referring to Price. "You know you're going to have to play well. There are two teams out there. It's not just me and him. I thought we defended really well."

Jones won his third straight and the Sharks improved to 8-0-2 against the Canadiens in San Jose since November 1999.

Pavelski also had an as-

sist, and Joe Thornton got two assists.

Price was efficient after giving up the two early goals, one on a power play and the other on an odd-man rush. He finished with 28 saves for Montreal, and Andrew Lehkonen scored a power-play goal late in the third period.

The Canadiens failed to maintain pressure against Jones, who turned away several point-blank shots early and then was rarely tested.

"He did his job," Pavelski said. "He always does his job. He shows up. We have a lot of confidence in him, and he showed you why tonight. Guys did a good job in front of him, and it was a really good effort against a good team."

The Atlantic Division leaders have gone consecutive games without earning a point for the first time this season. Meanwhile, the Pacific Division-leading Sharks have won three

straight and six of seven.

Montreal's Alexander Radulov exited with 4:06 remaining after getting cut over the eye by Logan Couture, who was assessed a double minor for high-sticking.

"I was just going to the net and I think their guy was trying to protect the slot area and not let me in and it's just part of the game," Radulov said, sporting a few stitches above his right eye. "Scary, but it's OK. He tried to lift my stick but I tried to jump in front of him and his stick went up because my stick was not there. It's just hockey."

Montreal took advantage of the late penalty to get on the board when Lehkonen scored with a 6-on-4 advantage.

"Kind of an unlucky bounce there in front of the net that just kind of squeaked through my legs there," Jones said. "But we killed really well tonight. We didn't let them get set up for the

most part. That's a good power play. They're going to get some chances."

Burns scored his 10th goal, most among NHL defensemen, to put the Sharks ahead on the power play 5:22 into the game.

Flames 3, Wild 2 (SO): Sean Monahan scored the shootout winner in host Calgary's victory over Minnesota.

Monahan waited out Devan Dubnyk before snapping a shot over the goalie's right pad. Calgary's Chad Johnson then stopped Charlie Coyle's attempt at the other end to seal the victory.

Kris Versteeg scored in regulation and the shootout, and Mikael Backlund also scored in regulation for the Flames. They have won two straight and are 4-1-1 in their last six.

Johnson made 26 saves for his second straight victory.

Chris Stewart and Mikko Koivu scored for Minnesota, and Dubnyk made 30 saves.

Bulls hand defending champion Cavs 3rd straight loss

Associated Press

CHICAGO — LeBron James wasn't holding back.

Cleveland's superstar had plenty to say after the Cavaliers gave up 78 points in the paint on the way to another loss. The condensed version was this: It's time to start playing like a championship team again.

Jimmy Butler scored 26 points, Dwyane Wade had 24 and the Chicago Bulls beat James and the slumping Cavaliers 111-105 on Friday night.

Taj Gibson added a season-high 23 points and 11 rebounds for Chicago. Rajon Rondo had 15 points, 12 assists and 11 rebounds as the balanced Bulls handed the Cavaliers their third straight loss.

"We got to get out of the honeymoon stage," James said. "You got to play the game, the right way. We've got to battle every night like we ain't won nothing. Last year is last year. After ring night is over with,

now it's a new season and everybody is gunning for us every night and we have to understand that. The honeymoon stage is over. It's time to play some real ball and be physical, especially in the trenches. Giving up 78 points (in the paint) is ridiculous. We've got to man up. Everybody."

James manned up to the tune of 27 points and 13 assists, a championship-level performance on a night when he showed up dressed as a World Series champion: He arrived at the arena in a Cubs uniform to honor a World Series bet with buddy Wade.

Kyrie Irving added 20 points and eight assists, but the Cavaliers matched their longest losing streak in a year.

Chicago dominated Cleveland 78-60 in the paint, out-rebounded the Cavaliers 49-33 and came out on top despite shooting 3-for-18 on three-pointers. It was a big turnaround for the Bulls coming off

a loss to the Lakers.

"I think we know what we're capable of if we play basketball the right way and do what we're supposed to do," Butler said.

Pistons 121, Hawks 85: Kentavious Caldwell-Pope scored 23 points, Tobias Harris added 18 and visiting Detroit beat reeling Atlanta.

The Hawks, losers in eight of their last nine games, were 9-2 and tied for the Eastern Conference lead after beating Milwaukee on Nov. 16. Now they are one-half game behind the eighth-place Pistons.

Knicks 118, Timberwolves 114: Carmelo Anthony scored 29 points, Derrick Rose had 24 and Kyle O'Quinn added 20 points and 13 rebounds as host New York defeated Minnesota.

Rockets 128, Nuggets 110: James Harden scored 20 points and visiting Houston led from start to finish in beating Denver.

Celtics 97, Kings 92: Al Horford scored 26 points and

blocked six shots, Isaiah Thomas scored 14 of his 20 points in the second half and host Boston held off Sacramento.

Magic 104, 76ers 88: Aaron Gordon scored a season-high 20 points, Nikola Vucevic had 12 points, 11 rebounds and five assists and visiting Orlando cruised by Philadelphia in a matchup of slumping Eastern Conference teams.

Raptors 113, Lakers 80: Kyle Lowry had 24 points and seven assists and host Toronto rolled past Los Angeles for its fifth straight victory.

Clippers 114, Pelicans 96: Blake Griffin had 27 points and 10 rebounds, Chris Paul had 17 points and 13 assists, and Los Angeles beat host New Orleans.

Spurs 107, Wizards 105: Kawhi Leonard scored 23 points, including the winning jumper with 6 seconds left, and San Antonio overcame another sluggish start at home to beat Washington.