

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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## McCain blasts Navy warships in report

BY MATTHEW DALY

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee is blasting the Navy's expensive new warships that have been plagued by engine problems and have yet to demonstrate key warfighting functions.

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., a Navy fighter pilot in the Vietnam War, said the \$12.4 billion spent for 26 littoral combat ships is the most egregious example of what he calls "America's Most Wasted: Indefensible," the latest in a series of reports on wasteful spending by the Pentagon.

In a report Monday, McCain calls the littoral ship program "an unfortunate and classic example" of defense acquisition gone awry. Initially expected to cost \$220 million per ship and be able to counteract mines by 2008, the program's cost has

more than doubled to \$478 million per ship, and mine countermeasures are not expected to be operational until 2020.

As the military confronts a diverse and complex array of national security challenges, the U.S. "simply cannot afford to waste our precious defense dollars on unnecessary or poorly performing programs" such as the littoral ships, McCain said. They are designed to operate in shallow coastal — or littoral — waters.

Navy Vice Adm. Thomas Rowden, commander of Naval Surface Forces, defended the program to the House Armed Services Committee earlier this month, saying that he is well aware of the problems surrounding the ship's development and has been leading the effort to identify solutions. He said they have come up with a number of recommendations to address the issues.

"We're learning about the issues. We're learning about how to maintain it, and going forward, I am 100 percent confident that we'll tackle those issues and we'll defeat them," he said. "There is still much work to be done to fully unlock the significant potential of these ships."

The Navy also said the cost of each ship has been below the congressionally mandated cap of \$480M since that limit was set in 2011, and the production cost per ship has been steadily declining. Two versions of the warships were sped into production to meet the Navy's goal of a speedy ship to operate in shallow coastal waters.

Although the ship — known as LCS — "may yet deliver some capability," McCain said as currently configured it has "no proven combat capability." McCain's frustration with the program could translate into

changes next year when his committee authorizes military spending.

Beside the littoral ships, McCain's report also criticizes the Pentagon for improperly spending \$458 million on incomplete or inappropriate travel expense reimbursements; \$58 million for alternative fuel sources for the Navy; and \$1 million for reimbursements for unauthorized expenses at casinos and strip clubs.

An Air Force lieutenant colonel was reimbursed for 89 transactions totaling \$14,371, McCain said, while an Army lieutenant colonel was reimbursed for 37 transactions totaling \$7,760.

Military agencies should monitor employees' activities to ensure they are not a national security risk "and report individuals for re-evaluation when they engage in activity that could place them at risk — like gambling," he said.

## Underwater drone seized by China is returned to Navy

BY ERIK SLAVIN

Stars and Stripes

China has returned the Navy unmanned underwater vehicle it seized last week in the South China Sea in an incident the U.S. is calling illegal and unprofessional.

The Yokosuka-based destroyer USS Mustin received the underwater drone in the same area — about 50 miles northwest of the Philippines' Subic Bay — where a Chinese ship "unlawfully seized" it last Thursday, according to a Pentagon statement Tuesday.

The USNS Bowditch, a Military Sealift Command vessel, had been recovering two underwater gliders used to collect ocean data when a Chinese

navy salvage ship pulled within 500 yards, launched a small boat and seized one of them in international waters, the Pentagon said.

"This incident was inconsistent with both international law and standards of professionalism for conduct between navies at sea," the statement said.

Chinese state-run media reports have criticized the U.S. for conducting "close-in surveillance" within the South China Sea, most of which Beijing claims as its own. The Chinese Communist Party newspaper The People's Daily said the drone was found in "Chinese jurisdictional waters."

The drone was seized and the handover completed within the Philippines exclusive economic

zone, or EEZ, the Defense Department said.

"The seized UUV is a sovereign immune vessel of the U.S. Navy which was conducting routine operations in the international waters of the South China Sea in full compliance with international law," the Pentagon said Tuesday.

EEZs comprise about a third of the world's oceans and are open to navigation. Most countries consider them open to surveillance activities under international maritime law, though a few countries, such as China, have raised objections.

However, Chinese vessels operate their own underwater drones, and their intelligence ships have routinely been reported within U.S. EEZs off

Guam, Hawaii and Alaska, according to previous Navy reports.

The U.S. is continuing to investigate the incident and will discuss the findings with China, said the statement, which also called on the Chinese to "refrain from further efforts to impede lawful U.S. activities."

China's claims to hundreds of rocks, reefs and small islands within the South China Sea have stoked tensions in recent years with its neighbors, several of whom hold competing claims. China has dumped more than 3,000 acres of landfill on its claimed reefs, topping them with weapons, radar and military-capable runways, according to Pentagon reports and satellite imagery.

# NATO, Russia talk, still differ on Ukraine

BY LORNE COOK  
Associated Press

BRUSSELS — NATO and Russia remain at loggerheads over Ukraine, the alliance's top official said Monday, but have discussed a proposal to try to improve air safety over the Baltic Sea.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said the 28-nation military alliance and Russia "have profound disagreements on the crisis" in Ukraine.

He said NATO allies "reiterated their strong support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity" and insisted that they would never "recognize Russia's illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea."

Stoltenberg's remarks came after the NATO-Russia Council, their main forum for dialogue, met in Brussels on Monday for more than three hours.

In a statement later, Russia's NATO ambassador, Alexander Grushko, said that he had raised Ukrainian cease-fire violations with the allies, notably through the use of heavy weapons. NATO members have also accused Russia of similar violations.

He also called on the alliance to urge Ukraine to respect its commitments.

It was the third time this year that diplomats have tried to resolve some of their differences.

The meeting included talks on ways to avoid incidents and accidents between

Russian and NATO forces.

Russia has annoyed NATO with snap war games or by buzzing the alliance's ships and aircraft with fighter jets, as well as what NATO sees as aggressive use of propaganda.

The two sides exchanged some information on respective military exercises.

Grushko, said a major factor in the deterioration of ties was the alliance's "reinforcement of military infrastructure along the Russian borders," and he called on NATO to stop its military activities there.

Stoltenberg underlined that the new meeting "does not indicate a return to business as usual."

## Confidence in US support higher in S. Korea than Japan

BY ERIK SLAVIN  
Stars and Stripes

South Koreans are confident the American military would aid them in a conflict, while the Japanese are far less certain, according to a Gallup poll released this week measuring confidence in U.S. intervention among Asian nations.

If conflict broke out on the Korean Peninsula, 70 percent of South Koreans said the U.S. military would fight by their side, with 18 percent disagreeing and the remainder either

unsure or answering that it depends on the situation.

In Japan, which U.S. officials often call a "cornerstone ally," 53 percent said the U.S. would defend their country, with 33 percent answering that the U.S. would leave them to fend for themselves.

The U.S. stations about 50,000 personnel throughout Japan and maintains a treaty that requires it to defend Japanese territory if attacked.

Japanese officials and media have stated uncertainty in U.S. support in recent years due to

budget caps on defense spending by Congress. Those statements increased following campaign speeches by President-elect Donald Trump, who questioned in early 2016 whether Japan and South Korea were paying anything to support the U.S. presence.

Japan pays an average of 189.3 billion yen per year, which has fluctuated between \$1.6 billion and \$1.9 billion, depending on exchange rates, to support U.S. bases in the country as part of a five-year deal signed in 2015.

Japan also spent 176 billion

yen, or \$1.8 billion, in 2016 toward realignment of U.S. forces in the region, which includes transferring Marines to Guam in the 2020s.

U.S. and South Korean officials say Seoul paid nearly \$850 million last year, or about half the total cost for the 28,500 U.S. troops stationed on the peninsula.

Among the 16 countries polled in the Asia Pacific region, Australians felt most confident in U.S. military aid, with 79 percent saying Washington would help.

## N. Korea's ballistic missile sub appears to have been at sea

BY AARON KIDD  
Stars and Stripes

North Korea's ballistic missile-launching submarine appears to have been out to sea recently, a Washington-based think tank said, though it's unclear whether a test is imminent.

The news comes at the end of a year in which the communist nation conducted two underground nuclear tests and a number of missile launches, including three from a sub.

Satellite images taken this month of the North's Sinpo

South Shipyard show that netting previously covering the GORAE-class experimental ballistic missile submarine and submersible test barge is missing, according to an analysis published Monday by 38 North, a website run by Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies.

Equipment and supplies are visible near the vessel, suggesting it had either recently been at sea or was being prepared to head out soon, the website said.

However, the analysis said it's impossible to determine whether a submarine-launched bal-

listic missile test is in the cards since the sub and test barge could be sent out for a variety of reasons, including "certification of personnel or validation of repairs."

The photos also show that a protective berm at the shipyard's test stand has been finished, allowing the North to test missiles larger than the KN-11 SLBM fired in August. That missile flew about 310 miles but at a high angle, suggesting it could have gone much farther.

Construction also may have started on a new ballistic-missile submarine, said the

analysis, citing the repeated movement of rail-mounted gantry cranes near construction halls over the past several months and frequent activity at a storage yard.

"These two developments suggest that there is either internal construction work underway on the halls or a shipbuilding program has begun," 38 North said. "If a shipbuilding program has begun, one possibility is that North Korea has commenced construction of a new submarine to carry ballistic missiles."

## Russia, Turkey, Iran meet about Syria without the US

Associated Press

BEIRUT — Russia, Iran and Turkey are ready to act as guarantors to a future settlement between the Syrian government and the opposition, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Tuesday, as hundreds more residents left the opposition's last foothold in eastern Aleppo.

The announcement from Moscow underscored Turkey's position as a key broker in the Syria conflict, after it mediated last week's agreement with Russia to have the opposition surrender its presence in Aleppo, Syria's largest city.

The United States was notably absent from the meeting between the foreign ministers of Turkey, Russia and Iran.

Moscow is a staunch ally of Syrian President Bashar Assad, while Ankara sponsors the rebels seeking to topple him.

The talks in the Russian capital were a sign that the two countries wanted to keep their ties on track after the dramatic assassination of Russia's ambassador to Turkey the previous night by an Ankara policeman. After killing his victim, the shooter cried out, "Don't forget Aleppo! Don't forget Syria!" — a reference to Moscow's role in backing Syria's assault on the city politically and militarily with airstrikes.

In Aleppo, a fleet of buses entered east Aleppo again Tuesday afternoon to evacuate the remaining rebels and civilians from the city, activists said.

Opposition media activist Ahmad Primo said the fleet could well be the last one to

leave the city. He spoke from the Rashideen crossing between government and rebel-held territory in the Aleppo countryside.

Residents from eastern Aleppo and the Syrian opposition say the evacuation amounts to forced displacement. Months of devastating Syrian and Russian air raids that destroyed buildings, hospitals and schools in the enclave — and reduced much of eastern Aleppo to rubble — left the residents with little choice but to flee.

The precise number of people seeking evacuation — and who have already left — has never been clear.

Rami Aburrahman head of the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said 17,000 civilians and 5,000 fighters have left; the International Committee of the Red Cross, which has overseen the evacuations, said 25,000 have left; and the Turkish Foreign Ministry's figure is 37,000.

The Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, which is fighting alongside Syrian President Bashar Assad's forces, warned the remaining residents in the rebel enclave on Tuesday to leave "as quickly as possible" in statements broadcast by a Hezbollah media arm.

Dmitry Peskov, the spokesman for Russian President Vladimir Putin, said the killing of Russian Ambassador Andrei Karlov in the shooting Monday night in Ankara plays into the hands of those who want to derail peace talks for Syria and "drive a wedge between Russia and Turkey."

## Security increased at German markets Americans frequent

BY JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

Security was ratcheted up Tuesday at Christmas markets across Germany, where heavily armed police were on guard after a deadly attack in Berlin that has prompted U.S. military officials to urge vigilance among its members in Europe.

U.S. European Command said it was accounting for its 62,000 personnel stationed in Europe. A hijacked truck was driven through a crowded Christmas market Monday evening in Berlin, killing 12 people and injuring nearly 50. But there have been no reports that any members of the military community were among the dead or injured.

"Everyone should maintain a high level of situational awareness and apply appropriate measures to reduce the risk of a terror attack, such as shopping during non-peak hours, avoiding areas near vehicle access points, and minimizing time spent in unsecure areas of airports and other mass-transit nodes," U.S. Army Europe's anti-terrorism division said in a release.

EUCOM said it continually assesses new threats across Europe to ensure the safety of personnel but declined to spec-

ify any measures being taken to beef up base security, citing security concerns.

"It's an important time for servicemembers and their families to remain vigilant," EUCOM spokesman Lt. Col. David Faggard said.

In Stuttgart, home to EUCOM headquarters, a military community of 23,000 people and host to one of the largest Christmas markets in Germany, police with rifles were a prominent presence Tuesday in the downtown area where the market is located. The market attracts thousands of visitors during the Christmas season, and Americans are a common presence after hours and on the weekend. Until now, the police presence had been steady but discreet.

"From today on, police will carry machine guns, and on several streets around the Christmas markets, we will put concrete barriers," said Stefan Keilbach, spokesman with the Stuttgart police.

Special police trained in countering terrorist attackers also have been placed at the Stuttgart market, though authorities declined to specify how many officers have been added.

Similar scenes of a more robust police presence played out in other cities with large U.S. military contingents.

## Turkish official: Russian envoy's killer likely didn't act alone

Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey — The Turkish policeman who assassinated Russia's ambassador was unlikely to have acted alone, a senior Turkish government official said Tuesday, as investigators from both countries hunted for clues as to who might have been behind the killing.

Russian investigators on Tuesday inspected the art gallery in the Turkish capital of Ankara, where Ambassador Andrei Karlov was shot dead Monday evening by Mevlut Mert Altintas, 22. The gunman, a member of Ankara's riot police squad, had shouted slogans about the embattled Syrian city of Aleppo as he killed the

envoy.

Russia's entrance into Syria's war helped turn the tide of the conflict and heralded a series of victories for government forces. Up until a few months ago, the Russian military was bombing rebel positions in Aleppo.

The senior government official described the killing as "fully professional, not a one-

man action," and said the attack was well-planned. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to The Associated Press because he was not authorized to release details to the press.

Turkish authorities have not publicly released any information on the investigation or on a possible motive for the shooting.

## First lady gives Oprah solemn exit interview

*The Washington Post*

As Michelle Obama prepares to exit the White House, she seems to be in a somber mood. In a wide-ranging interview with Oprah Winfrey, she said the weight her husband's presidency placed on their family has lifted "knowing that we've made it this far, and we've survived and in many ways thrived."

But she sounded concerned about the future, saying that when it comes to the nation, she said she prays that Americans still have "hope."

Obama was relaxed throughout the conversation, which was taped last week before the Obamas left for their annual Christmas vacation in Hawaii. The women are friends, and Winfrey is a political supporter of President Barack Obama.

When Winfrey asked whether Michelle Obama thought her husband's administration achieved the "hope" that it "was all about," the first lady said she did — and then drew a contrast with his successor.

"Yes, I do. Because we feel the difference now," she said, referring to the election results that will put Republican Donald Trump in the White House. "See, now we are feeling what not having hope feels like, you know. Hope is necessary. It is a necessary concept. What do you give your kids if you can't give them hope?"

The president-elect responded to the first lady's assessment at a rally Saturday in Alabama. "Michelle Obama said yesterday that there's no hope," Trump told the crowd, which booed. "But I assume she was talking about the past, not the future."

Still, Obama said that she and her husband are doing what they can to help smooth a path for the next administration. She met with future first lady Melania Trump following the election.

"My offer to Melania was, you really don't know what you don't know until you're here, so the door is open," Obama said.

# Revolt fizzles as Trump secures official Electoral College victory

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — So much for an Electoral College revolt.

Despite weeks of lobbying and a day of protests, President-elect Donald Trump won all but two of the Electoral College votes he claimed on Election Day, ensuring he will become America's 45th president.

There were more protest votes among Democratic electors — five — than there were among Republicans.

All 538 electors met in state capitals across the country Monday to cast their votes. Trump's polarizing victory in November and the fact that Democrat Hillary Clinton won the popular vote by more than 2.8 million votes had stirred an intense lobbying effort. But the endeavor produced more noise than results.

With all states reporting, Trump finished with 304 votes

and Clinton had 227. It takes 270 Electoral College votes to win the presidency. Texas put Trump over the top, despite two Republican electors casting protest votes.

"We did it!" Trump tweeted Monday evening. "Thank you to all of my great supporters, we just officially won the election (despite all of the distorted and inaccurate media)."

He later issued a statement saying: "With this historic step we can look forward to the bright future ahead. I will work hard to unite our country and be the President of all Americans."

Befitting an election filled with acrimony, thousands of protesters converged on state capitals Monday, urging Republican electors to abandon their party's winning candidate.

More than 200 demonstrators braved freezing tempera-

tures at Pennsylvania's capital, chanting, "No Trump, no KKK, no fascist USA!" and "No treason, no Trump!"

In Madison, Wis., protesters shouted, cried and sang "Silent Night." In Augusta, Maine, they banged on drums and held signs that said, "Don't let Putin Pick Our President," referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Among the Republican electors in Texas who cast protest votes, one voted for Ohio Gov. John Kasich; the other voted for former Texas Rep. Ron Paul.

Clinton lost four electors in Washington state — three voted for former Secretary of State Colin Powell and one voted for Native American tribal leader Faith Spotted Eagle. She also lost an elector in Hawaii to Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders. Clinton beat Sanders in the Democratic primaries.

## Judge orders public release of warrant in Clinton private email server probe

*Associated Press*

NEW YORK — A federal judge on Monday ordered the public release of the search warrant that FBI agents used just weeks before the presidential election to reopen their investigation of Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server.

U.S. District Judge P. Kevin Castel ruled Monday that the public had a right to see the warrant, which he said was secretly filed with the court on Oct. 30.

Agents used the warrant to get access to emails stored on a computer belonging to Anthony Weiner, the estranged husband of top Clinton aide Huma Abedin.

FBI Director James Comey upended the presidential race on Oct. 28 when he informed Congress that agents would be digging through the cache of emails between Abedin and

Clinton for any new evidence related to Clinton's handling of sensitive State Department information.

Two days before the Nov. 8 election, Comey announced that the inquiry had uncovered no new evidence of wrongdoing. Historians will long debate whether the revelations factored into Clinton's loss to Donald Trump.

The court documents will be unsealed at noon Tuesday, with portions blacked out to conceal the names of the agents. The judge also ordered the redaction of any information about an open investigation of Weiner's online correspondence with a teenage girl.

Agents initially seized the computer in connection with that investigation.

Weiner, a Democrat, resigned his seat in Congress after sexu-

ally explicit texts and social media posts to various women. He tried for a political comeback two years later by running for mayor of New York, but his campaign was undone when evidence emerged that he hadn't given up his sexting habit.

Federal authorities began investigating him in late September after an online news outlet, the Daily Mail, published an interview with a North Carolina girl who said she had exchanged sexually explicit messages with him over several months.

Randol Schoenberg, a Los Angeles lawyer who specializes in recovering works of art stolen by the Nazis, petitioned the court to make the search warrant and supporting documents public.

In his order, Castel said public interest in the case overrode any privacy considerations.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Teens attack after man declines shoveling help

**MA** BROCKTON — Police say a group of teens attacked a Brockton man after he declined their offer to help him shovel his driveway.

The Enterprise reported that the man had been clearing his driveway after Saturday's snowstorm when he was approached. He told police 10 to 15 teens asked him if he needed help. He said the teens jumped him and hit him with a piece of wood when he said he didn't.

The teens then ran off. Police did not find them.

### Santa robbed of coat, toy bag in van theft

**KS** OVERLAND PARK — Someone is on Santa's naughty list after making off with his jacket and toy bag.

The Kansas City Star reported that the theft happened Saturday when longtime Santa actor Gary Senner, 62, stopped for coffee before spending the day hearing children's Christmas wishes. While he was inside a convenience store, someone drove off with his van. He was wearing his Santa pants, but he left his coat and keys in the vehicle.

He said his mother made his Santa outfit, which he describes as "very distinctive."

### Fly infestation forces closure of high school

**MA** CHELSEA — A suburban Boston high school is expected to remain closed for a few more days while contractors work on controlling a fly infestation that one student called "nasty."

Superintendent Mary Bourque said Chelsea High School was to remain closed Monday and Tuesday so work-

ers could cut through a concrete floor and fix four cracked pipes underneath that are thought to be the source of the infestation. The school was also closed for two days last week.

The cracked pipes were discovered using video technology. The flies were first spotted in the kitchen area earlier this month.

### Teen robbery suspects found hiding in water

**CT** STAMFORD — Police in Connecticut say two 16-year-old boys who allegedly assaulted and robbed a food delivery driver thought it would be a good idea to hide from police by jumping in a frigid pond.

Police told the Stamford Advocate they got a call at about 3:40 p.m. Sunday from a witness who reported seeing three people wearing ski masks robbing the delivery man in Stamford before running away.

Lt. Gene Dohmann said more than a dozen police including two dog units descended on the area and within 15 minutes found two suspects crouching in the waters of Holly Pond up to the top of their heads. A third suspect remains at large.

### Former bar owner fined after 3 killed in crash

**VT** CASTLETON — The Vermont Liquor Control Board said the former owner of a bar was fined \$15,000 and had its liquor licenses revoked in connection with a one-car crash that killed three people in March.

The Rutland Herald reported the decision to fine The Edgewater Inc. was announced Dec. 1 and came after an investigation by the Department of Liquor Control.

The Edgewater formerly owned the Fishtail Tavern in

Bomoseen. Authorities say Andrew Laramie, 26, Caleb Kinney, 24, and Samantha Forrest, 23, had left the Fishtail Tavern and were later killed after crashing into a tree in Castleton. The board found that the bar didn't take the proper precautions to prevent the three deaths by serving the trio when they were visibly intoxicated and not preventing them from getting in the car.

### Secret Santa pays nearly \$5K in layaways

**OH** MIDDLETOWN — A Secret Santa has paid off nearly \$5,000 in shoppers' layaways at a southwest Ohio Wal-Mart store.

Store manager Darren Dooley told the Hamilton-Middletown Journal-News the anonymous Santa paid off layaway items at a Wal-Mart store in Middletown last week. He did the same thing last year.

Dooley said he knows the person's identity, but that he doesn't want it revealed.

Dooley said layaways have also been paid at other Wal-Mart stores in the region.

### State's bald eagle may be among US' oldest

**IN** BLOOMINGTON — Indiana wildlife officials say a bald eagle introduced to the state 28 years ago may be one of the oldest bald eagles in the U.S.

Assistant nongame bird biologist Amy Kearns of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources said the female eagle known as C43 was spotted last month at Monroe Lake, where she was released in 1988.

Kearns said only seven other banded eagles in the U.S. have been reported to live 28 years or longer.

Biologists brought C43 and 72 other eaglets to Indiana to

start the state's bald eagle restoration program

### Hit-and-run crash leads police to pipe bomb

**CA** SACRAMENTO — Sacramento police have reopened a street after safely disabling a live pipe bomb dropped during a hit-and-run crash.

Sacramento police said the pipe bomb appeared to have fallen off a car that hit another vehicle and fled the scene Saturday.

Television station KCRA reported police were looking for the car, described as a white Chevy "camper style" van with ladders and blue stripes.

Police said that in addition to the pipe bomb, the suspect also left behind power tools, syringes, camouflage clothing and fishnet stockings.

No one was injured in the crash.

### Ones, zeroes stolen off addresses returned

**PA** PHILADELPHIA — Scores of ones and zeroes stolen from addresses mounted on the homes of Philadelphia residents have been returned.

The news website Billy Penn reported that a white trash bag containing 83 metal address markers was left Monday night at the east Kensington home of Meghan Haley.

Haley earlier released surveillance footage of a man and woman going around the neighborhood in September ripping zeroes and ones off the front of homes.

She said she doesn't know whether the bag containing 56 ones and 27 zeroes was returned by the thieves or by a good Samaritan who found the numbers.

From wire reports

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# Could skipping bowls be a new trend?

Associated Press

The decisions by Louisiana State University's Leonard Fournette and Stanford's Christian McCaffrey to bypass post-season games as they prepare for the NFL could be a jolt to the College Football bowl business.

"Is it a sign of things to come?" asked Arthur Weiss, an agent based in Franklin Lakes, N.J. "I would think that it's too early to say for sure, but when you factor in the type of financial considerations that these top-ranked players are facing, it may well be headed in that direction."

McCaffrey, the 2015 Heisman Trophy runner-up, announced Monday he wouldn't play in the Dec. 30 Sun Bowl between Stanford and North Carolina "so I can begin my draft prep immediately." Three days earlier, Fournette said he would miss LSU's Citrus Bowl matchup with Louisville on Dec. 31 to rest an injured ankle.

The two running backs are regarded as potential first-round draft picks for the NFL, with Fournette expected to be among the first players picked.

Their decisions garnered so much attention Monday that Texas A&M junior defensive end Myles Garrett released a statement through the uni-

versity saying he would play in the Texas Bowl against Kansas State. Garrett hasn't announced whether he plans to turn pro after this season, but he is considered a potential No. 1 overall pick.

Bowl officials have taken the news in stride, at least publicly.

Steve Hogan, the executive director of the Citrus Bowl and Russell Athletic Bowl, said he was aware at the time LSU received a Citrus invitation of the possibility Fournette's ankle might prevent him from playing.

"I hope it's not a trend," Sun Bowl executive director Bernie Olivas said. "As far as Christian, I'm not speaking for him, but I know where he's coming from, especially based on the fact he'd been injured this year already and didn't want to risk reinjuring."

Last season, Notre Dame linebacker Jaylon Smith tore two knee ligaments in a Fiesta Bowl loss to Ohio State, and has not played since.

Smith was projected as a potential top-five pick before his injury, and instead went to the Dallas Cowboys in the second round with the 34th overall pick in the draft. The difference in guaranteed contract money is about \$19 million.

Wright Waters, the executive director of the Football Bowl

Association, said he understands if an injury prevents a star player from performing in a bowl game.

"If we have someone who is just pulling out of the game ... and they're just saying, 'I might get hurt,' and they don't have any problem, yeah, I've got a problem with that," Waters said. "And I think that's in some cases kind of narrow-sighted, because they might have the opportunity to enhance their (stock)."

North Carolina junior defensive tackle Naz Jones will forgo his senior season to enter the draft and will play in the Sun Bowl.

"I still have things that I can put on film," Jones said. "Yeah, I'm not in that category to sit out a game like that."

Pittsburgh junior running back James Conner missed the 2015 season as he recovered from a knee injury and battled cancer. Conner said he never considered missing the Panthers' Dec. 28 Pinstripe Bowl matchup with Northwestern.

"I just feel like I'm going to take advantage of it really, showing the scouts I'm back to my normal self and that I can compete at a high level after everything I've been through," Conner said.

McCaffrey's Stanford teammates Trenton Irwin and Solo-

mon Thomas sent out tweets supporting him Monday. Dallas Cowboys rookie running back and former Ohio State star Ezekiel Elliott tweeted: "I would do anything to play one more time with my brothers in that scarlet and gray."

Elliott bypassed his senior season to enter the draft. He added in separate tweets: "there is a difference between not coming back for your last year and not finishing your last season."

Arkansas coach Bret Bielema said he understands getting upset about a player bailing out on his team, but there is more to it.

"You've got to let go of the moment and look at the big picture, which I think is really, really big in moments like this," Bielema said. "These kids now have not only the next six months that could shape their future, but when you're paying the money that some of these people are getting, you're talking about the next 40 years of their life, their children's lives and everybody can be affected by this."

The stakes are higher than ever for players looking at professional careers.

"It's as simple as this," Weiss said. "It's risk vs. reward."

## Evans leads Tulsa to Miami Beach Bowl win

Associated Press

MIAMI — Dane Evans and Tulsa put up huge numbers all season, and did it again at the Miami Beach Bowl.

Evans passed for 304 yards and five touchdowns in his final college game, three of those scoring throws going to Keenan Lucas, and Tulsa rolled past Central Michigan 55-10 on Monday afternoon at Marlins Park.

Evans completed 28 of 38 passes for the Golden Hurricane (10-3), who finished with six wins in the season's final seven games. It capped a record-setting career for Evans, who became Tulsa's leader with 84 touchdown throws and — as a big baseball fan — said it was a thrill to play in a big-league

park.

"If anyone knows me, they know I don't go into a game hoping I get 300 and five touchdowns," said Evans, also the school leader in passing yards. "I just want to win."

Tulsa's offense got points on its first eight possessions, plus another touchdown when Jesse Brubaker ran an interception back 66 yards for a score. The Golden Hurricane — who weren't stopped with Evans on the field — turned it over on downs in their final two drives, the second of those a merciful kneel-down with 1:44 left at the Central Michigan 5.

Tulsa finished the season averaging 42.5 points and 527 yards per game. The Golden Hurricane outgained Central Michigan

581-355.

"We've had a really good season and this is a really good football team," Tulsa coach Philip Montgomery said. "I don't know if we've gotten the respect across the country that we deserve."

Cooper Rush was 24-for-49 passing for 241 yards for Central Michigan (6-7), throwing three interceptions in his final game with the Chippewas. Jahray Hayes ran for Central Michigan's lone touchdown.

"We certainly felt like we matched up a little better than what we demonstrated today," Central Michigan coach John Bonamego said. "We just didn't execute at a fundamental level."

# Broncos deny offensive-defensive rift

Associated Press

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. — The Denver Broncos downplayed any disharmony in their locker room that erupted following their 16-3 loss to New England that left them precariously close to missing the playoffs a year after winning it all.

Cornerback Aqib Talib objected when left tackle Russell Okung rose to speak after coach Gary Kubiak asked if anyone wanted to address the team in the locker room after the loss.

That started a shouting match between defensive players who had held Tom Brady in check and the O-linemen, who have taken the brunt of the blame for Denver's dive.

"Well, it was just an instance where you have two guys that are very emotional and very competitive who really want what's best for this team and it's nothing, it's not a big issue," Okung said Monday. "I think at the end of the day we all want the same thing, we want to win games."

The defensive backs didn't

come through the locker room during the media's 45-minute access Monday.

Talib's comments to reporters after the game belied any brewing conflict.

"That's not going to take us nowhere, being frustrated and beefing with the offense," Talib said. "That's going to get us nowhere. We're going to ride and stick together. We're going to go play Christmas night."

The Broncos (8-6) need to beat the Chiefs (10-4) and the Raiders (11-3) to have any chance of defending their title. Even that might not get them into the playoffs.

Denver's defense has carried the team for two years now, and the frustration boiled over after they held Brady to a season-low 188 yards and no touchdowns on 16-for-32 passing. For a Patriots offense missing Rob Gronkowski and Danny Amendola, that should have been sufficient to beat Brady for a seventh time in 10 tries.

Kubiak said he didn't have a problem with Talib's reaction Sunday after the game, but in-

sisted it wasn't a big issue that could fracture his team.

"It's OK to be upset," Kubiak said. "There's pain in what we do and you put a lot into it. There's no division. That's battling and that's part of football. Defensively, we should feel really good in how we played yesterday. Offensively, we should look at it and say, 'Damn, we did some good things, we should have scored some points.'"

Kubiak said he would "never let something be divisive," and wasn't bothered by the friction.

"There's nobody feeling good today," Kubiak said. "Did some people play better than others? Yeah, but that's the case every week in football."

"But we regroup and we've got to get better, got to go on the road and play in a tough game. So, there's no time to feel sorry for yourself. But there's always time to be honest with yourself."

Okung said he and Talib cleared the air Monday, saying, "we definitely made amends." Yet, Kubiak wondered if that was even necessary, suggest-

ing the hubbub "was not a big deal."

## Texans starting Savage

HOUSTON — Tom Savage will start at quarterback for the Houston Texans on Saturday against the Cincinnati Bengals.

Coach Bill O'Brien announced the decision on Monday, a day after Savage took over in the second quarter when Brock Osweiler was benched against the Jacksonville Jaguars.

"We make decisions on what we think is the best way to help the team, what helps the team win," O'Brien said.

"And I think that yesterday and this week I feel like Tom Savage gives us the best chance to win. I'm going to give him a week to prepare as a starter and see what he can do for us on Saturday night against the Bengals."

Savage threw for 260 yards to help Houston rally from a 13-point deficit for a 21-20 win in his first regular-season action since 2014.

# Panthers deal severe blow to Redskins' playoff hopes

Associated Press

LANDOVER, Md. — Kirk Cousins and the Washington Redskins had their easiest path to the playoffs in front of them and they gave it away with another Monday night flop.

Cousins threw an interception and lost a fumble near his goal line, and the Redskins lost control of their playoff future with a 26-15 loss to the defending NFC champion Carolina Panthers.

Washington (7-6-1) could have clinched a playoff berth by winning its final three games but now needs help with two weeks left in the season. The Redskins need the Green Bay Packers and Tampa Bay Buccaneers to slip to have any chance of making the postseason.

"We put ourselves in this po-

sition, so we can't sit here and feel sorry for ourselves," left tackle Trent Williams said. "Obviously we're not in the driver's seat anymore and we're going to need some help, but that all doesn't matter if we don't take care of our business."

Carolina (6-8) kept its astronomical wild-card hopes alive. The Panthers need to win out and have 10 games go their way, including another tie for Washington.

"We didn't get it done," said wide receiver DeSean Jackson, who had seven catches for 111 yards. "Obviously it's frustrating because we knew what we had at stake, we knew what we had on our hands and we can't really talk about playoffs until we handle who we need to handle and play better."

After being picked off by Kurt

Coleman in the first half to set up a Carolina field goal, Cousins was sacked by Wes Horton and fumbled on the first snap after halftime as the Panthers took over at the 1-yard line. They scored two plays later to take a 20-9 lead.

Cousins finished 32-for-47 for 316 yards with far too many missed throws in a game with such high stakes. Cousins and coach Jay Gruden were at a loss to explain how the usually high-powered offense sputtered at such a key moment.

"We just never got any kind of rhythm whatsoever throughout the whole game," said Gruden, referencing his team going 2-for-12 on third down. "Part of it was the running game was atrocious, part of it was we had no deep passing game and then the other part: Carolina was

very good today."

Reigning league MVP Cam Newton showed no ill effects from a shoulder injury suffered last week, throwing for 300 yards and two touchdowns.

"He took a little bit of a shot early on, but when he came to the sideline and had a chance to take a breath he was ready to roll," Carolina coach Ron Rivera said.

The Panthers took advantage of blunders by the Redskins, who lost their sixth consecutive Monday night home game. It was Washington's most lopsided loss since being routed 38-16 by Pittsburgh in the season opener, also on a Monday night.

"We didn't play well enough to win," Cousins said. "Just didn't make enough plays."

# Millsap helps push Hawks past Thunder

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Paul Millsap took advantage of a chance to show off his rare versatility.

Atlanta's 6-foot-8 forward shifted to center because Dwight Howard was out and Millsap scored a season-high 30 points, including the go-ahead 10-footer with 12.7 seconds left. He helped the Hawks overcome Russell Westbrook's 46 points and beat the Oklahoma City Thunder 110-108 on Monday night.

"It took everything we had," Millsap said. "It took everybody stepping up to get this win tonight."

After Millsap's late shot, Thunder center Steven Adams rebounded a missed three-pointer by Westbrook and dunked it, but a review determined that the basket came just after time expired.

Westbrook entered the game as the NBA's leading scorer with more than 30 points per game.

"If he gets his points — he's going to get that regardless," Millsap said. "The game plan was try to take everybody else out of it."

Westbrook, who made 16 of 33 shots and had 11 rebounds and seven assists, was unimpressed with his effort.

"No, we don't have any moral victories around here, buddy," he said.

Dennis Schroder scored 31 points and made 10 of 16 shots for the Hawks, who have won four of six after a six-game losing streak.

"Pretty special effort by the guys tonight, to come in here down Dwight, without him, and to find a way to compete against a great rebounding team and an individual player that's playing just lights-out basketball," Atlanta coach Mike Budenholzer said. "I was very proud of our players."

Jerami Grant scored a season-high 15 points, and Andre Roberson matched a season high with 14 points for the Thunder.

Westbrook scored 18 points in the second quarter to help the Thunder take a 53-48 lead. The Hawks shot 50 percent in the first half, but without Howard, they were outrebounded 27-14, and the Thunder outscored them 10-0 on second-chance points. Schroder scored 18 points in the first half, and

Millsap added 16.

The Hawks took an 81-78 lead into the fourth, then Atlanta held on.

"They made some tough plays toward the end of the game," Thunder guard Semaj Christon said. "We can do better on defense keeping the guys in front of us without fouling."

**Bulls 113, Pistons 82:** Jimmy Butler scored 19 points while Rajon Rondo had 10 points, 14 assists and eight rebounds as host Chicago beat Detroit to snap a three-game losing streak.

Taj Gibson added 16 points, Robin Lopez had 14 and Dwyane Wade, Doug McDermott and Nikola Mirotic had 13 apiece for Chicago, which had lost six of eight.

Jon Leuer scored 16 points for the Pistons, who have dropped three straight and four of five.

**Pacers 107, Wizards 105:** Thaddeus Young made a runner with 0.9 seconds left to give host Indiana a victory.

Paul George scored 27 points and Jeff Teague had 23, but the Pacers needed the last of Young's 12 points after the Wizards scored seven straight to tie it.

With 4.6 seconds remaining,

Young took the inbound pass at the top of the key, squared up his defender, Markieff Morris, then drove and put up his runner from the left side.

**Timberwolves 115, Suns 108:** Karl-Anthony Towns had 28 points and 15 rebounds as host Minnesota beat Phoenix.

Andrew Wiggins scored 26 points and Zach LaVine added 23 for the Timberwolves. Ricky Rubio had 12 assists and Minnesota picked up its first win at home since Nov. 17.

Eric Bledsoe scored 27 points for the Suns, who have lost three straight and four out of five.

**Nuggets 117, Mavericks 107:** Nikola Jokic had 27 points and 15 rebounds while Gary Harris scored a career-high 24 points as host Denver beat Dallas.

Jokic finished an assist shy of his first career triple-double and tied his career high in points to help the Nuggets win their third straight game. Emmanuel Mudiay scored 18 points.

Deron Williams led Dallas with 23 points and eight assists.

## Nugent-Hopkins scores in OT, lifts Oilers over Blues

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Patrick Maroon scored an emotional goal to tie it, and then Ryan Nugent-Hopkins won it for Edmonton in overtime.

Nugent-Hopkins scored 2:55 into OT after taking a pass from Connor McDavid, lifting the Oilers over the St. Louis Blues 3-2 on Monday night.

The winner came after Maroon, a St. Louis native, got his first goal in nine career games against the Blues by tipping a shot by Brandon Davidson 5:47 into the third period.

Cameras caught Maroon's son Anthony celebrating the score in the stands, and Maroon cried when he was shown

the video during a postgame television interview.

"I don't get to see him as much," he said, choking back tears. "It's pretty special."

"That was good especially playing in front of a team that I grew up watching," he added. "We had season tickets and you always get up for those games no matter what. It's fun to play your hometown team that you grew up watching and to get a goal is an extra bonus for me, and especially in front of my son and my family."

McDavid became the first NHL player with 40 points by assisting on the OT goal.

**Predators 2, Flyers 1 (SO):** Filip Forsberg got the tying goal midway through the third

period and Ryan Ellis had the only score in the shootout to help Nashville give host Philadelphia its second straight loss.

The Flyers had won 10 straight before losing to the Dallas Stars on Saturday.

**Ducks 3, Maple Leafs 2:** Cam Fowler scored a power-play goal in the third period, giving Anaheim coach Randy Carlyle a victory in his return to Toronto.

Carlyle was at Air Canada Centre for the first time since he was dismissed as Leafs coach almost two years ago.

**Flames 4, Coyotes 2:** Kris Versteeg put visiting Calgary ahead with its third power-play goal of the game in the third period to beat Arizona.

Versteeg and Troy Brouwer had a goal and assist each for Calgary, which had lost its last two games but has at least one power-play goal in its past eight contests.

**Red Wings-Hurricanes, ppd.:** The scheduled game between Carolina and Detroit was postponed because of unplayable ice.

A leak in the cooling system at PNC Arena in Raleigh, N.C., was discovered earlier in the day. The issue was fixed but not in time to restart the game. NHL rules state a game cannot start less than 22 hours before a team's next scheduled contest and the Red Wings are set to play at Tampa Bay at 7:30 on Tuesday night.