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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Marines: Lejeune needs \$3.6B in repairs

By LOLITA C. BALDOR

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — When Marines from Camp Lejeune, N.C., were preparing for their upcoming deployment to the Middle East, they faced an unusual challenge: the beach they needed to train on had been washed away by Hurricane Florence.

Using bulldozers and other equipment, they moved enough sand to rebuild a portion of Onslow Beach so Marines could practice moving on and off landing craft and get certified for their deployment. But almost immediately afterward, the ocean swept away the sand.

Marine leaders are saying it will cost around \$3.6 billion to repair the extensive damage to Camp Lejeune caused by the September hurricane that destroyed hundreds of buildings and facilities on the major East Coast base and spawned massive flooding and coastal erosion. That damage, they said, has made it harder to train forces for overseas deployments.

“We had to go through extraordinary efforts just to clear a patch of the beach so we could certify the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit that will deploy next week,” Marine Lt. Gen. Mark Brilakis said in an interview Thursday. “Marines are can-do. We went out and made that happen.”

But he said it’s only a temporary solution. “We pushed a lot of sand around, and a lot of that sand went back into the ocean. So we’re only going to be able to repeat that a couple times, if that, before we just don’t have the sand available to create that kind of capability,” said Brilakis, commander of U.S. Marine Corps Forces Command.

Marines conduct exercises twice a year in order to get certified prior to deployment. Part of that training involved bringing ships — such as landing craft — down to Lejeune from Norfolk, so that troops can rehearse combat landings and other mission drills. The beach must be wide enough to accommodate the ships, but the storm washed too much of it away.

In addition to the beach, the more than

30 inches of rain that flooded the region washed out roads and knocked down trees, blocking access to training ranges. And a number of hangars were damaged.

Meanwhile, nearly 5,000 military personnel and family members at Camp Lejeune were displaced, as their homes were destroyed or roofs damaged. Hundreds of other buildings were also damaged by the wind and rain, causing mold that also must now be removed.

Gen. Robert Neller, commandant of the Marine Corps, told senators this week that a number of the buildings are so old that it isn’t cost effective to repair them. Instead, he said they should be rebuilt. Brilakis said that a lot of the newer buildings on the base were better able to withstand the storm.

Hurricane Michael, which made landfall in the Florida Panhandle in October, heavily damaged Tyndall Air Force Base, and that price tag, said Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., is about \$5 billion.

Leave cancellation forces troops to scramble

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Scores of soldiers deployed to Europe could be on the hook after purchasing airline tickets home for the holidays, only to learn that their leave was never fully approved.

The 4th Combat Aviation Brigade out of Fort Carson, Colo., is nearing the end of a nine-month deployment in support of the U.S. military’s effort to reinforce NATO’s eastern flank.

In November, troops were told by their brigade commander that holiday leave was approved, allowing for soldiers to return home, according to U.S. Army WTF Moments — a site where troops often vent about military snafus.

The problem: whatever informal approval 4th CAB commander Col. Scott Gallaway thought he’d received hadn’t been cleared up the U.S. Army Europe chain of command, the website reported.

Policy states that deployed units are not authorized ordinary leave and an exception must be granted, according to USAREUR.

“Due to mission requirements, an exception was not supportable,” USAREUR spokeswoman Beth Clemons said. “Unfortunately, many soldiers purchased tickets before the leave approval process was complete.”

The Army has assigned refund coordinators to each of the brigade’s battalions to help soldiers try to get their money back, Clemons said.

About 250 soldiers bought tickets home, Clemons said.

“The command is doing everything in its power to rectify the situation and ensure no Soldier has to pay out of pocket for incurred expenses due to unapproved leave,” Clemons said in an email.

The confusion has been a source for unit strain. Soldiers “... are facing financial hardship due to inability to obtain refunds, pay high cancellation fees, and deal with the emotional toll being placed on these young families,” stated the message posted to Army WTF Moments.

But on U.S. Army WTF Moments’ Facebook page, there wasn’t an outpouring of sympathy among all commenters.

“So, the rotational force to

bulk up NATO forces against Russian forces actually thought they would get Christmas leave from Europe, even after current hostilities in the Kerch Strait? Lol get real,” wrote one.

Another unsympathetic commentator weighed in: “if you’ve been in the army longer than a day you know never buy tickets for leave without insurance on the flights, this (expletive) happens all the time,” the Facebook poster wrote.

However, there was some concern about the toll on the children back home.

“It’s not all about the financial hardship it’s about making kids happy and being a United family for the Holidays and a wish come true,” wrote another Facebook poster. “That has been destroyed.”

Senate votes to end Yemen war aid

BY CLAUDIA GRISALES
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Senate on Thursday approved legislation to end the U.S. military's support of the Saudi-led coalition in the war in Yemen, dealing a blow to the White House and a longtime strategic ally in the Middle East.

Senators voted 56 to 41 to approve a resolution to stop support for Saudi Arabia in the wake of the gruesome murder of a journalist, a souring alliance with the country and a civil war that is pushing Yemen to the brink of famine.

The Senate also approved a resolution condemning the country's crown prince.

Supporters said the Yemen resolution delivers the upper chamber's firmest rebuke of Saudi Arabia in the history of its relationship with the United States and marks the first

time that the Senate has voted to end what they called an unauthorized war. The resolution also escalates pressure on President Donald Trump's administration.

"We brought Republicans and Democrats together in a very historical moment," Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., a sponsor of the resolution, said after the final vote. "The Senate this afternoon stated that we will not continue participation in the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen, which has resulted in the worst humanitarian crisis on earth.

The Senate vote comes more than two weeks after it approved a procedural measure to allow Thursday's move, increasing pressure on the White House to reverse its direction in Yemen as well as push for a peaceful resolution in the country's ongoing civil war. More than 10 million people are bat-

tlung starvation because of the war, which has already claimed the lives of an estimated 85,000 children.

U.S. forces have provided support for Saudi Arabia and the Yemen government in their fight against Iran-backed Houthi rebels. Some lawmakers contend the U.S. military has not been given proper authority to do.

The Senate debated the resolution for several hours over two days, and it is slated for consideration before the House of Representatives next year.

After several days of peace talks between the Yemen government and the Houthis, both sides have reached several agreements, including a ceasefire in the key port city of Hodeida. The talks also signaled that the negotiations could see another round of discussions next month.

Army upgrades medal for GI who died in Kamdesh battle

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

In the early hours of Oct. 3, 2009, more than 300 enemy fighters stormed an isolated U.S. outpost in Afghanistan near the Pakistan border, overwhelming the mere 50 American troops stationed there.

For the next 12 hours, the soldiers stationed at Combat Outpost Keating fought one of the deadliest battles of the long war in Afghanistan.

Eight soldiers died and 27 were wounded in the Battle of Kamdesh, dubbed "a day of heroes" for the acts of valor displayed by those who repelled the attack.

Among the dead was Staff Sgt. Justin Gallegos, 27, who was posthumously awarded the Silver Star.

Now, that medal is being upgraded to the Distinguished Service Cross, the country's second-highest award for valor.

The fallen hero's teenage son, MacAiden Gallegos, will accept the award during a ceremony Saturday at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Alaska, the Army said in a statement.

Col. Dave Zinn, the current commander of the brigade in which Gallegos served during the battle, will present the honor. Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, will present a flag that had flown over the Capitol in Washington.

"As a team leader, Staff Sergeant Gallegos maneuvered under heavy sniper and RPG fire to reinforce a Western battle position and called for fire on several enemy positions," Gallegos' Silver Star citation reads. He "planned and initiated a course of action that enabled a section of Soldiers to regroup and provide security to endure the remaining hours of battle and counterattack the enemy force."

Ex-Special Forces soldier faces murder charge

The Washington Post

A former Special Forces soldier once lauded as a hero of the Afghanistan War was notified Thursday that he faces a charge of premeditated murder in connection with the 2010 killing of a suspected Taliban bomb maker, according to the veteran's attorney and an Army spokesman.

A forthcoming Article 32 hearing will assess the evidence against former Army Maj. Mathew L. Golsteyn and determine if the case should go to trial, said Phillip Stackhouse, the attorney. Golsteyn has been investigated by the military since 2011, when he allegedly said he had killed the man. The admission came during a polygraph test he took while applying for a job at the CIA, according to Army documents.

Army Lt. Col. Loren Bymer, a spokesman for Army Special Operations Command, confirmed the charge was read to

Golsteyn.

The prosecution marks the latest twist in the fall of a soldier who at one point was highly decorated. It also comes amid a string of other cases in which special operations veterans are accused of carrying out serious crimes, including a Navy SEAL who has been charged with murder in the alleged execution of an unarmed Islamic State militant in Iraq and two SEALs and two Marine Raiders who have been charged in the murder of a Special Forces soldier in Mali.

Stackhouse has maintained that Army investigators exaggerated what Golsteyn said in the CIA job interview and indicated Thursday that he and Golsteyn will fight the charge.

Two Marines who were working with Golsteyn's unit were killed by improvised explosives. According to Army documents obtained by The Washington Post, Golsteyn later recounted during the CIA job interview

that he and his soldiers began searching homes nearby afterward and eventually found materials needed to make bombs like the one that had killed the Marines.

Golsteyn said they brought the suspected bomb maker back to their base and that the man unexpectedly crossed paths with an Afghan tribal leader with whom Golsteyn's team was working. When the leader expressed fear for his life, Golsteyn grew concerned about the consequences of letting the suspected insurgent go, Army documents said. He is alleged to have then shot the Taliban fighter.

Army investigators closed an investigation of potential murder and conspiracy charges in 2014, finding that there was insufficient evidence to prosecute.

The Army reopened its investigation two months later.

Migrant girl, 7, dies in custody of US at border

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A 7-year-old girl picked up with her father and dozens of other migrants along a remote stretch of the U.S.-Mexico border suffered seizures and spiked a high fever in immigration custody and later died, federal officials said.

An autopsy was scheduled to try to determine what killed the girl, who appeared to be dehydrated and suffering from shock and apparently had not had anything to eat or drink in days, they said.

The girl was found Dec. 6 near Lordsburg, N.M., by U.S. Border Patrol agents. She was in custody for about eight hours before she began having seizures, U.S. Customs and Border Patrol officials said. Emergency medical technicians discovered the girl's fever was 105.7 degrees Fahrenheit, and she was airlifted to an El Paso, Texas, hospital, where she died. The results of the autopsy could take weeks, officials said.

The Guatemalan girl's death comes as increasing numbers of children and families are making the dangerous trek north from Central America and as immigration officials are being increasingly criticized for their treatment of migrants who arrive at the U.S.-Mexico border. A review of what happened in the girl's case will take place, federal officials said.

"On behalf of the Department of Homeland Security, our sincerest condolences go out to the family of the child," said a statement from Homeland Security, the parent department of the Border Patrol. "Border Patrol agents took every possible step to save the child's life under the most trying of circumstances. As fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, we empathize with the loss of any child."

The girl's death raises questions about whether border agents knew she was ill and whether she was fed anything or given anything to drink during her time in custody.

Cohen says Trump knew two hush-money payments wrong

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Shaken and facing a prison term, President Donald Trump's longtime personal lawyer said Friday that Trump directed him to buy the silence of two women during the 2016 campaign because he was concerned about how their stories of alleged affairs with him "would affect the election." He said Trump knew the payments were wrong.

Michael Cohen — who for more than a decade was a key power player in The Trump Organization and a fixture in Trump's political life — said he "gave loyalty to someone who, truthfully, does not deserve loyalty." Cohen spoke in an interview with ABC that aired Friday on "Good Morning America."

Cohen said that "of course" Trump knew it was wrong to make the hush-money payments, but he did not provide any specific evidence or detail

in the interview. Federal law requires that any payments made "for the purposes of influencing" an election must be reported in campaign finance disclosures.

Speaking to ABC's George Stephanopoulos, Cohen appeared shaken over the series of events that swiftly took him from Trump's "fixer" to a man facing three years in prison.

"I am done with the lying," Cohen said. "I am done being loyal to President Trump."

Cohen was sentenced Wednesday to three years in federal prison after pleaded guilty to several charges, including campaign finance violations and lying to Congress. Prosecutors have said Trump directed Cohen to arrange the payments to buy the silence of porn actress Stormy Daniels and former Playboy model Karen McDougal in the run-up to the 2016 campaign.

The hush money wasn't initially reported on campaign

finance documents and, in any case, far exceeded the legally acceptable amount for in-kind contributions. The federal limit on individual contributions is \$2,700.

Trump has denied directing Cohen to break the law and has asserted in a barrage of tweets over the last several weeks that Cohen is a "liar" who cut a deal in order to get a reduced prison sentence and to help himself and his family.

Loyalty has long been a core value for Trump, who has been stung by the behavior of Cohen and other former associates who have dissociated themselves from the president, intent on saving themselves.

Cohen insists that Trump is a different person now than when he was running his real estate empire in New York and said he believes the pressure of being the president of the United States is "much more than he thought it was going to be."

Chief of staff search has reality TV feel

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Serious contenders are hiding from view. Celebrity hangers-on are applying via Twitter. Fresh names circulate practically on the hour. And the man in charge is stoking much of the confusion.

President Donald Trump's hunt for a new chief of staff has taken on the feel of a reality TV show.

No leading name has emerged in the days since Trump's preferred candidate to replace John Kelly bowed out. But the void has quickly filled with drama. British journalist Piers Morgan suggested he would be a good fit in an op-ed for The Daily Mail, while former major league slugger Jose Canseco tweeted his interest to Trump. Speculation has swirled around

an array of Trump associates, prompting some to distance themselves from the job.

When former House Speaker Newt Gingrich visited the White House this week, he insisted it was merely to see the Christmas decorations.

Trump met Thursday with former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie to discuss the job, according to a person familiar with the meeting who was not authorized to discuss it publicly.

The chaotic process is hardly a novelty for the Trump administration, which has struggled with high staff turnover and attracting top talent, but it underscored the tumult of Trump's Washington. In past administrations, chief of staff was a sought-after job, typically awarded after a careful

process. Now, many view the job as a risky proposition, given Trump's propensity for disorder and his resistance to being managed.

For his part, Trump insisted Thursday that the process is moving along.

"We're interviewing people now for chief of staff," he said, adding that the short list is now "five people. Really good ones. Terrific people. Mostly well-known, but terrific people."

Trump himself likes to feed the drama. The erratic search recalled the transition period before Trump took office when prospective aides and television personalities paraded before a pack of journalists in the lobby of Trump Tower.

Author Chris Whipple, an expert on chiefs of staff, called the search process "sad to watch."

Wave of hoax bomb threats made across US

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A wave of bomb threats emailed Thursday to hundreds of schools, businesses and government buildings across the U.S. triggered searches, evacuations and fear — but there were no signs of explosives, and authorities said the scare appeared to be a crude extortion attempt.

Law enforcement agencies across the country dismissed the threats, saying they were meant to cause disruption and compel recipients into sending money and were not considered credible.

Some of the emails had the subject line: “Think Twice.” They were sent from a spoofed email address. The sender claimed to have had an associate plant a small bomb in the recipient’s building and that the only way to stop him from setting it off was by making an online payment of \$20,000 in Bitcoin.

“We are currently monitoring multiple bomb threats that have been sent elec-

tronically to various locations throughout the city,” the New York City Police Department’s counterterrorism unit tweeted. “These threats are also being reported to other locations nationwide & are NOT considered credible at this time.”

Other law enforcement agencies also dismissed the threats, which were written in a choppy style reminiscent of the Nigerian prince email scam.

The Palm Beach County, Fla., sheriff’s office and the Boise, Idaho, police said they had no reason to believe that threats made to locations in those areas were credible. One of the emails wound up in a spam filter, Boise police Chief William Bones said.

The FBI said it is assisting law enforcement agencies that are dealing with the threats.

“As always, we encourage the public to remain vigilant and to promptly report suspicious activities which could represent a threat to public safety,” the FBI said in a statement.

Thursday’s scare came less than two months after prominent Democratic officials and CNN’s Manhattan offices were targeted with package bombs. The suspect in that case, Cesar Sayoc, is in jail while awaiting trial.

In 2015, an emailed bomb threat prompted different reactions from the nation’s two largest public school systems. The Los Angeles school system closed down under threat of a mass attack, but New York City officials quickly saw it as a hoax.

In the wake of Thursday’s emails, some schools across the country closed early and others were evacuated or placed on lockdown. Authorities said a threat emailed to a school in Troy, Mo., about 55 miles north-east of St. Louis, was sent from Russia.

The bomb threats also prompted evacuations at city hall in Aurora, Ill., the offices of the News & Observer in Raleigh, N.C., a suburban Atlanta courthouse and businesses in Detroit.

Armored truck spilling cash leads to NJ crashes

Associated Press

An armored truck spilled cash on a New Jersey highway Thursday, leading to two crashes as drivers “went a little bit crazy,” stopping their cars and scrambling to grab the swirling money.

The frenzy happened during morning rush hour in East

Rutherford, near MetLife Stadium, where the New York Giants and New York Jets play.

In online videos, a man in uniform is seen running through traffic trying to collect money, while others exited their cars to do the same.

“People went a little bit crazy when they saw the money,” said Danielle Shah, 29, of Bloom-

field, N.J., who witnessed the incident from a bus she was riding into New York. “I mean, it seemed like the people who got out of the car — they just didn’t care. They parked their cars in the middle of the highway.”

Police Capt. Phil Taormina said it appeared that the armored vehicle had an issue with the lock on one of its doors.

In a statement, Brink’s confirmed the truck belonged to the company and said an investigation is underway, but declined further comment.

Police said they don’t know how much money spilled.

They later said people could arrange to return any collected cash without facing charges.

Strasbourg Christmas market attack suspect dead

Associated Press

STRASBOURG, France — The man authorities believe killed four people during a rampage near a Christmas market in Strasbourg died Thursday in a shootout with police at the end of a two-day manhunt, French authorities said.

The Paris prosecutor’s office, which handles terrorism cases in France, formally identified the man killed in the eastern French city as Cherif Chekatt, 29, a Strasbourg-born man with a long history of convictions for various crimes, including robberies.

Chekatt also had been on a watch list of potential extremists.

Interior Minister Christophe Castaner, speaking earlier from Strasbourg, said police had spotted a man matching the

suspect’s description in the city’s Neudorf neighborhood.

“The moment they tried to arrest him, he turned around and opened fire. They replied,” killing the man, Castaner said.

Investigators looking into the attack are trying to establish whether the main suspect was helped by accomplices while on the run, Paris prosecutor Remy Heitz said Friday.

The prosecutor, who handles terrorism cases throughout France, told a news conference on Friday that seven people are in police custody, including four family members of Chekatt.

“We want to reconstruct the past 48 hours in order to find out whether he got some support,” Heitz said.

Chekatt was suspected of killing people near Strasbourg’s Christmas market on

Tuesday night.

Three people died Tuesday and a fourth died Friday. Although they did not entirely clarify their announcement, prosecutors appeared to suggest that the person who died Friday was one of 12 wounded people and not another person who has been described as being brain dead.

Investigators found a gun, a knife and ammunition on Chekatt’s body.

The immediate aftermath of the shootout between French security forces and the suspect was caught on camera from across the street, with video footage showing armed officers at the scene and the body of the man slumped in a doorway.

More officers arrived at the scene soon after, followed by crime scene investigators.

Annual DC Rolling Thunder ride to end

BY NIKKI WENTLING
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Rolling Thunder will no longer hold its annual Memorial Day motorcycle ride through Washington after 2019, the group's founder announced Thursday.

The tradition is ending because of escalating costs and a lack of cooperation from the Pentagon and metropolitan police departments, said Artie Muller, a Vietnam veteran and founder of Rolling Thunder Inc.

"It has been a hard decision to make," Muller wrote in a letter that he plans to send to supporters in January. "After much discussion and thought over the last six months, Rolling Thunder National Officers have concluded to end our 32-year

annual D.C. Memorial weekend event."

Rolling Thunder is a nonprofit organization that honors prisoners of war and servicemembers missing in action. Its "Ride for Freedom" through Washington every Memorial Day weekend draws thousands of riders and onlookers. The ride started in 1988 with about 2,000 riders, Muller said. This year, there were more than 500,000.

Costs for the 2018 ride totaled more than \$200,000, Muller said. The nonprofit hasn't been able to recruit a new corporate sponsor, and Rolling Thunder didn't sell enough merchandise, such as patches, pins and flags.

The money that Rolling Thunder does collect should be going toward the group's community service branch, which

offers financial help to veterans, servicemembers and their families, Muller said.

"We're collecting money to help veterans, troops and their families, and spending \$200,000 on a run? I can't justify that," he said.

In addition, working with Pentagon police and the city police department to organize the event has become more difficult, Muller said. Participants this year were prevented from entering certain Pentagon parking lots where they typically convene.

In place of the national event, Muller encouraged the 90 individual chapters of Rolling Thunder to host their own Memorial Day demonstrations starting in 2020.

The announcement Thursday

prompted disappointment from some riders and fans of the event, according to Muller.

"I'm not surprised. I knew some would be upset about it," he said of the calls that he has received. "But sometimes, you got to change, and I think we do have to change."

Joe Chenelly, director of AM-VETS, a national veterans organization, said his group has "been working to ensure this does not die."

"This is too important to our veterans and, really, to all Americans to simply let it stop," Chenelly said. "These demonstrations and Rolling Thunder's unbelievable work over the past 32 years has made a tremendous impact, keeping the search going for our missing and prisoners of war."

Tainted romaine lettuce traced to California farm

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. health officials have traced a food poisoning outbreak from romaine lettuce to at least one farm in California.

But they cautioned Thursday that other farms are likely involved in the E. coli outbreak, and consumers should continue checking the label before purchasing romaine lettuce.

The Food and Drug Administration said 59 people in 15 states have now been sickened by the tainted lettuce. That's

seven more cases than previously reported, but regulators said they are fairly confident that the lettuce that first triggered the outbreak has been removed from the market. The FDA told consumers to avoid romaine lettuce just before Thanksgiving.

Officials said a water reservoir at Adam Brothers Family Farms in Santa Barbara County tested positive for the bacterial strain and the owners are cooperating with U.S. officials. Officials from the FDA and the Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention have not determined how the water reservoir — which is used to irrigate lettuce — became contaminated.

The bacteria can get into water and soil through multiple routes, including waste from domesticated animals or wild animals, fertilizer and other agricultural products.

The FDA's Dr. Stephen Ostroff said investigators have linked the tainted lettuce to multiple distributors and processors, suggesting it must have come from several farms.

A man who answered the

phone at Adam Brothers said he could not comment on the government announcement. According to the company's website, it grows only vegetable products, including broccoli, cauliflower, celery and various types of lettuce.

The government also narrowed the source of the outbreak to three California counties: Santa Barbara, Monterey and San Benito. That's down from six California counties under investigation when regulators began warning the public last month.

3 rescued from coal mine might face criminal charges

Associated Press

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — Spending four days in an inactive coal mine "was terrible," said one of three adults rescued Wednesday. However, the ordeal might be compounded by the filing of criminal charges.

Their faces covered in black soot, the three walked out of an ambulance at a fire hall in Whitesville to the screams of

relatives for a brief reunion Wednesday night before being taken to a hospital.

Cody Beverly told news outlets the four-day experience inside Elk Run Coal's Rock House Powellton mine near Clear Creek "was terrible."

"I'm with my family now. I'm fine," he said.

Beverly later told NBC News "Anybody who was involved in searching for us, I just want to

thank you with everything inside of me," he said. "This is the biggest lesson I've ever learned in my life. This is a life-changing experience for me."

"We appreciate every one of you guys," said Kayla Williams, who also was among those rescued.

Williams' father, Randall Williams, said she had gone into the mine in search of copper.

People in the region do

"whatever they can do to make money if they ain't got a job," Randall Williams told CBS News.

Raleigh County Prosecutor Kristen Keller said Thursday the sheriff's office is conducting a criminal investigation into the latest incident. She said the two offices began discussing potential charges when the search began Sunday.

Chargers go for two, knock off Chiefs

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Arrowhead Stadium was already emptying by the time Chargers quarterback Philip Rivers jogged to the locker room, triumphantly waving his hand as a satisfying cascade of boos washed over him.

He had finally beaten the Kansas City Chiefs.

It sounded perfect.

Rivers led Los Angeles on a feverish fourth-quarter comeback Thursday night, capped by a debatable pass-interference call, a tense video review of the last touchdown and the gutsy decision to try a two-point conversion. And for the first time in years against Kansas City, everything turned out perfectly for Rivers and the Chargers in a 29-28 victory that clinched their playoff spot.

"This was big. Here or at home, whatever," Rivers said, "we needed to beat these guys."

The Chargers (11-3) trailed 28-14 when Justin Jackson's touchdown run with 3:49 to go gave them a chance. They quickly got the ball back from Patrick Mahomes and the NFL's highest-scoring offense, and Rivers led a tense final drive that included a fourth-down dart to Travis Benjamin to keep it alive.

That crucial penalty on Kendall Fuller in the back of the end zone gave the Chargers the ball at the 1, and Rivers found Mike Williams along the sideline on the next play. And when his TD catch with 4 seconds left was confirmed, coach Anthony Lynn sent his offense back onto the field.

Williams hauled in the conversion to end five years' worth of frustration.

"We didn't come here to tie. We came here to win. So to me it was a no-brainer," said Lynn, whose team became the first since Minnesota in Week 15 of the 2002 season to win with a two-point conversion in the final 10 seconds of regulation.

The comeback allowed Los Angeles to forge a first-place tie in the AFC West, though the Chiefs (11-3) hold the tiebreaker with a better division record. More satisfying was the simple fact that Rivers and the Chargers had finally snapped their nine-game losing streak against Kansas City.

"Oh, it's satisfying," Benjamin said. "We talked about it. We knew it had been a couple years and we wanted to go into this game and change that and we did."

Rivers threw for 313 yards and two touchdowns with two interceptions, and Williams had seven catches for 76 yards and two scores while adding another on the ground. Jackson ran for 58 yards and a touchdown in place of the injured Melvin Gordon and Austin Ekeler.

Mahomes was held to just 243 yards and two touchdowns for Kansas City.

"They found a way to win and we didn't," Mahomes said. "You have to find a way in this league."

Get into the spirit with these bowls

Fort Worth (Texas) Star-Telegram

'Tis the season for college football bowl games. Check out the top five games to keep an eye on before the Christmas holiday.

Las Vegas Bowl

Fresno State (11-2, 7-1 MWC) vs. Arizona State (7-5, 5-4 Pac-12)
Saturday

The buzz: During two seasons under head coach Jeff Tedford, Fresno State has combined to win 22 games as well as a Mountain West Conference title. A win on Saturday would give the Bulldogs their first 12-win season. However, to do so, they must beat an Arizona State program for the first time in four tries. The Sun Devils, who are coming off a respectable season under first-year coach Herm Edwards, are looking for their first bowl win since 2014. These two teams take very good care of the football, with both leading their respective conferences in turnover margin: Fresno State (+13) and Arizona State (+9).

Boca Raton Bowl

Northern Illinois (8-5, 6-2 MAC) vs. UAB (10-3, 7-1 C-USA)
1 a.m. Wednesday, CET;
9 a.m. JKT, AFN-Sports

The buzz: Three years ago, the UAB football program was packed away in mothballs with no future in sight. To go from nonexistent to Conference USA champions is nothing short of miraculous, and the Blazers can cap it with their first bowl win against Northern Illinois. The Huskies, who upset Buffalo to claim their first MAC championship since 2014, are looking to snap a five-game bowl losing streak dating to 2011. NIU features a pair of defensive linemen in Sutton Smith and Josh Corcoran who combined for 25 sacks.

Armed Forces Bowl

Houston (8-4, 5-3 AAC) vs. Army (10-2)
Dec. 22, 9:30 p.m., CET; 5:30 a.m. Dec. 23, JKT, AFN-Sports2

The buzz: Army is back in the Armed Forces Bowl for the second straight year after putting together another 10-win

season. The Black Knights, who knocked off San Diego State in last year's game, are looking for their first 11-win season if they can knock off Houston. The Cougars come into this one on a bit of a down note, having lost three of their last four games. They'll be without their best offensive (D'Eriq King) and defensive (Ed Oliver) players for this game, which is bad news when facing the second-best rushing team in the nation.

Dollar General Bowl

Troy (9-3, 7-1 Sun Belt) vs. Buffalo (10-3, 7-1 MAC)
Dec. 23, 1 a.m. CET; 8 a.m. JKT, AFN-Sports2

The buzz: Troy is looking to make it three straight double-digit win seasons with a win over Buffalo. A loss to Appalachian State in the regular-season finale cost the Trojans a spot in the Sun Belt Conference title game. The Bulls, who have put together their best season in school history, also are coming off a disappointing finish after surrendering a 20-point lead and eventually the game to Northern

Illinois in the Mid-American Conference title game. A win by Buffalo would give the school its first bowl win.

Hawaii Bowl

Louisiana Tech (7-5, 5-3 C-USA) vs. Hawaii (8-5, 5-3 MWC)
Dec. 23, 4:30 a.m. CET;
12:30 p.m. JKT, AFN-Sports2

The buzz: Hawaii is back home in the Hawaii Bowl for the second time in the past three seasons after the Rainbow Warriors won eight games for the first time since 2010. Junior wide receiver John Ursua was named a semifinalist for the Biletnikoff Award after finishing second in the Mountain West Conference in receiving yards (1,343) and first in receiving touchdowns (16). Louisiana Tech is back in a bowl game for the fifth straight year with the Bulldogs looking to make it five straight wins. These two programs were conference foes as members of the Western Athletic Conference from 2000-2011, with Hawaii leading the series 8-2, including a 5-0 mark at Aloha Stadium.

3-team trade wraps up winter meetings

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Carlos Santana and Jeurys Familia found friendly landing spots. Edwin Encarnacion took off for a more uncertain future. Joe Kelly joined the team he helped beat in the World Series. The Milwaukee Brewers boosted their imposing bullpen.

The winter meetings wrapped up Thursday with a three-team trade involving Cleveland, Seattle and Tampa Bay, plus a couple more relievers reached free-agent deals.

Even so, baseball fans might've felt a bit cheated this week. Because even after all clubs gathered along the Strip, no one went all in.

Hometown slugger Bryce Harper stayed put, Manny Machado didn't move. A lot of trade talk about Corey Kluber, Noah Syndergaard and J.T. Realmuto, but no deals.

Blame that, maybe, on a new way of doing business.

In older days, a general manager or agent would've met around the blackjack table or

roulette wheel in the wee hours and hammered out a swap on a handshake. Now, with so many financial, medical and analytical components, that's virtually impossible.

"There's a lot of great agents who have done big high-profile deals that are involved with these guys, so contracts have gotten more complicated in recent years with the opt-outs and various deferrals and other mechanisms that it's very possible that in the end we see something that we haven't seen before in terms of deal structure," White Sox general manager Rick Hahn said.

Well said, actually.

In the biggest trade of the week, the Indians brought back Santana and sent the slugging Encarnacion to Seattle. The Rays got highly prized infielder Yandy Diaz in a swap that also included a couple more players, cash and a draft pick. The Rays also have a pending deal with All-Star pitcher Charlie Morton.

"Looking at history, I think to expect to come out of the winter

meetings with as many things either completed or possible as we have is not something that you can expect," Rays senior vice president of baseball operations Chaim Bloom said.

Encarnacion drove in 107 runs and hit 32 homers, increasing his major league-best totals in both departments since 2012. He could provide the power lost when DH Nelson Cruz became a free agent — or not.

A month before he turns 36, Encarnacion is guaranteed \$25 million: \$20 million next season and a \$5 million buyout of a \$25 million club option for 2020.

The 32-year-old Santana spent the first eight seasons of his career in Cleveland and was a fan favorite. The first baseman/DH signed a \$60 million, three-year deal with Philadelphia last offseason, was traded to Seattle earlier this month and moved again this week.

Kelly cashed in, reaching agreement with the Los Angeles Dodgers on a \$25 million, three-year deal, a person familiar with the negotiations told The Associated Press. The

person spoke on condition of anonymity because the deal had not yet been announced.

The 30-year-old righty was 4-2 with a 4.39 ERA and two saves in 73 games this year for Boston, then excelled in October. He pitched in all five World Series games against the Dodgers and didn't allow a run, striking out 10 in six innings.

The revamped New York Mets bullpen will include a very familiar face in Familia. He needs a physical to complete a \$30 million, three-year deal.

Familia had spent his entire career with New York before being traded to Oakland last July. He'll return to the Mets as a setup man after they recently acquired big league saves leader Edwin Diaz from Seattle.

The NL Central Brewers added another reliever, getting left-hander Alex Claudio from the Texas Rangers for a draft pick. Claudio was 4-2 with a 4.48 ERA and one save in 65 relief appearances and one start this year.

No. 16 Wisconsin pulls away from Savannah State

Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. — Finally, Wisconsin had a breather.

The 16th-ranked Badgers dominated back home against an overmatched team following a seven-game stretch versus power conference foes.

Brad Davison scored a season-high 24 points and Wisconsin had a school-record 69 first-half points to overwhelm Savannah State 101-60 on Thursday night.

"Every game is an opportunity. It doesn't matter what the team is, we're focused on trying to get better," Davison said. "But definitely, we've had a little bit of a grind."

It was just the kind of confidence-building rout that Wisconsin needed after a 74-69 loss in overtime last week to in-state rival Marquette. That game was

also preceded by mostly down-to-the-wire contests against more evenly matched schools.

The Badgers (9-2) took care of Savannah State in a hurry on Thursday.

Davison was 6-for-9 from three-point range. Preseason All-American Ethan Happ had 18 points and 11 rebounds, and freshman Tai Strickland added a career-high 14 points.

The Badgers shot 71 percent in the first half to take a 37-point lead on their way to their first 100-point contest since 2013. Savannah State (3-9) is the only team in Division I allowing 100 points a game.

"We try to do it and play the game the right way ... that will reinforce (good) habits," Wisconsin coach Greg Gard said. "We don't change our demands regardless of scores or opponents."

Jaquan Dotson had 20 points to lead the Tigers, a team that likes to shoot threes.

Tip ins: Savannah State: The team dressed just eight players, the tallest player being 6-foot-8 Romani Hansen. But 6-6 guard Adam Saeed faced the 6-10 Happ for the opening tip. Allowing foes to shoot 50 percent on the season, the Tigers were routed, as expected. They were also outrebounded 45-20. ... Tyrell Harper finished with 11 points and 12 rebounds.

Wisconsin: F Khalil Iverson sat out with a lower left foot injury. Coach Greg Gard said the injury wasn't serious. He didn't really need one of his best defenders anyway. ... The 11 threes in the opening 20 minutes were a school record for a first half. ... Wisconsin finished the night shooting 47 percent.

Overwhelmed Tigers: At one

point, Davison was trapped in the corner in the frontcourt by two defenders before jumping and slinging a pass to Kobe King at the opposite wing. King hit a bucket and drew a foul for a 39-20 lead with 9:25 left in the first.

Later, Wisconsin's Charles Thomas blocked Romani Hansen's layup attempt from behind. At the other end, D'Mitrik Trice punctured the undersized Tigers' zone with a diagonal pass to a cutting Davison for an easy layup and 21-point lead with 8:13 left in the first.

"The only way (the team) can get better is playing against better competition," Tigers coach Horace Broadnax said. "And it's a good experience to come in here and play the Big Ten."

NHL roundup

Vasilevskiy leads Lightning past Leafs

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Andrei Vasilevskiy delivered a record-setting performance after sitting out a month.

Tampa Bay's goalie made a career-high 48 saves in his return from a broken left foot and the Lightning beat the Toronto Maple Leafs 4-1 on Thursday night in a matchup of the NHL's top two teams.

"Actually (felt) pretty good," Vasilevskiy said. "Tried to survive the first period, then the second, too."

Vasilevskiy tied the team record for saves in a game established by Ben Bishop against Carolina on Jan. 19, 2014.

"He was the best player on the ice for us by a country mile," Lightning coach Jon Cooper said.

Alex Killorn and Tyler Johnson both scored for Tampa Bay during the final 36 seconds of the second period to make it 4-1. Vasilevskiy, who missed the previous 14 games, stopped all 23 shots he faced in the period.

"That was a pretty good test for us," Vasilevskiy said. "Guys scored important goals at the end of the second."

Anthony Cirelli and Nikita Kucherov also had goals for the Lightning (25-7-1), who have won eight in a row and lead Toronto by eight points in the Atlantic Division. The franchise record is a nine-game winning streak in 2016. Tampa Bay scored three times on 12 shots in the second. Killorn put home a backhand with 35.8 seconds left, and Johnson converted from the slot with 1.7 seconds to go.

Toronto got a goal from Kasperi Kapanen, and Frederik Andersen stopped 17 shots. The Maple Leafs have lost three of four (1-2-1) after a five-game winning streak.

The Leafs went 0-for-6 on the power play.

"We did everything but put the puck in the back of the net," Toronto center John Tavares said. "I don't think you want to hang your head. I think you're

obviously disappointed in the result. We have high expectations for ourselves. It's a long season. We'll see these guys again."

Vasilevskiy got his glove on Patrick Marleau's point-blank chance and then trapped the loose puck with his pad early in the third.

The Maple Leafs hit the crossbar or post three times in the first and Vasilevskiy made a left pad save on Tavares' in-close backhand late in the period.

Nazem Kadri had a nifty deflection stopped by Vasilevskiy and also hit the post during a power play midway through the second.

"He played unbelievable," Maple Leafs center Auston Matthews said. "I thought we played well. We had a ton of chances. I think sometimes you've just got to tip your hat and move forward."

Sabres 3, Coyotes 1: Jeff Skinner scored his 22nd goal of the season as host Buffalo de-

feated Arizona.

Blue Jackets 4, Kings 1: Artemi Panarin scored twice, Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 29 shots and host Columbus topped Los Angeles.

Canadiens 6, Hurricanes 4: Jeff Petry scored twice and Casey Price made 27 saves for his fourth consecutive victory as host Montreal got past Carolina.

Wild 5, Panthers 1: Nino Niederreiter scored twice, Ryan Suter had three assists and Devan Dubnyk finished with 30 saves as host Minnesota downed Florida.

Predators 4, Canucks 3 (OT): Colton Sissons scored 3:05 into overtime to give host Nashville a victory over Vancouver.

Sharks 3, Stars 2: Timo Meier scored two goals and Logan Couture had two assists in host San Jose's win over Dallas.

Jets 5, Oilers 4 (OT): Defenseman Josh Morrissey scored 41 seconds into overtime to lift host Winnipeg over Edmonton.

NBA roundup

Harden's triple-double powers Rockets past Lakers

Associated Press

HOUSTON — James Harden had 50 points, 10 rebounds and 11 assists, scoring 11 points during a big fourth-quarter run to lead the Houston Rockets to a 126-111 victory over the Los Angeles Lakers on Thursday night.

Harden grabbed his 10th rebound with less than 90 seconds left to give him his second triple-double this season and the 37th of his career.

LeBron James finished with 29 points for the Lakers, who had won their previous two games.

It was the first meeting between these teams since Chris Paul and Rajon Rondo got into

a fight on Oct. 20 that led to suspensions for both players and Brandon Ingram. There wasn't an altercation this time in a game where Rondo sat out as he recovers from surgery to repair a broken right hand. But there was a spate of technical fouls late in the third quarter that led to the ejection of Nene.

Spurs 125, Clippers 87: LaMarcus Aldridge scored 27 points and San Antonio won its fourth straight, topping visiting Los Angeles for its largest win of the season.

Rudy Gay added 21 points and DeMar DeRozan had 14 points and seven assists for San Antonio.

The Spurs held an opponent

under 100 points for the third straight game while winning the first four games of a six-game homestand.

Tobias Harris had 17 points for Los Angeles and Danilo Gallinari and Avery Bradley added 15 apiece. The Clippers have lost two straight and four of five.

Suns 99, Mavericks 89: T.J. Warren scored a season-high 30 points and host Phoenix snapped a 10-game losing streak by beating Dallas.

The Dallas loss came in the season debut of Dirk Nowitzki, who hadn't played yet while recovering from ankle surgery.

Phoenix beat the Mavericks for the seventh straight time. The Suns have just five wins

this season and two have come against Dallas.

The Mavericks were beaten in the season opener 121-100, also in Phoenix. Both games were late tips on national television.

Dallas, which had won three straight and eight of 10, made only 5 of 33 three-pointers.

Magic 97, Bulls 91: At Mexico City, Nikola Vucevic scored 26 points, including a tiebreaking jumper with 28 seconds remaining, and Orlando snapped a three-game losing streak.

Zach LaVine scored 23 points but the Bulls (6-23) lost for the 10th time in their last 11 games and remained with the worst record in the Eastern Conference.