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N. Korea: Won't denuclearize until US does

BY KIM GAMEL

Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea said Thursday that it won't give up nuclear weapons until the United States does, toughening its stance as the year draws to a close with no sign of progress in breaking an impasse in talks between the sides.

The statement, carried on the state-run Korean Central News Agency, reinforced concerns that Pyongyang and Washington remained far apart on the definition of denuclearization despite agreeing to the general concept in their historic June 12 summit in Singapore.

"The United States must now recognize the accurate meaning of the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, and especially, must study geogra-

phy," KCNA reported.

References to the peninsula included South Korea, "where the United States has placed its invasive force, including nuclear weapons," it said.

The U.S. removed tactical nuclear weapons from South Korea in the 1990s, but it maintains about 28,500 servicemembers on the divided peninsula and more than 50,000 in neighboring Japan and Guam.

"When we talk about the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, it means the removal of all sources of nuclear threat, not only from the South and North but also from areas neighboring the Korean Peninsula," according to the statement.

Experts have warned the North may rekindle its demand that the U.S. withdraw troops from the South as the com-

munist state considers them a threat.

Thursday's statement didn't mention the troops, but it was the latest in a string of rebukes that suggest the North is growing increasingly frustrated with the deadlock in diplomacy six months after President Donald Trump met with leader Kim Jong Un.

Last week, the North complained about new sanctions imposed by the United States against senior officials and warned continued pressure would "block the path to denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula forever."

The Trump administration insists it will maintain punishing measures against the North until it abandons its nuclear weapons program.

Meanwhile, Stephen Biegun,

the U.S. special envoy for North Korea, visited the truce village of Panmunjom in the heavily fortified border area.

Biegun, who arrived in Seoul on Wednesday for talks, said Washington is reviewing the possibility of easing travel restrictions to facilitate humanitarian shipments to North Korea.

The impasse has been a setback for South Korean President Moon Jae-in, who has played middleman in an effort to maintain calm on the peninsula.

Nuclear talks have reversed tensions that had spiked last year as the North conducted several missile and nuclear tests that demonstrated strong progress toward its goal of developing a weapon that could target the U.S. mainland.

US pullout from Syria gets negative reaction from many allies

Associated Press

BEIRUT — The United States' main ally in Syria on Thursday categorically rejected President Donald Trump's claim that Islamic State militants have been defeated, but Russian President Vladimir Putin welcomed Trump's decision to withdraw forces from Syria, saying he agreed a U.S. military presence is no longer needed.

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces said in a strongly worded statement laced with bitterness that a premature U.S. pullout before ISIS is defeated would have dangerous repercussions including a resurgence of the extremist group and a destabilizing effect on the entire region.

"The war against terrorism has not ended and (ISIS) has

not been defeated," the statement said, adding that the fight against ISIS was at a "decisive" stage that requires even more support from the U.S.-led coalition. It was the first official comment by the group on Trump's surprise announcement.

Trump's decision to withdraw troops from Syria has rattled Washington's Kurdish allies, who are its most reliable partner in the country and among the most effective ground forces battling ISIS. With U.S. air support, the Kurds drove ISIS from much of northern and eastern Syria in a costly four-year campaign.

The announcement of a pullout is widely seen as an abandonment of a loyal ally.

"The decision to pull out under these circumstances will lead to a state of instability and

create a political and military void in the region and leave its people between the claws of enemy forces," the SDF statement said.

Kurdish officials and commanders met into the night, discussing their responses to the decision, local residents said Thursday.

A war monitor said among the options seriously discussed was releasing thousands of ISIS militants and their families from various nationalities who are being detained in SDF-run prisons and camps. It was not clear whether any decision was immediately made, and SDF commanders were not immediately available for comment.

Arin Sheikhmos, a Kurdish journalist and commentator, said "we have every right to be afraid."

"If the Americans pull out and leave us to the Turks or the (Syrian) regime our destiny will be like the Kurds of Iraqi Kurdistan in 1991 — million of refugees, there will be massacres. Neither the regime, not Iran nor Turkey, will accept our presence here," he told the AP.

In new tweets, Trump on Thursday defended his decision, saying it should be "no surprise." He claimed that Russia, Iran and Syria "are not happy about the U.S. leaving, despite what the Fake News says, because now they will have to fight ISIS and others, who they hate, without us."

The contention contradicts predictions that the Syrian government and its allies would attempt to fill the void created by the withdrawal of U.S. troops.

GIs leaving Syria. Is Afghanistan next?

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Against the advice of many in his administration, President Donald Trump is pulling U.S. troops out of Syria. Could a withdrawal from Afghanistan be far behind?

Trump has said his instinct is to quit Afghanistan as a lost cause, but more recently he's suggested a willingness to stay in search of peace with the Taliban. However, the abruptness with which he turned the page on Syria raises questions about whether combat partners like Iraq and Afghanistan should feel confident that he will not pull the plug on them, too.

"If he's willing to walk away from Syria, I think we should be concerned about whether Afghanistan is next," Jennifer Cafarella, the director of intelligence planning at the Institute for the Study of War, said in an interview Wednesday.

The U.S. has been at war in Afghanistan for 17 years and still has about 15,000 troops there helping government troops combat the Taliban. The approximately 5,000 U.S.

troops in Iraq are training and advising Iraqi security forces as they continue to fight Islamic State militants, a battle the U.S. entered in 2014 after ISIS swept into Iraq from Syria.

Before other officials confirmed the withdrawal decision, Trump tweeted, "We have defeated ISIS in Syria, my only reason for being there during the Trump Presidency." The aspect of this that he did not address is whether the extremists or others will fill the security vacuum created by the U.S. withdrawal to regroup and pose a new threat.

The administration said it intends to continue combating ISIS extremists globally and could return to Syria if necessary. Still, critics launched a barrage of questions about the implications of Trump's decision, including whether it opens the door for Turkish forces to attack the Syrian Kurds who had partnered with the U.S.

Kori Schake, deputy director-general of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, wrote on the Atlantic.com website Wednesday that the Syria decision ought to unsettle every ally that relies on U.S. security assurances.

"The governments of Iraq and Afghanistan ought to be very, very worried," she wrote. "For if Syria can be so lightly written off, the fight arbitrarily declared won, what is the argument for continuing to assist Iraq — where ISIS is even more defeated? And if Trump has so little interest in stabilizing security and assisting governance in Syria, how can Afghanistan have confidence that he won't make the same decision about them, when the fight there is costlier and progress less evident?"

These and other questions about the Trump decision and its broader implications were on the minds of many in Congress. Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., denounced what he called a betrayal of the Syrian Kurds.

"Now the president seems content to forsake their trust and abandon them to a potentially bloody conflict with Turkey," Reed said. "This decision also significantly increases the security risks to our key regional partners in Israel, Iraq and Jordan."

Trump has argued for a Syria withdrawal since he was a presidential candidate in 2016, and he has repeated his view sev-

eral times since taking office.

On Thursday, Trump defended his decision, saying on Twitter: "Getting out of Syria was no surprise. I've been campaigning on it for years, and six months ago, when I very publicly wanted to do it, I agreed to stay longer."

He added: "Does the USA want to be the Policeman of the Middle East, getting NOTHING but spending precious lives and trillions of dollars protecting others who, in almost all cases, do not appreciate what we are doing? Do we want to be there forever?"

Still, the decision appeared to catch many in his administration by surprise; Pentagon officials offered no details on the timing or pace of the withdrawal, nor could they square it with numerous statements by Defense Secretary Jim Mattis about the importance of remaining in Syria to assure stability.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., and typically a Trump supporter, said he was "blindsided" by the decision and called it "a disaster in the making." He said, "The biggest winners in this are ISIS and Iran."

After being detained at Istanbul airport, GI released

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — A U.S. soldier, detained this week by Turkish officials over accusations he has links to a U.S.-based Turkish cleric considered an enemy by Ankara, has been released.

U.S. European Command said the soldier was released Thursday, but had no other details.

The American was identified as Yahya Ozer, who is listed in U.S. military records as an Army specialist assigned to Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Syria.

Aksam newspaper, which backs the government of Turk-

ish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, reported that the soldier was taken into custody at Istanbul's Ataturk Airport earlier in the week. He was stationed at Incirlik Air Base, where he worked as a translator, the newspaper said.

The soldier also has family ties in southern Turkey. Ozer was accused of being a follower of Fethullah Gulen, a Muslim cleric who is exiled in Pennsylvania and wanted by the Erdogan regime.

The incident came to light one day after President Donald Trump ordered the departure of all U.S. troops from Syria, a move that has been regarded as a victory for Ankara, which has opposed the presence of U.S.

ground troops there.

Turkey has also said recently that Trump expressed willingness to extradite Gulen, though White House officials have disputed that claim.

Incirlik is a main hub for U.S. forces in Turkey and has played a key role in delivering airstrikes against Islamic State targets in Syria and Iraq.

The base, which is operated by Turkey, also had a role in the 2016 coup attempt in the country. In the aftermath of the failed coup, which involved members of the country's air force, some Turkish leaders accused the U.S. of having a role in the incident. Erdogan also has said Gulen supporters were responsible for the attempt.

In August, a group of pro-government lawyers in Turkey filed charges against several U.S. officers associated with the air base, seeking their arrest for alleged ties to terrorist groups.

Ozer was apparently headed back to the U.S. when he was taken into custody in Istanbul, the newspaper said. Aksam reported that he had connections to Harmony Public Schools in Texas, which has received funding from Gulen's supporters.

As of Thursday morning in the U.S., officials at Army Special Operations Command had not been notified of the soldier's detention, spokesman Lt. Col. Loren Bymer said.

Navy adds rules to protect sea mammals

BY WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — The National Marine Fisheries Service announced Thursday additional measures to protect marine mammals from “incidental” harm caused by Navy vessels training and testing in waters near Hawaii and California.

Under the new regulations, which will be in effect from 2019 through 2023, the Navy will further limit the use of sonar and explosives in two training areas off the California coast and the use of explosives around four Hawaiian islands, said Jolie Harrison, chief of Permits and Conservation Division, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries, Office of Protected Resources.

The new rule adds two areas in Southern California waters where the use of sonar

and explosives will be limited, primarily to protect blue whales, Harrison said.

In Hawaii, use of explosives will be limited in an area around the islands of Maui, Lanai, Molokai and Oahu.

After the fisheries service was sued by the environmental group Earthjustice on behalf of the Conservation Council of Hawaii and other groups, the Navy in 2015 agreed to refrain from conducting exercises in sensitive areas around the island of Hawaii.

As part of the new rule, NOAA will continue to impose mitigation measures instituted in two previous five-year authorizations. They include shutting down sonar when marine mammals are in an area; waiting for animals to leave a training range prior to use of in-water explosives and then monitoring that area to see if any animals have been affected; following protocols to reduce vessel collisions with ma-

rine mammals; limiting activities during times of mammal reproduction, migration and feeding; and implementing a reporting plan for stranded or injured animals.

“The Navy has balanced our conservation requirements for marine mammals with their critical national security requirements for training and military readiness,” Timothy Gallaudet, acting undersecretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere at NOAA, said in a statement. “As the acting NOAA administrator and a retired Navy admiral, I know this is a win-win for marine mammal protection and national defense.”

The National Marine Fisheries Service evaluates the predicted effects of human activities on protected marine species under the authority of the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act.

Navy christens newest littoral combat ship

BY CHRISTIAN LOPEZ

Stars and Stripes

The Navy christened and launched its newest littoral combat ship, the USS St. Louis, during a recent ceremony in Marinette, Wis.

Barbara Broadhurst Taylor, the ship sponsor and the daughter of World War II pilot Lt. Gen. Edwin Borden Broadhurst, christened the St. Louis by breaking a bottle of sparkling wine on its bow Saturday. U.S. Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo., was the principal speaker at the event.

The Lockheed Martin-built

Freedom-class LCS boasts new technology and capabilities allowing the ship to take on any mission from deep water to the littorals, according to a Navy statement Friday.

The ship is a fast, maneuverable, focused-mission craft designed for near-shore operations and will specialize in countering threats such as quiet diesel submarines, mines and fast surface craft, the statement said.

“I am thrilled and very honored to be the sponsor of the future USS St. Louis,” Taylor said during the ceremony. “The combination of my family’s

military background and the enduring spirit of the great city of St. Louis make this incredibly meaningful.”

Taylor’s husband, Andy Taylor, is the chairman of Enterprise Holdings, the St. Louis-based rental car company. Company founder Jack Taylor flew Navy fighters in World War II from the carrier USS Enterprise, for which the company is named, according to St. Louis Public Radio.

During the ceremony, Barbara Taylor placed two combat ribbons in the ship’s steel box to represent the Purple Heart and Distinguished Flying med-

als her father received in World War II.

The ship’s box, at the base of its mast, remains on board for its entire service life.

The St. Louis is the seventh ship to bear the name of Missouri’s major port city. The first St. Louis was commissioned in 1828 as a sloop for most of the 19th century. The next was a gunboat during the Civil War, followed by a steamer troopship in the Spanish-American War, a World War I cruiser, a World War II light cruiser, and an attack cargo ship during the Cold War, according to the statement.

Injured jogger led to ‘active shooter’ reaction at base

Associated Press

CINCINNATI — A jogger who called a hospital employee screaming and crying in pain from a twisted ankle led to a series of miscommunications in a chaotic “active shooter” response that sent security forces scrambling across an Ohio air base, Air Force officials said Wednesday.

A review ordered by the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base commander following the mistaken alert Aug. 2 found that

training exercises that included an active shooter scenario at the base near Dayton resulted in a mistaken call of a “real world active shooter,” a lockdown, emergency responders flocking from state, local and federal agencies, and more 911 calls after sounds of gunshots as security forces shot through a locked hospital door.

“A breakdown of communication led to a completely uncoordinated and ineffective combined response that could have resulted in serious injury or property damage,”

the Air Force report found.

Adding to the initial confusion was a mass casualty response exercise being staged internally at the hospital at the time the injured jogger arrived at the emergency room. The hospital exercise wasn’t linked to an active shooter scenario being practiced at a chapel about a mile away on the base.

“This was the beginning of bleed over from exercise to real world events,” the report stated.

Trump says he won't sign bill to fund government

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump told congressional Republicans on Thursday he would not sign a bill to fund the government because it doesn't include money for his border wall with Mexico, throwing the budget process into deep disarray and risking a federal shutdown this weekend.

"The president said he will not sign this bill," House Speaker Paul Ryan said exiting a hastily called meeting with Trump and other GOP lawmakers at the White House.

The House had been set to vote on the bill Thursday, before a deadline at midnight Friday to fund parts of the government or risk a partial shutdown just before Christmas.

The White House suggested

earlier Thursday that Trump was not onboard with the critical spending agreement because it lacked billions of dollars for "steel slats or a wall" at the Mexican border.

And Trump himself lashed out at Republican leaders on Twitter after speaking by telephone with Ryan. Then Trump's press secretary issued a statement saying the president "does not want to go further without border security," including money for the wall.

Trump has faced rare, bitter criticism from some fellow Republicans over the past day for "caving" on wall funding. As House Republicans struggled to find the votes to pass the Senate bill, Trump started blaming GOP leaders for failing to deliver on the \$5 billion he had demanded for the wall.

Putin praises Trump on Syria decision

The Washington Post

MOSCOW — Russian President Vladimir Putin praised President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria, describing the American presence there as illegitimate and Islamic State as largely defeated on the ground.

Putin told journalists at his annual year-end news conference that ISIS has suffered "serious blows" in Syria.

"On this, Donald is right. I agree with him," Putin said.

Trump said Wednesday that ISIS has been defeated in Syria, although analysts say the militant group remains a deadly force. Russia — Syrian President Bashar Assad's most powerful ally — turned the tide of the civil war in Assad's favor in 2015 and has maintained its military presence there.

The United States and many allies strongly denounced Russia's military intervention in Syria. But Trump's withdrawal is seen by many — including some Trump backers — as an

indirect boost for Moscow and its status as the main foreign power in Syria.

Moments after Putin's statement, Trump tweeted about his decision to withdraw troops. He noted the presence of Russian, Iranian and Syrian forces, also enemies of ISIS, and said the United States was doing their work for them.

"Time for others to finally fight," he said in a follow-up tweet.

Putin said the U.S. troop deployment to Syria, by contrast, was illegitimate because neither Assad's government nor the United Nations had approved the U.S. mission.

"If the United States decided to withdraw its force, then this would be right," Putin said.

Russia has been negotiating a political settlement to the civil war in Syria with Assad, neighboring Turkey and Russia's ally Iran. The presence of U.S. troops was not helpful for achieving such a settlement, Putin said.

Jury convicts ex-Blackwater guard in third murder trial

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — A former Blackwater security guard was convicted of first-degree murder Wednesday for killing one of 14 unarmed civilians in a barrage of gunfire in a crowded Baghdad traffic circle in 2007, an episode that drew international condemnation during the Iraq War.

It was the second time a federal jury in Washington convicted Nicholas Slatten, 35, of murder in the death of Ahmed Haithem Ahmed Al Rubia'y, 19. His 2014 conviction was overturned on appeal, and a second trial last summer ended in a hung jury. Slatten now faces a mandatory life sentence without parole.

The jury foreperson told The Washington Post that jurors rejected Slatten's claim that

he fired on Al Rubia'y in self-defense. "In our determination, there were no justifiable deaths," the foreperson said. "No justifiable shooting."

The outcome brings a muted end to a killing that triggered diplomatic and humanitarian protests over the U.S. government's use of private military forces and marked one of the lowest points of the Iraq War.

Three other Blackwater guards who were part of Slatten's convoy also were convicted in 2014, of manslaughter and other charges. The verdicts for Paul Slough, Evan Liberty and Dustin Heard were not reversed, but the 30-year sentences they received were vacated on appeal. No sentencing date has been set for any of the four defendants, all of whom are in custody.

In Nisour Square, on Sept. 16, 2007, Slatten, a former Army sniper, was one of 19 Blackwater security contractors in a convoy of four heavily armed trucks using the call sign Raven 23. But after a car bombing earlier in the day, the team disregarded an order to stay in the Green Zone, and it set up a blockade in the square, prosecutors said.

A white Kia, driven by Al Rubia'y with his mother in the passenger seat, headed toward the blockade.

Prosecutors alleged Slatten, of Sparta, Tenn., fired the first shots into the Kia and intentionally set off a rampage in which more than 30 people were shot, 14 fatally.

In 2014, a jury in Washington convicted Slatten of murder and Slough, Liberty and Heard

of manslaughter and attempted manslaughter. One other guard reached a plea deal for reduced sentences.

In August 2017, a federal appeals court tossed Slatten's life sentence and ordered a new trial, saying he should have been tried separately from Slough, 39. Slough had told investigators days after the shootings that he, not Slatten, fired the first rounds.

Slatten then received a retrial that ended in a hung jury in September, with the defense saying the convoy members had been acting in self-defense.

The third trial started Nov. 5.

Slatten's defense team declined to comment after the verdict.

The jury deliberated for five days.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Residents report goat joining elk herd

CO LOVELAND — A domestic goat appears to have joined an elk herd near Loveland, amusing nearby residents and perplexing wildlife officials.

The Loveland Daily Reporter-Herald reported residents of neighborhoods near the Devil's Backbone west of the city have spotted the little black goat with a bull elk a few times recently.

Resident Josiah Engblom said he saw elk and the goat running from coyotes near U.S. Highway 34 over the weekend. He says the goat stayed close to an elk as it confronted the predators.

Man sentenced for \$2.6M Lowe's scam

NY BUFFALO — Authorities said a New York City man has been sentenced to five years in prison for his role in scamming more than \$2.5 million from a national home improvement retailer.

The U.S. attorney's office in Buffalo said Kenneth Cassidy, 52, of Brooklyn, was also sentenced Tuesday to pay restitution of nearly \$2.65 million. Cassidy was convicted of conspiracy to commit wire fraud.

Prosecutors said during a four-year period beginning in 2012 he opened more than 170 fraudulent Lowe's accounts receivable accounts throughout the U.S. using bogus checks.

Coyotes prowling near downtown Charlotte

NC CHARLOTTE — Security video has caught a small pack of coyotes prowling near the downtown area of a North Carolina city.

The Charlotte Observer reported one video showed as

many as four coyotes roaming in a neighborhood near downtown Charlotte, with one of them actually going up on a porch at one home. Donna Ragan, who works with Charlotte's Second Harvest Food Bank, posted the video on Facebook, noting the coyotes were filmed Monday morning outside her mother's home, including one that comes up to the porch.

Man, acquitted in firebombing, killed

MD BALTIMORE — A man acquitted this year of murder charges relating to a firebombing that killed two teens has been fatally shot.

News outlets reported that Antonio Wright, 27, was fatally shot last Friday morning. His attorney, Warren Brown, told The Baltimore Sun that Wright's death was "another casualty in the war on each other."

Wright was accused of throwing two Molotov cocktails into a home in March 2017, killing Shi-heem Sholto, 19, and Tyrone James, 17, and injuring six others.

Baltimore police had labeled Wright "Public Enemy No. 1" before his arrest.

Report: Sheriff tried to avoid DWI arrest

MI KALKASKA — A police report and bodycam video show that a Michigan sheriff accused of drunken driving asked a deputy not to arrest him.

Television station WJRT obtained bodycam video from the Nov. 16 arrest of Midland County Sheriff Scott Stephenson, who later pleaded guilty to driving while impaired.

Stephenson is heard on the video asking that he not be arrested. He says, "Jesus Christ, I'm a sheriff."

Stephenson was suspected of drunken driving after leaving a deer hunting camp in Kalkaska County. A breath test revealed a blood-alcohol level nearly three times the legal limit for driving.

The video shows a deputy knocking on Stephenson's window and waking him up while his vehicle was parked along the side of a road. The deputy tells Stephenson: "Someone thought you were dead over here."

Tunnel authority to move wreath after poll

NJ JERSEY CITY — The great Holland Tunnel wreath controversy has been resolved.

After complaints about the placement of two holiday wreaths and a tree decoration over the New York-bound tunnel, more than 21,000 people voted in a poll commissioned by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, the tunnel's operator.

The consensus? Move the tree from over the "N" in "Holland" to over the "A," and remove a wreath hanging over the "U." That proposal garnered about 42 percent of the votes, about 1,200 more than an option that would have moved the tree but kept the second wreath where it was.

Some motorists had complained the design was distracting and possibly even a trigger for people with obsessive-compulsive disorder. An online petition had gathered more than 2,900 supporters by Monday afternoon.

'Text tax' withdrawn after FCC ruling

CA SAN FRANCISCO — Regulators have canceled a plan to charge a fee for text messaging on mobile

phones.

The California Public Utilities Commission reversed course after a Federal Communications Commission ruling last week classified text messaging as an information service and not a telecommunications service. The federal Telecommunications Act limits state authority over information services.

Judge orders groups to end gorilla dispute

OH CINCINNATI — A judge has ordered the Cincinnati Zoo and a gorilla conservatory to resolve a custody dispute over a gorilla loaned as a companion to Koko, who was famous for mastering sign language. U.S. District Judge Richard Seeborg recommended out-of-court mediation Monday, writing that the zoo and The Gorilla Foundation appear to value what's best for the 37-year-old silverback gorilla named Ndume. The zoo sued in October for Ndume's return.

Police: Shotgun blast caused fireworks fire

NH WINCHESTER — Police have accused a man of recklessly discharging his shotgun at home, causing a fire at a nearby fireworks store.

Police said a 12-gauge, slug-style shotgun round went through a wall at the Winchester home in September, across the street and into State-line Fireworks. Police say the 3,000-square-foot store was filled with fire, smoke, and exploding fireworks in less than 48 seconds. No one was hurt.

Police recently arrested Joseph Champagne, 75, on charges including reckless conduct, criminal mischief and falsifying physical evidence.

From wire reports

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Reporting
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Broncos' rookie Lindsay makes history

Associated Press

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. — No, Phillip Lindsay never once thought he'd become the first undrafted offensive player to make the Pro Bowl. He's been too busy making tacklers miss and general managers regret passing him over in the NFL Draft just because he stands 5-foot-8.

"I'm an undrafted free agent. To be able to have 100 yards in a game was great. To get a touchdown, to be able to play at (Mile High Stadium), that's the stuff right there that I dreamt about," the Denver Broncos' rookie running back said Wednesday. "The Pro Bowl is something that you think like five years down the line, three years down the line."

After waiting seven rounds and never hearing his name called or his phone buzz on draft weekend, Lindsay signed with his hometown Broncos and when he survived cuts after training camp, he sought Hall of Famer Terrell Davis' blessing to wear his old No. 30 jersey.

Yet, Lindsay said he's been so focused on his next opponent that he didn't even ponder the possibility of making the Pro Bowl when a couple of Cleveland Browns players told him after their game Saturday night that "our whole linebacker room voted for you for the Pro Bowl."

Excluding special teams players, the only other undrafted rookie to make the Pro Bowl was Dallas Cowboys defensive

back Everson Walls in 1981.

"That tells you what he's done," coach Vance Joseph said. "His first day with us, he was the sixth halfback on the depth chart. The sixth! Obviously, being a rookie free agent. Didn't go to the combine. Wasn't drafted. ... He came in here just trying to make our football team."

Lindsay started out as a special teams stud and didn't even start in the backfield until midway through the season.

"Now, he's in the Pro Bowl, so that speaks to his work ethic, his heart and his talent," Joseph said. "So, it's amazing what he's accomplished in such a short time."

Although Lindsay said, "Nobody knew about me when I got here, other than I was little," teammate Bradley Roby said the veterans sure took notice of him right away.

"Very impressive. I know this, when he first got here, OTAs, you kind of feel the rookies out, see how they move. And I always felt that his movement was good," Roby said. "I was thinking like if he can run with the pads on, he's going to be nice."

"And he's done nothing but prove that he's worth. He should have been drafted, obviously. He's a gem."

The wild-haired rookie cracked up his teammates during team introductions by saying, "I'm Phillip Lindsay, I'm from Colorado. And I went to Colorado."

Short and sweet.

Just like his stride.

The first player from the Broncos Futures Football middle school program to sign an NFL contract, Lindsay grew up in Aurora not far from the Broncos' headquarters, and starred at Denver South High School and the University of Colorado, where his wild hair and relentless rushing style earned him the nickname "Tasmanian Devil."

Lindsay, who is 9 rushing yards shy of 1,000 and whose 5.5-yard average is second in the league, said he's eager to go to the Pro Bowl with teammate Von Miller, the game's reigning MVP, and he's also eager to finally meet Saquon Barkley, the running back from Penn State whom the Giants drafted second overall.

Barkley is the only rookie running back who has more yards (1,155) than he does (991), although both have nine touchdown runs.

"It's going to be fun to be able to finally talk to Saquon," Lindsay said. "We always heard about each other, but we never got to see each other. So, it will be cool to hang out with each other."

Lindsay said he hopes his remarkable rise will inspire kids everywhere who are overlooked underdogs.

"You've got to keep pushing, you just never know. You've got to keep the faith no matter what," Lindsay said. "Everybody can take anything from you, but they can't take your faith. That's what you've got to rely on. You've got to go for your dreams."

Ouellette leads Ohio to Frisco Bowl rout

Associated Press

FRISCO, Texas — Ohio running back A.J. Ouellette doesn't think of Frank Solich as the oldest head coach in FBS. He sees him as the guy who stuck around a smaller program long enough to run it for going on 15 years.

Ouellette gave Solich and the Bobcats a little something to build on in his final game.

The senior had his fourth straight 100-yard game with 164 yards rushing, quarterback Nathan Rourke accounted for all three touchdowns and Ohio rolled to a 27-0 victory over San Diego State in the drizzly Frisco Bowl on Wednesday night.

Ohio (9-4) finished with six wins in seven games and won a second straight bowl game

under Solich, who became the oldest head coach in FBS at 74 when 79-year-old Bill Snyder retired at Kansas State before bowl season.

"To have him a little older than most coaches, young coaches are at a school a couple of years and they leave," said Ouellette, who finished among Ohio's career rushing leaders with 3,784 yards. "Him being there 14 years, we've just been lucky that he stayed around."

Solich spent 19 years on Tom Osborne's staff at Nebraska before replacing the coach at his alma mater in 1998.

After six years in charge of the Cornhuskers, Solich was forced out following a 9-3 season, a year after a 7-7 record that ended a streak of 40

straight winning seasons. A year later, he took the Ohio job and has taken the Bobcats to 10 bowls in 14 seasons.

"I feel like I still have a lot of energy," Solich said. "I still feel like I communicate well with players and coaches. I'm not feeling like the oldest coach, at least not tonight."

San Diego State was shut out in a bowl for the first time since its first postseason appearance — a 53-0 loss to Hardin-Simmons in the 1948 Harbor Bowl at long-since-demolished Balboa Stadium in San Diego.

The Aztecs had 44 of their 287 yards on one run by Juwan Washington while losing a fourth straight game in a season for the first time in eight years under coach Rocky Long.

The fourth-best run defense in FBS gave up a season-high 215 yards rushing to Ohio.

San Diego State's first meeting with Ohio was its first loss in 15 games against Mid-American Conference teams. The 27-point margin ended a streak of 10 straight games decided by single digits for the Aztecs, which the school said was the longest such streak since at least 1980.

"I think you have to look at everything you do, from the top on down," Long said. "We can delve into this as deep as you want. And we're evaluating everything in our program. And it might be nothing but we don't have one big-time player. That might be the difference."

College basketball roundup

Johnson, NC State upset No. 7 Auburn

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Markell Johnson had career highs of 27 points and five three-pointers to help North Carolina State upset No. 7 Auburn 78-71 on Wednesday night.

Devon Daniels scored all 15 of his points after halftime for the Wolfpack (10-1), who led nearly all night before pushing ahead for good in the final 10 minutes.

N.C. State shot 58 percent after halftime behind Johnson and Daniels. Johnson stood out with 19 points after the break, including a run of 10 straight points — a three-pointer, a four-point play and pullup three in transition — during one critical 75-second sequence.

By the time Daniels scored twice followed by Johnson's layup, the Wolfpack had pushed the lead to a dozen near the four-minute mark on the way to another big upset under second-year coach Kevin Keatts.

J'Von McCormick scored 14 points for the Tigers (9-2), who shot 48 percent but committed a season-high 25 turnovers.

No. 3 Tennessee 83, Samford 70: Jordan Bone set career highs with 24 points and 11 assists, and the host Volunteers

earned their fifth consecutive victory.

Bone shot 11 of 16 and committed only two turnovers. Admiral Schofield scored 18 points and Grant Williams had 13 of his 16 points after halftime to help Tennessee (9-1) snap the Bulldogs' three-game winning streak.

Ruben Guerrero had 16 points and eight rebounds before fouling out for Samford (10-3). Kevion Nolan scored 13 points, Myron Gordon had 12 and Josh Sharkey added 10.

No. 5 Virginia 69, South Carolina 52: Ty Jerome had a season-high 25 points and the Cavaliers added to their perfect start with a victory on the road.

Virginia improved to 10-0 for the first time since it opened with 19 straight wins on its way to the Atlantic Coast Conference title for the 2014-15 season. The Cavaliers showed off their usual stout defense while sending the Gamecocks (4-6) to their third straight loss — and second in a row to a No. 5 team after falling at then fifth-ranked Michigan on Dec. 8.

Kyle Guy had 18 points for Virginia, and Mamadi Diakite finished with 10. Chris Silva led South Carolina with 11 points.

No. 11 Florida State 95, North Florida 81: Mfiondu Kabengele scored a career-high 24 points and the host Seminoles pulled away for a win against the Ospreys.

Kabengele made 7 of 12 shots from the floor, 10 of 10 free throws and pulled down seven rebounds as Florida State (10-1) earned its fifth straight victory. Terance Mann had 17 points, including several alley-oop dunks, as the Seminoles dominated inside. They finished with 64 points in the paint.

J.T. Escobar, who played at Maclay School and Florida A&M High in Tallahassee, had 27 points for North Florida (5-8).

No. 13 Virginia Tech 82, North Carolina A&T 60: Nick-eil Alexander-Walker scored 12 of his 20 points in the second half, and the Hokies beat the Aggies for their fifth consecutive victory.

Virginia Tech (10-1) went 15 for 17 at the free-throw line and enjoyed a 42-20 rebounding advantage over North Carolina A&T. Kerry Blackshear Jr. had 17 points and nine rebounds, and Justin Robinson finished with 14 points, seven boards and six assists.

Quavius Copeland scored 16

points for the Aggies (4-7).

No. 17 Mississippi State 98, Wofford 87: Lamar Peters and Aric Holman each scored 19 points, and the host Bulldogs beat the Terriers for their seventh consecutive win.

Mississippi State (10-1) rallied from a 12-point deficit early in the second half. Quindary Weatherspoon made 14 of 15 foul shots on his way to 18 points, and Nick Weatherspoon and Reggie Perry each had 12 points for the Bulldogs. Fletcher Magee scored 24 points for Wofford (9-4), and Cameron Jackson finished with 20.

No. 22 Indiana 86, Central Arkansas 53: Devonte Green scored 19 points, freshman Romeo Langford recorded his second double-double and the Hoosiers beat the Bears.

Indiana (10-2) has won five straight, though this was its first victory by more than three points during the streak. They've also won eight straight home games. Langford had 18 points, 11 rebounds and five assists.

Hayden Koval had 16 points as Central Arkansas (4-7) lost its fourth game to a power-conference team this season.

Sports briefs

Patriots' Gordon steps away to focus on mental health

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Patriots receiver Josh Gordon says he is stepping away from football in order to focus on his mental health.

In a statement posted on Twitter on Thursday morning, Gordon said his decision was spurred by him feeling recently that he could have a better grasp on things mentally. He thanked the Patriots for their support and vowed to work his way back.

Gordon has been suspended multiple times by the NFL for violations of its drug policies since being drafted by the Browns in 2012. Any sort of violation of NFL substance abuse policy could lead to a lifetime ban.

■ Cam Newton is headed to the bench with a sore shoulder.

The Panthers made the decision to shut down the 2015 league MVP for at least one game and possibly the remainder of the season due to a lin-

gering right shoulder problem. Coach Ron Rivera said Taylor Heinicke will make his first career start when Carolina hosts the Falcons on Sunday. Kyle Allen will be Carolina's backup.

Senators propose betting regulations

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. — Sens. Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., and Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, are proposing that the federal gov-

ernment take back control of sports gambling in America, the first formal move by Congress after a Supreme Court ruling reopened a complex debate over fans betting on games and who controls the action.

Several states have begun offering sports betting after New Jersey won a long-fought challenge in May, and many others are expected to take up the issue during new legislative sessions in 2019 as a way to generate millions in revenue.

NBA roundup

Rockets set 3-pointer record, beat Wiz

Associated Press

HOUSTON — The Houston Rockets were on the cusp of NBA history, just one three-pointer away from setting the league record for most threes in a game.

The crowd chanted: “Three, Three, Three,” every time Houston got the ball and let out a collective moan after each of four straight misses as the clock ran down on Wednesday night against the Washington Wizards.

Then, with just 31.1 seconds remaining, Michael Carter-Williams, who had missed two of those four, set his feet and shot his way into the record books, making Houston’s 26th three of the night to set the mark and help Houston to a 136-118 win.

“All I was hearing were my teammates saying: ‘shoot it, shoot it,’” Carter-Williams said. “So we were just out there trying to make the last one. I had a good, clean look so I just tried to knock it down.”

James Harden scored 35 points as the Rockets won their fifth straight game. He made six threes, Chris Paul added five and Gerald Green and Eric

Gordon made four each on a night Houston attempted 55.

“We knew going into the game they were going to take a lot of them,” Washington coach Scott Brooks said. “They were hot and they’ve been hot for a while now. They have a couple of hot players and there’s not much you can do when they’re making contested threes.”

Carter-Williams joked that the reserves who were on the floor at the end of the game would never have heard the end of it if they hadn’t at least tried to set the record.

Harden believes they would have had a tougher time dealing with the fans.

“Not even us. The crowd — the crowd would have attacked them,” he said with a laugh. “Credit to those guys, they made shots to close out the game.”

A three by Gary Clark tied the record with 2:42 left before Carter-Williams made the record-setter. The previous record was held by the Cleveland Cavaliers, who made 25 against Atlanta on March 3, 2017.

Paul was happy to help Houston set the record, but didn’t realize what was going on until he heard the crowd.

“I had no clue that we had that many until the fans started chanted: ‘three,’ every time we got the ball,” he said. “So it’s cool to do it together as a team.”

Suns 111, Celtics 103: Devin Booker had 25 points and eight assists, and Deandre Ayton added 23 points and 18 rebounds to lead suddenly re-surgent Phoenix.

It was the fourth consecutive victory for the Suns since opening the season 4-24. Phoenix has its first four-game winning streak since March 2015.

Thunder 132, Kings 113: Paul George scored 43 points, Russell Westbrook had a triple-double and Steven Adams grabbed a career-high 23 rebounds in visiting Oklahoma City’s win in a matchup of short-handed teams.

Hornets 110, Cavaliers 99: Kemba Walker had 30 points and six assists to help host Charlotte rally past Cleveland.

76ers 131, Knicks 109: Joel Embiid had 24 points and 10 rebounds, Ben Simmons got his second triple-double in three games to lead host Philadelphia past New York.

Spurs 129, Magic 90: La-

Marcus Aldridge scored 20 points and five San Antonio players scored in double figures in the win over host Orlando.

Raptors 99, Pacers 96: Fred VanVleet hit a go-ahead three-pointer with 25 seconds left and host Toronto rallied from a 17-point deficit.

Bucks 123, Pelicans 115: Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 25 points and host Milwaukee dispatched New Orleans.

Nets 96, Bulls 93: Spencer Dinwiddie scored 27 points off the bench and made a critical defensive play in the final seconds to lift visiting Brooklyn to its seventh consecutive victory.

Pistons 129, Timberwolves 123 (OT): Blake Griffin scored 34 points and Reggie Bullock added a career-high 33 as visiting Detroit topped Minnesota in overtime.

Jazz 108, Warriors 103: Joe Ingles scored 20 points while Rudy Gobert had 17 points and 15 rebounds to lead host Utah past Golden State.

Trail Blazers 99, Grizzlies 92: Damian Lillard had 24 points, including 15 in the third quarter, and host Portland handed Memphis its fourth straight loss.

NHL roundup

Penguins snap Capitals’ five-game streak

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The calendar said December. The intensity felt like late spring.

The third meeting this season between longtime rivals Pittsburgh and Washington featured tight checking, strong goaltending and more than a few punches. The Penguins won 2-1 on Wednesday night, yet the Capitals appreciated the ferocity with which the game was played.

“It was a good game, especially this time of year, one with playoff mentality,” Washington goaltender Braden Holtby said. “We haven’t had one of those since Vegas.”

Holtby was referring to the 2018 Stan-

ley Cup Final, when the Capitals beat the Golden Knights to earn their first championship.

Washington came in with five straight wins and a 12-2 record since Nov. 14.

“Obviously, you don’t want to end up on the losing side, but I think we did a lot of good things tonight and both teams played really well,” Holtby said. “It’s one you can really learn from.”

Sidney Crosby and Bryan Rust scored for the Penguins. They were scuffling along with a 15-12-6 record before playing one of their best games of the season.

“We’ve got to build on it,” Crosby said. “It’s a divisional game, a rivalry, a team

that we’ve seen a lot, so these kind of intense, emotional games seem to bring out the best in us. We understand we need that same intensity, same desperation every night if we want to win.”

It was the third meeting this season between the rivals, each of which has been decided by one goal. Pittsburgh has won two of them. In this one, Crosby had a hand in both Pittsburgh goals and logged more than 22 minutes.

Avalanche 2, Canadiens 1: Gabriel Landeskog broke a tie 35 seconds into the third period by batting in a goal, Philipp Grubauer stopped 35 shots and host Colorado beat Montreal.