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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Funding impasse closes US government

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Christmas-season gridlock descended on the nation's capital Saturday like an unwelcome present just before the holiday as America's elected leaders partially closed down the government over their inability to compromise on money for a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Congressional Democrats are refusing to accede to President Donald Trump's demands for \$5 billion to start erecting his long-promised barrier, and the stalemate is a chaotic coda for Republicans in the waning days of their two-year reign controlling government.

Vice President Mike Pence, Trump son-in-law and senior adviser Jared Kushner and White House budget chief Mick Mulvaney left the Cap-

itol late Friday after hours of bargaining with congressional leaders produced no apparent compromise.

Mulvaney sent agency heads a memorandum telling them to "execute plans for an orderly shutdown." He wrote that administration officials were "hopeful that this lapse in appropriations will be of short duration." That expectation was widely shared.

With negotiations expected to resume, the House and Senate scheduled rare Saturday sessions. House members were told they would receive 24 hours' notice before any vote.

The impasse blocks money for nine of 15 Cabinet-level departments and dozens of agencies, including the departments of Homeland Security, Transportation, Interior, Agriculture, State and Justice.

The disruption affects many government operations and the routines of 800,000 federal employees. Roughly 420,000 workers were deemed essential and will work unpaid just days before Christmas. An additional 380,000 will be furloughed, meaning they will stay home without pay.

The Senate passed legislation ensuring that workers will receive back pay.

Trump has savored the prospect of a shutdown over the wall for months. He recently said he would be "proud" to close down the government, and on Friday, he said he was "totally prepared for a very long" closure. Many of Congress' most conservative Republicans welcomed such a confrontation, but most GOP lawmakers have wanted to avoid one because polling shows the public broadly op-

poses the wall and a shutdown over it.

Initial Republican reaction to the shutdown was muted. Among the few GOP lawmakers who issued statements as it began were Sens. Lisa Murkowski, of Alaska, who expressed disappointment at the lack of a deal, and Lamar Alexander, of Tennessee. "This is a complete failure of negotiations and a success for no one," Alexander said.

The Democratic leaders, Rep. Nancy Pelosi, of California, and Sen. Chuck Schumer, of New York, said in a statement that Trump "threw a temper tantrum and convinced House Republicans to push our nation into a destructive Trump Shutdown in the middle of the holiday season."

Reduced forces may focus on counterterrorism

The Washington Post

U.S. military officials grappled Friday with President Donald Trump's order to pull nearly half of all U.S. troops from Afghanistan, a move that would likely focus the war squarely on one of the few military efforts the president says he cares about: counterterrorism.

The order to draw up withdrawal plans, issued during a White House meeting this week, would reduce the military presence from more than 14,000 troops to about 7,000, drastically scaling back Pentagon efforts to assist and support Afghan forces.

Afghan forces have suffered hundreds of fatalities per month this year, as a resurgent Taliban puts pressure on the Afghan government despite a

marginally expanded Pentagon mission there 16 months ago.

U.S. military officials in Afghanistan and at the Pentagon have declined to comment. Some U.S. officials close to the president, speaking on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue, said they are trying to talk the president out of making a change.

Trump has long expressed frustration with the 17-year war and nation-building in general. In announcing his Afghan plan last year, he criticized efforts by the Obama administration as not muscular enough, but also said he was going against his own instincts to pull out of Afghanistan entirely.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, who resigned Thursday, and other senior advisers who lobbied for staying in Afghani-

stan are now on their way out. Other influential voices in foreign policy weighed in wearily Friday about Afghanistan, but focused mainly on the consequences of withdrawing all U.S. troops from Afghanistan, a move that would hamstring the Pentagon's ability to carry out strikes against the Islamic State, al-Qaida and other terrorist groups.

"An Afghan withdrawal would be even more calamitous than pulling out of Syria," said James Stavridis, a retired Navy admiral, referring to Trump's announcement this week that he would withdraw all American forces there. "It would lead to the resurgence of the Taliban, who would welcome al-Qaida back with open arms."

Stavridis made a case for keeping the existing strategy,

adopted by Trump in August 2017, and said that not doing so undercuts U.S. efforts to strike a peace deal with the Taliban.

Withdrawing 7,000 troops would be a "big mistake," he said but acknowledged that doing so would focus the mission most heavily on strikes against terrorist groups.

In Afghanistan and at the Pentagon, military officials have privately discussed the possibility that Trump would run out of patience with the war. But many hoped that they could at least make the case that the counterterrorism mission should continue.

Maintaining the mission will require the Pentagon to keep at least one major base open, most likely Bagram Airfield north of Kabul.

US envoy to anti-ISIS coalition resigns

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Brett McGurk, the U.S. envoy to the global coalition fighting Islamic State, has resigned in protest to President Donald Trump's abrupt decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria, joining Defense Secretary Jim Mattis in an administration exodus of experienced national security officials.

Only 11 days ago, McGurk had said it would be "reckless" to consider ISIS defeated and therefore would be unwise to bring American forces home. He decided to speed up his plan to leave in mid-February.

McGurk, appointed to the post by President Barack Obama in 2015 and retained by Trump, said in his resignation letter that the militants were on the run, but not yet defeated, and that the premature pullout of American forces from Syria

would create the conditions that gave rise to ISIS. McGurk also cited gains in accelerating the campaign against ISIS, but that the work was not yet done.

His letter, submitted Friday to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, was described to The Associated Press on Saturday by an official familiar with its contents. The official was not authorized to publicly discuss the matter before the letter was released and spoke on condition of anonymity.

McGurk, whose resignation is effective Dec. 31, was planning to leave the job in mid-February after a U.S.-hosted meeting of foreign ministers from the coalition countries, but he felt he could continue no longer after Trump's decision to withdraw from Syria and Mattis' resignation, according to the official.

Trump is acting to pull all 2,000 U.S. troops from Syria

and has now declared victory over ISIS, contradicting his own experts' assessments. Many lawmakers have called his action rash and dangerous.

Mattis, perhaps the most respected foreign policy official in the administration, announced Thursday that he will leave by the end of February.

The U.S. began airstrikes in Syria in 2014, and ground troops moved in the following year to battle ISIS and train Syrian rebels in a country torn apart by civil war. Trump, in a tweet last week, abruptly declared their mission accomplished.

The decision will fulfill Trump's goal of bringing troops home from Syria, but military leaders have pushed back for months, arguing that ISIS remains a threat and could regroup in Syria's long-running civil war. U.S. policy has been to keep troops in place until the extremists are eradicated.

McGurk said at a State Department briefing on Dec. 11 that "it would be reckless if we were just to say, 'Well, the physical caliphate is defeated, so we can just leave now.' I think anyone who's looked at a conflict like this would agree with that."

A week before that, Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the U.S. had a long way to go in training local Syrian forces to prevent a resurgence of ISIS and stabilize Syria. He said it would take 35,000 to 40,000 local troops in northeastern Syria to maintain security over the long term, but only about 20 percent of that number had been trained.

Taking over for now for McGurk will be his deputy, retired Lt. Gen. Terry Wolff, who served three tours of active duty in Iraq.

NATO watchers wonder what's next after Syria pullout

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Following President Donald Trump's unexpected decision to pull troops from Syria and reports of a plan to cut half the number of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, the question now swirling in security circles is what mission could be next.

"Yesterday: Syria. Today: Afghanistan. Tomorrow: South Korea? Germany? It all fits a pattern and it shouldn't be surprising," said Ivo Daadler, a former U.S. representative to NATO, in a tweet Friday. "Trump has said he would since the day he ran for president."

The White House intends to pull 7,000 U.S. troops out of Afghanistan in a move that would bring force levels to their lowest levels since the early days of the 17-year-old war. The decision, reported by The New York Times, came to light hours after Defense Secretary Jim

Mattis resigned over the Syria pullout.

Derek Chollet, a Pentagon official during the Obama administration, warned that Trump could now turn his attention to NATO in an attempt to make good on past threats to both quit the alliance and cut back in South Korea.

"He sees both as antiquated missions and examples of allies ripping off the American taxpayer, and he has repeatedly threatened to pull the plug on both, only to be walked back by his advisers," Chollet wrote in Defense One last week. "There is no reason to expect the pattern to change. So with Syria behind him, those missions are up next. Don't be surprised."

In Europe, policymakers are likely reeling from Trump's sudden reversals on Syria and Afghanistan and what the longer-term implications could be for NATO after the resignation of Mattis — the alliance's chief defender in Washington.

"Mattis has a steady hand at NATO, and there is no doubt the Europeans will be pretty battered and demoralized with his exit," said Judy Dempsey, an analyst with Carnegie Europe. "This leaves NATO without an anchor. It is quite worrying."

Jorge Benitez, a NATO expert with the Atlantic Council think tank in Washington, said allies need to brace for more threats from Trump regarding U.S. support for the alliance.

German government spokeswoman Ulrike Demmer told reporters in Berlin on Friday that it was not informed in advance of Trump's decision to pull forces from Syria, where Germany conducts surveillance operations.

For now, Berlin plans to continue its surveillance and reconnaissance mission in Syria, officials said.

Carl Bildt, the former prime minister of Sweden, reacting to Mattis' resignation, said he

feared the U.S. would become more unpredictable with the pro-NATO defense secretary gone.

For allies, the prospect of a major U.S. drawdown in Afghanistan could have major implications for the NATO mission in the country, which is focused on training Afghan security forces. In addition to the 14,000 U.S. troops deployed to Afghanistan, there are an additional 8,000 servicemembers operating under the alliance's Resolute Support mission.

NATO forces rely heavily on the logistical capabilities the Americans bring to bear in the country.

However, NATO emphasized that just last month, alliance foreign ministers gathered to reaffirm that mission in Afghanistan and, in July, agreed to extend funding for the Afghan security forces until 2024.

2,600 troops to spend holiday on border

By ROSE L. THAYER

Stars and Stripes

AUSTIN, Texas — Another 550 active-duty servicemembers made it back to their home stations this week from deployments at the U.S.-Mexico border, U.S. Northern Command officials said Friday.

The 2,600 remaining servicemembers at the southern border are preparing for the Christmas holiday away from their families as they support U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents in California, Arizona and Texas.

“As with all U.S. military units serving at home and around the world every day,

some servicemembers will be conducting their assigned missions in support of CBP over the Christmas holiday,” said Col. Cathy Wilkinson, public affairs director for U.S. Army North.

Numbers available Friday showed 700 servicemembers are stationed in Texas, 700 are in Arizona and 1,200 are in California.

Many servicemembers deployed to California and Arizona will have what is referred to as “light duty days” on Dec. 24 and 25, Wilkinson said. “Unit commanders have organized morale-building events such as sports events and shared meals.”

Religious services will be available,

and some troops might travel locally to spend time with friends and families, she added. Army Lt. Gen. Jeff Buchanan, U.S. Northern Command’s forward operational commander, will visit servicemembers in California and Arizona on Christmas Day.

The mission along the border began Oct. 31 and is expected to end Jan. 31. At the height of the active-duty deployment, which was initiated by President Donald Trump to “harden” the border in advance of a migrant caravan moving through Central America toward the United States, about 5,900 servicemembers were situated within the three states.

US places hypersonic weaponry on fast track

The Washington Post

In a recent gathering at the Army Navy Country Club in Arlington, Va., two of the Pentagon’s highest-ranking weapons-buyers sent a clear message to a packed room of defense executives.

America is racing Russia and China to develop a worldwide hypersonic strike weapon that can reach anywhere in the world within hours, they said, and it’s time for American defense contractors to move from science and research to full-scale production of those systems.

Patrick Shanahan, a former Boeing executive now the deputy secretary of defense, said, “This is really about industrialization, not about science.”

And Michael Griffin, a physicist who is undersecretary of defense for research and engineering, said U.S. defense contractors should start preparing to churn out finished hypersonic weapons in the next few years.

“This is not primarily a research effort,” Griffin said. “It is an effort to get these systems into the field in the thousands. ... We are going to have to create a new industrial base for these systems.”

Hypersonic systems can travel many times the speed of sound, or more than a mile per second. If fielded, they could allow the U.S. military

to neutralize targets anywhere on earth in little more than an hour. Officials have suggested that such a capability could be used to quickly destroy a hostile nation’s nuclear launch sites, or conduct precision strikes against leaders of terrorist organizations. The Army, Navy and Air Force each have separate programs to develop and field them under an effort known as Prompt Global Strike.

But the United States may be playing catch up in a global hypersonics arms race, officials and analysts say. Russian President Vladimir Putin has boasted that the country has developed high-speed, nuclear-tipped missiles that can navigate the Earth below the atmosphere, something that would frustrate missile defense systems.

China is thought to have hypersonic capabilities of its own. In a review of over 20,000 patent filings related to hypersonics research, the market research firm Govini found that the number of patents filed related to hypersonics research in China increased about 24 percent each year between 2011 and 2016. The number of patent filings in Russia and the United States declined over the same period, Govini found.

To catch up, U.S. officials have referred to hypersonic weapons as their “first, second, and third” weapons develop-

ment priorities. The Pentagon’s 2019 budget called for increased funding for a key hypersonics program from \$201 million in 2018 to \$278 million in 2019, with close to \$2 billion allocated to the program. Govini found that U.S. contract funding for hypersonics research and development was close to \$350 million in 2017, more than double the 2011 amount.

Analysts and arms control experts are concerned about the potential destabilizing effect these weapons could have. Kingston Reif, director for disarmament and threat reduction policy at the Arms Control Association, says he is worried the new weapons could be mistaken for nuclear missiles, increasing the risk of a misunderstanding among nuclear-capable countries.

“In my mind just because Russia and China are rushing to deploy these systems does not mean we need to do so as well,” Reif said. “I’m seeing the technology driving this investment rather than a particularly well-thought-out rationale based on the costs and risks.”

For the defense contractors, the hypersonics arms race is seen as a growth market. Loren Thompson, a prominent defense analyst who works with Lockheed Martin and Boeing, said the hypersonics market should be worth “many billions of dol-

lars” in the long-term.

“We’re talking about an entirely new class of weapons and the operating concepts to go with it,” he said.

Developing and testing hypersonic systems requires highly specialized knowledge and expertise meaning the market is limited to a few large companies. In a November interview with the trade publication *Inside Defense*, Senate Armed Services Committee head James Inhofe said that the United States had just a single wind tunnel capable of adequately testing hypersonic systems, for example.

Griffin said the United States is “years ... not months, not decades” away from having a workable missile defense system that can stop hypersonic missiles. “I think we’ll have a workable defensive capability by the middle of the decade,” Griffin said in a recent briefing.

In the meantime, analysts say most of the U.S. funding for hypersonic weaponry is going towards precision strike weapons. Govini Chief Executive Chris Taylor says “nearly all” of the Department’s “true” hypersonics investment is in developing so-called offensive systems as opposed to missile defense systems.

Cancer the latest health woe for Ginsburg

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg is resting in a New York hospital following surgery to remove two malignant growths in her left lung, the third time the Supreme Court's oldest justice has been treated for cancer and her second stay in a hospital in two months.

Worries over Ginsburg's health have been a constant of sorts for nearly 10 years, and for liberals, particularly in the last two. Ginsburg, the leader of the court's liberal wing and known to her fans as the Notorious RBG, has achieved an iconic status rare for Supreme Court justices.

If she did step down, President Donald Trump would have another opportunity to move a conservative court even more to the right.

But Ginsburg has always bounced back before, flaunting her physical and mental fitness.

After past health scares, she has resumed the exercise routine popularized in a book written by her personal trainer and captured in a Stephen Colbert video. Weeks after cracking three ribs in a fall at the Supreme Court in November, the 85-year-old Ginsburg was asking questions at high court arguments, speaking at a naturalization ceremony for new citizens and being interviewed at screenings of the new movie about her, "On the Basis of Sex."

Ginsburg will remain in the hospital for a few days, the court said. She has never missed arguments in more than 25 years as a justice. The court next meets on Jan. 7.

While it's hard to refer to good luck and cancer diagnoses in the same breath, this

is the second time for Ginsburg that cancerous growths have been detected at an apparently early stage through unrelated medical tests.

The nodules on her lung were found during X-rays and other tests Ginsburg had after she fractured ribs in a fall in her Supreme Court office on Nov. 7, the court said. In 2009, routine follow-up screening after Ginsburg's colorectal cancer 10 years earlier detected a lesion on her pancreas. Doctors operated and removed the growth they'd previously spotted, plus a smaller one they hadn't seen before. The larger growth was benign, while the smaller one was malignant.

Doctors who are not involved in Ginsburg's care said she may have gotten lucky again, although they caution it is too soon to know.

Wrestler told to cut dreads or forfeit match

Associated Press

BUENA, N.J. — A New Jersey high school wrestler had his dreadlocks cut off minutes before his match after a referee told him to lose the hairstyle or forfeit his bout.

An SNJ Today reporter tweeted video of Buena Regional High School wrestler Andrew Johnson getting his hair cut court-side. He went on to win Wednesday's match but appeared visibly distraught.

Johnson, who is black, had a cover over his hair, but the referee Alan Maloney, who is white, said that wouldn't do.

The state's Interscholastic Athletic Association said in a statement they are recommending Maloney not be assigned to any

event until the matter has been reviewed more thoroughly.

The Division on Civil Rights has also opened an investigation into what happened, said Leland Moore, a spokesman for Attorney General Gurbir S. Grewal.

The school superintendent said in a letter to the community that they support and stand by all student-athletes.

"The student-athlete made the decision to have his hair cut, at that moment, in order to avoid a forfeiture of the match," wrote Superintendent David Cappuccio, adding that school officials reached out to the athletic association afterward. "The district will take appropriate action as more details become available."

The video was shared widely on social

media, with users calling the incident "racist," "cruel" and "humiliating."

Maloney came under fire in 2016 for using a racial slur against a black referee, according to the Courier-Post newspaper.

At a private gathering between officials at a condominium, Maloney allegedly poked referee Preston Hamilton, who is black, in the chest and allegedly used a racial slur during an argument over homemade wine. Hamilton slammed Maloney to the ground, according to the Courier-Post.

Maloney told the newspaper he did not remember making the comments.

A woman answering the phone at a listed number for Maloney said the ordeal is being blown out of proportion and the referee was simply following rules.

Unclear how US to receive \$14M raised for border wall

Associated Press

An Air Force veteran racked up millions of dollars on his fundraising page for President Donald Trump's U.S.-Mexico border wall, but it remained unclear Friday how the U.S. government would get the money.

Brian Kolfage's GoFundMe page had raised more than \$14.7 million as of Saturday afternoon to build the wall, funding for which caused a partial government shutdown. The crowdfunding page, which was

launched less than a week ago, has a goal of \$1 billion.

In a statement on the page, Kolfage assured contributors that the fundraiser was not a scam and that he had contacted the Trump administration about how to deliver the money.

White House officials did not immediately return an email seeking comment Friday.

Citizens can mail money as "gifts to the United States," according to the U.S. Treasury

Department. But it's not clear whether the Department of Homeland Security can accept gifts.

Kolfage, of Miramar Beach, Fla., wrote that donors would get a refund if the fundraising goal isn't met.

The page has brought attention to Kolfage, a triple amputee who was wounded in the Iraq War in 2004, and his social media history.

NBC News reported that Kolfage operated a Facebook page

called "Right Wing News" and sites that promoted conspiracy theories. He told the news outlet that he didn't mention the page because he "didn't want it to be a distraction."

"That shouldn't be the focus. My personal issues have nothing to do with building the wall," Kolfage said.

He told The Associated Press in an email Thursday that he worked on "Right Wing News," but the rest of NBC's story "is not true."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Hershey's candy missing its tips

PA HERSHEY — Bakers are complaining that something is amiss with Hershey's Kisses.

The chocolate candy's trademark tips have been mysteriously missing from batches around the country. Bakers have taken to social media to complain that the lopped-off tops are ruining the look of their holiday treats. Without their points, the chocolate candies are left with flat tops.

Company spokesman Jeff Beckman told the Lebanon Daily News they're reviewing the issue. Beckman said Hershey has donated baking items to the group as a thank you for pointing out the issue.

Shopper stops theft by breaking car window

IN SCHERERVILLE — A northwestern Indiana man said he smashed the window of a car to stop shoplifters outside a busy store.

Eric Cordell said he needed six stitches for his injuries, but he was able to recover a bag of coats stolen from a TJ Maxx in Schererville on Dec. 4.

Cordell was leaving the store after buying gift cards when he heard a woman say that a man had taken a bag. He chased the thief, who got into a car, and then smashed the window with his elbow. Cordell told the Post-Tribune, "I don't know what I was thinking."

Deliveryman found stealing packages

NJ KEANSBURG — Police in Monmouth County said a deliveryman made some pickups he wasn't supposed to.

Keansburg police charged William Tindall III with theft last week.

They said the 25-year-old Jersey City resident was working for Last Mile Delivery, an Elizabeth-based company that contracts with Amazon.

A homeowner provided surveillance video to police that allegedly showed a driver placing a package on her porch, then returning to steal other packages.

A stolen golden ball returned in gift wrap

MN ST. PAUL — A golden ball swiped from the top of the conservatory at St. Paul's Como Park has been returned — gift wrapped in a giant Christmas stocking.

Officials said someone scaled the 64-foot-tall Marjorie McNeely Conservatory last weekend and stole the finial from atop the building's dome.

A conservatory official put out a request for information Tuesday. An anonymous tip led police to a nearby parking lot, where they found the golden ball in a fabric Christmas stocking that was about 5 feet long.

No arrests have been made.

Yellowstone visits hit 4 million for the year

MT BOZEMAN — Figures show that November was not an abnormally busy month for Yellowstone National Park.

The Bozeman Daily Chronicle reported park statisticians estimate the park had about 13,849 visits during the month, about a 3,000-visit increase over November 2017.

It brings the total for 2018 to almost 4.1 million, already the fourth-busiest year on record. It's also the fourth consecutive

year with more than 4 million visits.

Visitation typically drops off in November.

Man, 90, dressed up as Santa for wife

MI CHARLOTTE — A 90-year-old Michigan man dressed up as Santa and brought Christmas to a local nursing home so his wife could celebrate the holidays.

Don West sang carols as a guitarist strummed along during a holiday party at Golden Days II Adult Foster Care in Charlotte, The Lansing State Journal reported.

His wife, Jackie West, 86, has been in the home since she suffered her first stroke in 2017.

The couple met at a dance more than 60 years ago.

"I just fell in love right there," Don West said. "Never fell out of love since then."

Message in bottle found at museum

NE OMAHA — Workers restoring the brick facade of the Durham Museum, formerly a 90-year-old train station, found a message in a bottle.

The Omaha World-Herald reported that the bottle was found in the two-inch gap between the exterior and an interior wall.

The bottle was covered in dirt with a green label that identified it as having once contained whiskey. Chapman took the bottle home and with a pair of tweezers, removed a small, rolled up scrap of card stock.

It had these words scrawled in cursive: "William Grabowski, Frank Grabowski, Jack Healy, Making Repairs, Feb 29 1946."

Church groups cash in on leaf collection

IN GOSHEN — Trees have dropped cash in an Indiana county.

Elkhart County distributed thousands of dollars last week to church groups and community organizations for collecting tons of leaves. Officials wanted to provide an incentive to reduce leaf burning.

Twenty-one teams took 181 tons of leaves to the county landfill. Prairie Camp, a program of Missionary Church, finished in first place and received nearly \$10,000 for 39 tons of leaves.

The Yellow Creek Mennonite Church youth group received about \$8,000 for 31 tons. Youth pastor Jason Ramer said it will almost cover the annual cost of bus travel.

Sunnyside Mennonite Church received \$4,900. Alan Ediger said church members "signed up right away" when they heard about the program.

Naked man tears down neighbor's decorations

WI GREEN BAY — Investigators said a 61-year-old Wisconsin man was arrested for tearing down a neighbor's Christmas decorations while drunk and naked.

The Green Bay Gazette reported that Gregory Brannigan faces misdemeanor charges of disorderly conduct and resisting an officer.

A criminal complaint shows Brannigan's neighbor called police Wednesday to report that he was naked, kicking her door and tearing down her decorations. The neighbor told police Brannigan appeared intoxicated.

From wire reports

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Reporting
World, National
and Military News

Plenty on line when Chiefs face Seattle

Associated Press

SEATTLE — From the time he entered the league in 2012, Russell Wilson for the most part has thrived late in the season with playoff berths or playoff positioning at stake.

What about potential MVP candidate Patrick Mahomes?

For all the brilliance Mahomes has shown this season in leading Kansas City to the cusp of a division title and possibly the No. 1 seed in the AFC, he's never been in the situation of showing he can win a late-season game in a hostile environment that could ultimately help determine how far the Chiefs go in the postseason.

That unknown about Mahomes makes Sunday night's matchup with Kansas City visiting Seattle fascinating. Should the second-year quarterback enter one of the most difficult venues in football and come away with a Kansas City

victory, Mahomes will have answered those questions and put Kansas City potentially in position to never leave home during the postseason.

But a loss to Seattle and wins by the Chargers and Texans this weekend could put all that in peril for the Chiefs — the division title, home-field advantage and a first-round playoff bye.

"I think the message for the whole team is we're not satisfied with where we're at. We wanted to put ourselves in this position, but at the same time, we know we still have a long way to go," Mahomes said.

"We're going to keep in that mentality the rest of this season and into the playoffs (of) not being satisfied with just being here. We want to make sure we can go and win the big games whenever we need to."

Kansas City (11-3) could have made the importance of Sun-

day's game significantly less if it could have held on at home last week against the Chargers. But the 29-28 loss to Los Angeles left open the chance Kansas City could miss out on the division title and fall all the way to being a wild-card team depending on how the final two weeks play out.

"You can hang your head and mope and do all those things you want to do, but that doesn't get anything accomplished," Kansas City coach Andy Reid said.

"You get in, you learn from it the best you can, and you go do better. That's the approach I am taking. That is the approach I felt from the guys."

Seattle (8-6) also had an unexpected thud last week, losing in overtime to lowly San Francisco on the road. Ultimately what Wilson and the Seahawks do against Kansas City doesn't matter in the big picture of Se-

attle trying to wrap up a wild-card spot in the NFC. A win over Arizona in Week 17 would be enough to put Seattle in the playoffs no matter what happens against the Chiefs.

With losses by either Washington or Minnesota and a win over the Chiefs, the Seahawks would be back in the postseason after missing a year ago. But they know beating the Chiefs won't be easy.

"They have such a diverse attack that you've got to be ready for a lot of stuff. Our guys, they're up for it, they're ready for the challenge and all of that," Seattle coach Pete Carroll said. "We've got to do a great job on their really classy receivers. (Travis) Kelce and (Tyreek) Hill are just unbelievably talented guys having great years. So, there's a lot of issues here. I think our guys will be ready to do this."

Sports briefs

Dodgers trade Puig, Wood, Kemp to Reds in 7-player deal

Associated Press

CINCINNATI — The Los Angeles Dodgers had a surplus of outfielders. With one attention-getting deal, they reshaped their roster in hopes of another pennant run.

The reigning NL champions shook up their lineup on Friday, trading Yasiel Puig, Matt Kemp and left-hander Alex Wood along with cash to the Cincinnati Reds for a pair of prospects as part of a seven-player deal.

The Reds included starter Homer Bailey in the swap, a way of freeing them from the \$28 million owed him in the final year of his contract. Bailey didn't fit into the Reds' pitching plans, so they wanted to include him in a deal if possible. The Dodgers plan to release him.

"It was to grant him his release, more of fitting into the overall construct of the deal,"

said Andrew Friedman, the Dodgers' president of baseball operations.

The Dodgers get minor leaguer infielder Jeter Downs and right-hander Josiah Gray. The Reds got catcher Kyle Farmer for depth at the position.

"I think if you look back over last few years, a hallmark of our teams has been depth on our roster," Friedman said. "This put us in position with a surplus in the outfield and pitching. A big focus was to figure out moves on those fronts that made sense."

For the Reds, it's another move toward becoming competitive after four straight 90-loss seasons. Cincinnati has been rebuilding since 2015, and decided it's time to spend some money and make some deals to complement its core of young players.

In other MLB news:

■ The Boston Red Sox have agreed to a one-year contract with reliever Heath Hembree, avoiding salary arbitration.

Hembree's non-guaranteed deal is worth \$1,312,500. He had a \$581,500 salary this year.

The 29-year-old Hembree went 4-1 with a 4.20 ERA in 67 appearances last season, helping the Red Sox win the World Series. The right-hander made four scoreless appearances in the playoffs covering 4²/₃ innings.

■ The Seattle Mariners acquired outfielder Domingo Santana from the Milwaukee Brewers on Friday in exchange for outfielder Ben Gamel and minor-league pitcher Noah Zavalos.

The swap of young outfielders adds a right-handed power bat to the Mariners' lineup and provides the Brewers with a

versatile corner outfielder.

Shiffrin ties World Cup mark, wins slalom

COURCHEVEL, France — Mikaela Shiffrin wrote more World Cup history Saturday, winning a slalom for a women's record-equaling 35th career victory in the discipline and 50th win overall.

Shiffrin extended her first-run lead of 0.04 seconds to finish 0.29 clear of Petra Vlhova, who has been runner-up to the American star in all three traditional slaloms this season.

Shiffrin tied her childhood idol Marlies Schild of Austria with 35 slalom wins on the World Cup circuit. Schild's final slalom victory, in December 2013, was achieved at the age of 32. Shiffrin turns 24 in March.

NBA roundup

James paces Lakers in win

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — LeBron James had 22 points, 14 assists and 12 rebounds, and the Los Angeles Lakers beat the New Orleans Pelicans 112-104 on Friday.

James got his third triple-double with the Lakers and No. 76 for his career, helping Los Angeles to its sixth consecutive home win. Kyle Kuzma had 23 points, and Ivica Zubac set season highs with 16 points and 11 rebounds.

Anthony Davis had 30 points and 20 rebounds for the Pelicans, who lost their third straight. Julius Randle scored 21 points, and Jrue Holiday had 18 points and 10 assists.

Davis and James shared the court for the first time since James recently declared in an interview with ESPN that it would be “amazing” if the Lakers traded for the Pelicans’ biggest star. James’ comments prompted accusations of tampering.

New Orleans coach Alvin Gentry said before the game that Davis will not be traded to the Lakers or anywhere else as long as he remains under contract to the Pelicans.

Raptors 126, Cavaliers 110: Kawhi Leonard matched his season high with 37 points, helping host Toronto to the win.

Bucks 120, Celtics 107: Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 30 points, and visiting Milwaukee won for the sixth time in seven games.

Kings 102, Grizzlies 99: Buddy Hield made four of his six three-pointers over the final 8½ minutes to help host Sacramento rally for the victory.

Jazz 120, Trail Blazers 90: Ricky Rubio had 24 points and eight assists to lead Utah to the runaway road win.

Pacers 114, Nets 106: Victor Oladipo scored 26 points as Indiana snapped host Brooklyn’s seven-game winning streak.

Spurs 124, Timberwolves 98: Bryn Forbes scored 22 points and host San Antonio set a season high with 19 three-pointers.

Hornets 98, Pistons 86: Marvin Williams made a career-high seven three-pointers and finished with 24 points, leading host Charlotte to its third victory over Detroit this season.

Hawks 114, Knicks 107: Kent Bazemore scored 22 points and John Collins had 17 points and 16 rebounds, helping Atlanta rally for the road win.

Bulls 90, Magic 80: Lauri Markkanen scored 32 points, and host Chicago won for just the third time in 15 games.

Top 25 roundup

LSU becomes first team to topple No. 24 Furman

Associated Press

BATON ROUGE, La. — After coming close in two opportunities against ranked teams earlier this season, LSU finally put together a complete effort against an opponent whose first-ever stint in the AP Top 25 may come to an end.

Tremont Waters had 20 points and seven assists, and LSU ended No. 24 Furman’s dream start to the season with a 75-57 victory on Friday night.

Last month, LSU had a nine-point advantage with three minutes to play against then-No. 14 Florida State, but the Seminoles rallied down the stretch and beat the Tigers in overtime. Earlier this month, LSU couldn’t protect a 15-point second half-lead and lost at then-No. 24 Houston.

“This was a good win,” LSU coach Will Wade said. “We did a good job on the backboards and we did a good job contesting their threes. We only turned it over three times in the second half and that’s where we were able to get our separation. I’m proud of how we played.”

Waters, who came off the bench for the second straight game, scored eight points over the final six minutes as LSU closed out the game with a 14-4 run.

“It feels really good beating a Top-25 team,” Waters said. “For my team, I don’t mind coming off the bench. Obviously, no one wants to come off the bench, but that’s what I have to do. Coach (Wade) said my time will come back around and I will get back in the starting lineup.”

Skylar Mays scored 16 points on 7-for-10 shooting, Kavell Bigby-Williams had 10 points and 10 rebounds and Naz Reid had nine points and 10 rebounds for the Tigers (9-3).

Andrew Brown scored 15 points to lead the Paladins (12-1), whose season-opening run included road wins over defending national champion Villanova and Loyola-Chicago, which made the Final Four last season.

Jordan Lyons had 13 points and Alex Hunter had 12 for Furman. The Paladins made just 38 percent of their field-goal attempts (21-for-56) and were out-rebounded 40-22. “LSU played an extremely physical game,” Furman coach Bob Richey said. “They’ve got a lot of size and they took advantage of it. They doubled us up on the glass and had 50 points in the paint. It’s a pretty simple game plan. They were able to

get it up on the rim, chase it and then get some put-backs.”

LSU took control of the game in the first four minutes of the second half, when it went on a 12-3 run to go ahead 43-30. Mays, Bigby-Williams and Reid combined for all 12 points. Furman got no closer than five points the rest of the game.

No. 8 Gonzaga 101, Denver 40: Brandon Clarke and Rui Hachimura each scored 23 points as the host Bulldogs routed the Pioneers.

Corey Kispert added 13 points and Zach Norvell Jr. scored 12 for Gonzaga (11-2), which is 13-0 all-time against current members of the Summit League.

Troy Stewart-Miller scored 10 points for undermanned Denver (5-9), which couldn’t handle Gonzaga’s size and speed.

Hachimura sank all nine of his field-goal attempts and Clarke made 10 of 12 as Gonzaga shot 68 percent to overwhelm the Pioneers, who shot just 24.6 percent.

No. 10 Michigan State 99, Oakland 69: Cassius Winston scored a season-high 26 points, leading the host Spartans past the Golden Grizzlies.

Michigan State (10-2) has won five straight.

Oakland (4-9) dropped its fourth game in a row.

Michigan State’s Nick Ward had 14 points in 20 minutes, limited by foul trouble. Joshua Langford started slow offensively and finished with 12 points for the Spartans.

Oakland’s Xavier Hill-Mais fouled out midway through the second half with 17 points on 8-for-20 shooting.

No. 20 Marquette 103, No. 14 Buffalo 85: Markus Howard scored 40 of his 45 points in the second half as the host Golden Eagles pulled away to hand the Bulls their first loss of the season.

Sam Hauser added 18 points for Marquette (10-2), which hit seven three-pointers during a second-half surge that turned a 52-49 deficit into an 85-68 lead.

Howard, just 1-for-7 with one three-pointer in the first half, finished 12-for-25 from the field. He was 9-for-13 from beyond the arc and 12-for-12 of from the line as Marquette improved to 9-0 at home.

Jeremy Harris had 22 points, Dontay Caruthers scored 20 and CJ Massinburg added 18 for the Bulls (11-1), whose season-opening run was their best since 1930-31.

NHL roundup

Wilson, Holtby lift Capitals

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Braden Holtby and Tom Wilson gave the Washington Capitals another two points in the standings.

Holtby made 36 saves, Wilson broke a tie with seven minutes left and the Stanley Cup champion Capitals beat the Buffalo Sabres 2-1 on Friday night.

Evgeny Kuznetsov started the winning play when he stole the puck from goalie Carter Hutton behind the net. The center quickly fed Wilson just outside of the crease. Wilson has 10 goals in 15 games this season.

“Whenever the goalie is behind the net, you just try and get open, just in case,” Wilson said. “(Kuznetsov) makes a great play, and you’ve just got to try and get it there before the goalie gets back in the net. It was good timing.”

Still, the Capitals needed Holtby as Buffalo held a 37-24 edge in shots. The Sabres had 17 third-period shots, and Holtby made 16 saves in the final 20 minutes and came up big at the end.

“(Holtby) was a big reason we were able to get two points tonight,” Washington coach Todd Reirden said. “He was outstanding all game long. He had a huge role in us winning that game.”

Blackhawks 2, Avalanche 1: Collin Delia made 35 saves in his first NHL start of the season and visiting Chicago beat Colorado for its third straight victory.

Recalled Monday from Rockford of the AHL after Corey Crawford sustained a concussion, the 24-year-old Delia made his third career start. In his previous start, he surrendered five goals late last season in a loss to the Avalanche.

Alex DeBrincat and Artem Anisimov scored for Chicago. J.T. Compher scored for Colorado, and Philipp Grubauer stopped 26 shots.

Devils 5, Senators 2: Reigning MVP Taylor Hall had two goals and two assists and host New Jersey rode its top line beat Ottawa and snap a three-game losing streak.

Kyle Palmieri added a goal and two assists, Nico Hischier had a goal and an assist and the line finished with nine points as the Devils won for only the fourth time in the last 17 games (4-7-6).

Pavel Zacha ignited the outburst with a short-handed goal and Keith Kinkaid made 25 saves.

Matt Duchene scored twice for Ottawa.

Bowl roundup

QB plays ‘perfectly’ in BYU win

Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho — At the Famous Idaho Potato Bowl pregame press conference Thursday, BYU coach Kalani Sitake set high expectations when asked about how he thought quarterback Zach Wilson would play.

“Perfectly,” Sitake said jokingly. “That’s what I’m praying for, perfect play from everyone.”

Sitake didn’t get it from everyone, but he did from Wilson.

The BYU freshman was 18-for-18 passing for 317 yards and four touchdowns and the Cougars beat Western Michigan 49-18 on Friday.

Selected the game MVP, Wilson tied the NCAA bowl record for completion percentage set by Riley Skinner at 11-for-11 for Wake Forest in the 2008 EagleBank Bowl.

Wilson’s 18 straight completions are second-most in an NCAA bowl game behind Georgia’s Mike Bobo, who had 19 straight against Wisconsin in the 1998 Outback Bowl.

“I’ve been trying to let Zach loose for a long time now,” Sitake said as he patted Wilson on the back. “I think an aggressive style of offense is what we need. This was really good for us to see that we could win a game when a team commits to stopping the run against us.”

In the first half, BYU (7-6) struggled to sustain momentum offensively and had just 115 yards, despite Wilson completing all eight of his attempts, mostly on short routes. The ground game had a total of 20 yards on 17 carries.

But with BYU down 10-7 at halftime, Sitake unleashed Wilson in the second half.

The Cougars’ 28-point third quarter started with an 8-yard pass from Wilson to Dylan Collie. Then, after a 37-yard TD run by Riley Burt, Wilson hit Aleva Hifo on a 70-yard scoring strike.

“I think the bar is set a little too high for the next bowl game,” Wilson said. “But I think we proved what we can do as a team and found our offensive identity and discovered what we’re good at.”

Despite the record-setting performance, Wilson admitted afterward that he had no idea his day was going so well statistically.

“The game flashes by so quick, and I thought I had at least six or seven incompletions,” Wilson said. “That’s when you realize the success for a quarterback is based on the team around you.”

Western Michigan (7-6), which was without starting quarterback Jon Wassink due to a foot injury, rolled up 192 yards of offense in the first half with freshman

Kaleb Eleby. But the Broncos managed only 41 yards on 18 plays in the decisive third quarter.

“I thought our defense did a great job of keeping us in it,” Western Michigan coach Tim Lester said. “Once they got a lead on us, they got after our secondary pretty good. We knew this game was going to be about which quarterback could get into a rhythm, we said that all week, and (Wilson) got comfortable.”

Bahamas Bowl

FIU 35, Toledo 32: Anthony Jones rushed for three touchdowns to complete his comeback story, and Florida International survived a horrible start to defeat Toledo on Friday in the Bahamas Bowl.

Jones missed much of the season after being one of two FIU players who were injured in a drive-by shooting in September. He scored on runs of 6, 30 and 18 yards for the Panthers (9-4), who set a school record for wins.

Sterling Palmer caught a touchdown pass and Maurice Alexander rushed for another score for FIU, which fumbled away the opening kickoff and trailed 10-0 early.

Christian Alexander completed 17 of 26 passes for 209 yards and a touchdown for FIU. The Panthers got a huge fourth-down conversion on a pass hauled in by Tony Gaiter IV with 2:40 remaining, the biggest play in a drive where Jones capped the win with his final TD run with 41 seconds left.

Eli Peters had three touchdown passes and threw for 264 yards for Toledo (7-6), which fell in a bowl game for the third consecutive year. Jon’Vea Johnson had two of those TD grabs, and Dontae Johnson had six catches for 98 yards and a score for the Rockets.

It was FIU’s second bowl victory. The other came in 2010 — also against Toledo.

FIU played without starting quarterback James Morgan, who has an arm injury. Morgan completed 65 percent of his passes for 2,727 yards and 26 touchdowns in the regular season. FIU also didn’t have running back Shawndarrius Phillips, who was left home after a domestic battery charge stemming from a June case became known this month.

And yet, the Panthers had more than enough.

They got on the board when Jones got his first rushing score of the day early in the second quarter, took a 14-10 lead into the half and grabbed the lead for good on Jones’ 30-yard run with 3:47 left in the third quarter.