

# STARS AND STRIPES®

Saturday, December 7, 2019

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## Gunman viewed shooter videos before attack

Associated Press

PENSACOLA, Fla. — The Saudi student who fatally shot three people at a U.S. naval base in Florida hosted a dinner party earlier in the week where he and three others watched videos of mass shootings, a U.S. official told The Associated Press on Saturday.

One of the three students who attended the dinner party videotaped outside the building while the shooting was taking place at Naval Air Station Pensacola on Friday, said the U.S. official, who spoke on condition of anonymity after being briefed by federal authorities. Two other Saudi students watched from a car, the official said.

The official said 10 Saudi students were being held on the base Saturday while several others were unaccounted for.

U.S. officials previously

had told the AP they were investigating possible links to terrorism.

The student opened fire in a classroom at the base Friday morning, killing three people.

A U.S. official who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity on Friday identified the shooter as Mohammed Saeed Alshamrani. The official wasn't authorized to discuss the matter publicly. The official also said the FBI was examining social media posts and investigating whether he acted alone or was connected to any broader group.

The assault ended when a sheriff's deputy killed the attacker. Eight people were hurt in the attack, including the deputy and a second deputy who was with him.

On Saturday, the Pensacola News Journal identified one of the dead as Joshua Watson, 23,

who had reported to Pensacola two weeks earlier for flight training.

Watson's father, Benjamin, told the newspaper that his son was officer of the deck when the shooting started and he was shot at least five times.

"Heavily wounded, he made his way out to flag down first responders and gave an accurate description of the shooter," Benjamin Watson said. "He died serving his country."

All of the shooting took place in one classroom and the shooter used a handgun, authorities said. Weapons are not allowed on the base, which base commander Capt. Tim Kinsella said would remain closed until further notice.

Florida U.S. Sen. Rick Scott issued a scathing statement calling the shooting — the second on a U.S. Naval base this week — an act of terrorism

"whether this individual was motivated by radical Islam or was simply mentally unstable."

During a news conference Friday night, the FBI declined to release the shooter's identity and wouldn't comment on his possible motivations.

"There are many reports circulating, but the FBI deals only in facts," said Rachel L. Rojas, the FBI's special agent in charge of the Jacksonville Field Office.

Earlier Friday, two U.S. officials identified the student as a second lieutenant in the Saudi Air Force and said authorities were investigating whether the attack was terrorism-related. They spoke on condition of anonymity to disclose information that had not yet been made public.

## Motive sought for Pearl Harbor shooting by submariner

Staff and wire reports

A Navy sailor's attack on employees at Pearl Harbor Navy Shipyard on Wednesday unfolded in about 23 seconds. When police arrived, the gunman was already dead, officials said Friday.

Gabriel Romero, 22, fatally shot two people and wounded a third with his service rifle before killing himself with his service handgun, officials said.

Military officials said Friday at a news conference that they had not found a motive yet for the shooting but that there's no evidence of domestic terrorism. They said the isolated attack, witnessed by shipyard employees in an area with thousands of workers, unfolded in about

23 seconds.

Romero was armed for his job standing watch and providing security for the fast attack submarine USS Columbia, which is at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam for routine maintenance, officials said.

Romero was a native of Texas who enlisted in December 2017. He was trained at the Navy Submarine School in Groton, Conn., and reported to the USS Columbia in June 2018, the Navy said. He served as a machinist's mate auxiliary fireman on the submarine.

A military official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss personnel matters, said Friday that Romero faced nonjudicial punishment, an ad-

ministrative process for minor misconduct.

Retired Army Col. Gregory Gross, a former military judge, said that just because Romero faced nonjudicial punishment doesn't automatically mean he should have been taken off watch duty.

"It could have been something as simple as you were late for work," said Gross, who presided over part of the court-martial for the 2009 shooting at Fort Hood in Texas.

But if the misconduct were something like assault, then it would have been easy to take Romero off watch duty and take away his weapons, Gross said.

"All it takes is for the commander to say, 'You're not get-

ting a weapon,' and he would be taken off that watch," he said.

It was not known if Romero knew his victims.

Killed in the shooting were Roldan Aguinaldo Agustin, 49, of Ewa Beach, and Vincent J. Kapoi Jr., 30, of Honolulu, according to the Honolulu Medical Examiner's Office.

Kapoi worked at the shipyard as a metals inspector apprentice, the Navy said in a statement.

Agustin was a shop planner, the Navy said. He served in the Navy and retired from the Army National Guard before taking a job at the shipyard, the AP reported.

A third shooting victim, a 36-year-old man, remains hospitalized in stable condition.

# Congress, White House near Space Force deal

*The Washington Post*

Congressional lawmakers and the White House are on the verge of reaching a sweeping agreement that would extend 12 weeks of paid parental leave to federal workers in exchange for making Space Force the sixth branch of the U.S. military, according to four people with knowledge of the tentative deal.

The deal is part of a defense authorization bill that is slated to pass this month. If consummated, the agreement could mark one of biggest deals President Donald Trump has cut with Congress. It would secure a massive expansion of benefits for federal workers, something Democrats have long sought, in exchange for a realignment of the U.S. military that Trump has sought to secure as part of his legacy.

Multiple people close to the negotiations stressed any final package still must be approved, and Trump has been known to change his mind even when negotiations reach a final stage.

Still, some top White House officials were already celebrating the possible addition of a new federal paid leave policy.

"As the country's largest employer, the United States Government must lead by example," Ivanka Trump, the president's daughter and one of his top advisers, said in a statement. "After 3 years of

relentless advocacy, the passage of the [defense authorization measure] will secure Paid Parental Leave for ALL federal employees. This will mark a HUGE step forward towards making paid leave a reality for all Americans. This new policy represents another incredible win for millions of hard-working American families courtesy of President Trump!"

The parental leave news was first reported by the Wall Street Journal. The people spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about the delicate negotiations.

One Democratic Congressional aide, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said the parties are "nearing agreement on a final deal." The package could be voted on as early as next week, the aide said.

If it is approved, the extension of paid family leave to federal workers would represent a major benefit to more than 2 million federal civilian workers, who are only eligible for unpaid leave under federal law.

It would mark a reversal of sorts for the White House, which has sought to strip pay and benefits from federal workers since Trump took office in 2017. Instead, it would mark one of the biggest extensions of a new work benefit for the federal workforce in recent history.

Space Force, a new branch of service, would largely be carved out of the Air

Force, but also remain part of the Air Force Department, in similar fashion to how the Marine Corps is part of the Navy Department.

The news comes after months of negotiations between House Democrats and the White House over the defense package.

Trump has become increasingly fixated on Space Force as his administration faces the House impeachment inquiry, according to one senior administration official.

The Pentagon has already reestablished a Space Command that will be headed by a four-star general.

But the Space Force, if approved, would stand up an organization to train and equip specialized forces whose mission would be to accelerate the country's response to militarization of space.

The force would be tasked with things like surveillance and protecting U.S. satellites from foreign attacks.

"It's really down to two issues: Space Force, which the president wants and which my caucus is concerned about, and paid family leave," House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith, D-Calif., told Bloomberg News in an interview last month, when asked about the spending negotiations. Smith added, "The White House has made clear they won't sign a bill unless it has the Space Force in it."

## US opens new peace talks with Taliban

*Associated Press*

KABUL, Afghanistan — U.S. peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad held on Saturday the first official talks with Afghanistan's Taliban since President Donald Trump declared a near-certain peace deal with the insurgents dead in September.

The talks will initially focus on getting a Taliban promise to reduce violence, with a permanent cease-fire being the eventual goal, said a U.S. statement. Khalilzad is also trying to lay the groundwork for negotiations between Afghans on both sides of the protracted conflict.

The meetings being held in the Middle Eastern State of Qatar, where the Taliban maintain a political office, follow

several days of talks in Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, where Khalilzad met with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani.

The Taliban have so far refused direct talks with Ghani calling him a U.S. puppet.

Ghani leads the Afghan government with Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah in a power-sharing agreement brokered by the United States after the presidential elections in 2014 were so deeply mired in corruption that a clear winner could not be determined.

To head off a conflict, Washington stepped in and forced the two leading candidates — Ghani and Abdullah — to share power in a so-called Unity Government that has been largely paralyzed because of the re-

lentless bickering between the two leaders.

The Afghan government is now embroiled in a fresh elections standoff. Presidential polls on Sept. 28 again ended in accusations of misconduct, with no results yet announced.

Repeat leading contender Abdullah has challenged the recounting of several hundred thousand ballots, accusing his opponent Ghani of trying to manipulate the tally.

Meanwhile, Khalilzad's return to his peace mission followed Trump's surprise Thanksgiving Day visit to Afghanistan in which he said talks with the Taliban were back on.

While Khalilzad is talking to the Taliban about reducing violence, the U.S. military in its

daily report said overnight on Saturday U.S. airstrikes killed 37 Taliban and operations by the Afghan National Security Forces killed another 22 of the militants.

The insurgents have continued to carry out near daily strikes against military outposts throughout the country.

They now hold sway over nearly half of Afghanistan.

Trump has expressed frustration with America's longest war repeatedly saying he wants to bring the estimated 12,000 U.S. soldiers home and calling on Afghanistan's own police and military to step up. The Afghan government has also been criticized for its relentless corruption.



# Pelosi: Impeachment ties Ukraine, Russia

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Democrats are bringing the impeachment focus back to Russia as they draft formal charges against President Donald Trump.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi is connecting the dots — “all roads lead to Putin,” she says — and making the argument that Trump’s pressure campaign on Ukraine was not an isolated incident but part of a troubling bond with the Russian president reaching back to special counsel Robert Mueller’s findings on the 2016 election.

“This has been going on for 2½ years,” Pelosi said Friday.

“This isn’t about Ukraine,” she explained a day earlier. “It’s about Russia. Who benefited by our withholding of that military assistance? Russia.”

The framing is taking on greater urgency and importance, both as a practical matter and a political one, as Democrats move seriously into writing the articles of impeachment.

It’s an attempt to explain why Americans should care that Trump pushed Ukraine to investigate rival Joe Biden while withholding \$400 million in military aid that Congress had approved for the struggling Eastern European ally fighting a border war with Russia.

“Sometimes people say, ‘Well I don’t know about Ukraine. I don’t know that much about Ukraine,’” Pelosi said Thursday after announcing the decision to draft formal charges. “Well, our adversary in this is Russia. All roads lead to Putin. Understand that.”

At the same time, tracing the arc of Trump’s behavior from the 2016 campaign to the present stitches it all together. And that helps the speaker balance her left-flank liberals, who want more charges brought against Trump, including from Mueller’s report, and centrist Democrats who prefer to keep the argument more narrowly focused on Ukraine.

Pelosi and her team are trying to convey a message that impeachment is indeed about

Ukraine — Trump’s asking-for-a-favor phone call that sparked the probe — but also about a pattern of behavior that could stoke renewed concern about his attitude toward Russia ahead of the 2020 election.

With articles of impeachment coming in a matter of days and votes in the House expected by Christmas, Trump’s team is hardening its argument that the president did nothing wrong. They say voters will stick with him at the Democrats’ expense next November.

Late Friday, White House Counsel Pat Cipollone informed the Judiciary Committee that the administration would not be participating in upcoming hearings, decrying the proceedings as “completely baseless.”

Democratic lawmakers and aides are working behind closed doors over the weekend as the articles are being drafted and Judiciary Committee members are preparing for hearings and votes expected next week.

## Families seek to halt lease of problem homes

BY ROSE L. THAYER

*Stars and Stripes*

AUSTIN, Texas — Three military families — one after another — moved into the same home at Randolph Air Force Base only to be forced out by the same sewage problems.

Air Force Lt. Col. Carmen and Mary Beth Pisano and their three daughters, who were the most recent family to move into the house, spent a year battling unexplained illnesses and countless work orders for stagnant raw sewage below the house, ongoing leaks and yellow water and walls so soft

the pressure of a thumb left an indentation.

An injunction filed by the Pisanos and eight other military families in federal court Thursday seeks a court order to stop Hunt Military Communities, the private company behind the base’s housing, from continuing to lease homes with unresolved and unsafe maintenance problems.

A representative for Hunt said the company does not comment on pending litigation.

The injunction, filed in U.S. District Court for the Western District of Texas, San Antonio

Division, is part of a multifamily lawsuit filed in October against Hunt for mold- and pest-infested housing at Randolph Air Force Base, which is part of Joint Base San Antonio, and Laughlin Air Force Base near Del Rio in west Texas.

Originally filed on behalf of eight families, the lawsuit expanded last month to include the Pisanos.

The Pisanos were given 24 hours to accept the house, sight unseen, according to the documents. When they arrived on base in November 2018, a neighbor warned them of prior ten-

ants’ experiences.

After 11 months of continuous work order requests, a contractor hired to clean the home’s air ducts found 8 inches of standing water and raw sewage in the crawlspace under the home. The family immediately moved out.

Thursday’s filing asks the court to order Hunt not to lease houses at Randolph and Laughlin that were vacated as of Oct. 29 until the houses are inspected and certified as safe for human habitation by a third-party inspector appointed by the court.

## Fayetteville soldier found guilty of marriage fraud

*The Fayetteville (N.C.) Observer*

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C. — A soldier was convicted in federal court of conspiring to commit marriage fraud and making a false statement in an immigration matter, a U.S. attorney said.

Edward Kumi Anguah, a sergeant who lives in Fayetteville, was found guilty after a two-day trial before Chief United States District Judge Terrence W. Boyle, according to a statement released Thursday by U.S. Attorney Robert J. Higdon Jr. Anguah faces a maximum

sentence of 10 years in prison, the statement said.

Evidence during the trial showed that Anguah conspired with foreign nationals to engage in fraudulent marriages with soldiers, according to the statement. By marrying soldiers, the foreign nationals were seeking

legal status in the United States to which they were not entitled, it said.

Anguah also filed a false statement with United States Citizenship and Immigration Services on behalf of one of the foreign nationals, the statement said.

# 25 dead as gunmen attack Iraqi protesters

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Iraqi officials said Saturday the casualty toll had risen to 25 dead and 130 wounded after a bloody night of attacks by unknown gunmen that targeted anti-government demonstrators in the capital.

Influential Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, the head of parliament's Sairoon bloc, said a drone had targeted his home in the holy city of Najaf on Saturday, according to statements from the political party.

The health and security officials spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

The attack Friday was among the deadliest since Oct. 1, when thousands of Iraqis took to the

streets calling for sweeping political reforms and the end of Iran's influence in Iraqi affairs. Security forces regularly use live rounds and tear gas to disperse the demonstrations, leading to heavy casualties.

The gunfire continued until the early hours of Saturday. The assailants first unleashed the deadly assault on Baghdad's Khilani Square and Sinak Bridge, driving through the areas that are the epicenter of the popular uprising. Protesters said the electricity in the square was cut, creating chaos as they ran from the bullets and took cover in nearby mosques and streets.

Three among the dead were policemen and the rest were

protesters, the officials said.

The attack included the burning of a car park that demonstrators had converted into a base for their sit-in while surrounding buildings in the square were pockmarked with bullet holes. On Saturday, protesters raised a bloodied white flag as they sought to return to the scene.

One was seen collecting the spent cartridges, and he held out at least a dozen.

Anti-government activists have sought to blame supporters of Iran-backed Iraqi militias, which have staged similar attacks against protester sit-ins in the capital and the country's southern cities.

A string of mysterious knife

attacks against anti-government protesters also occurred on Thursday in the square, after supporters of the Iran-backed militias attempted their own rival demonstration before withdrawing.

Friday's deadly attacks came hours after Washington slapped sanctions on the head of Asaib al-Haq, a powerful Iran-backed militia accused of being behind deadly sniping attacks on protesters. The U.S. Treasury sanctioned leader Qais al-Khazali, his brother Laith al-Khazali, who is a commander in the group, and Husain Falih Aziz al-Lami.

Iraqi security forces were deployed to streets leading to the square by the early morning.

## Iran frees US scholar in prisoner exchange

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran and the U.S. conducted a prisoner exchange Saturday that saw a detained Princeton scholar released for an Iranian scientist held by America, marking a rare diplomatic breakthrough between Tehran and Washington after months of tensions.

In a trade conducted in Zurich, Switzerland, Iranian officials handed over Chinese-American graduate student Xiyue Wang, detained in Tehran since 2016, for scientist Massoud Soleimani, who had faced a federal trial in Georgia.

While the exchange represents a rare win for both countries, it comes as Iran still faces crushing American sanctions and the aftermath of nationwide protests that reportedly saw over 200 people killed. Meanwhile, Western detainees from the U.S. and elsewhere remain held by Tehran. They are likely to be used as bargaining chips for future negotiations amid Iran's unraveling nuclear deal with world powers.

Wang's release had been rumored over recent days, with one lawyer involved in his case tweeting out a Bible verse about an

angel freeing the apostle Peter just hours before Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif broke the news in his own tweet.

"Glad that Professor Massoud Soleimani and Mr. Xiyue Wang will be joining their families shortly," Zarif wrote. "Many thanks to all engaged, particularly the Swiss government."

President Donald Trump shortly after acknowledged Wang was free in a statement from the White House, saying the Princeton scholar would be "returning to the United States."

## Trump orders toilet rule review, says people flush 10 times

Bloomberg

WASHINGTON — Donald Trump's latest target for deregulation is Americans' toilets.

The president on Friday said he ordered a federal review of water efficiency standards in bathroom fixtures and complained that "people are flushing toilets 10 times, 15 times as opposed to once" in homes with low-flow appliances.

He said other bathroom fixtures have slowed water to a trickle.

"You can't wash your hands practically, there's so little water comes out of the faucet, and the end result is you leave the fau-

cet on and it takes you much longer to wash your hands, you end up using the same amount of water," Trump said at an event with small-business owners at the White House.

The president said it was "common sense" to review standards he said resulted in showers with water "quietly dripping out" and toilets that "end up using more water" because of repeat flushing.

Trump has championed rolling back regulations since taking office in 2017, with a focus on environmental rules imposed or proposed during the Obama administration. The president routinely portrays himself as a champion of the environment,

while his critics say he's weakened regulations intended to fight climate change, conserve resources and promote clean air and water.

While the president said the Environmental Protection Agency was looking at the standards "at my suggestion," a review of the WaterSense program was mandated under 2018 legislation passed by Congress that said the agency should look at any regulations adopted before 2012. That means the government is forced to revisit specifications for tank-type toilets, lavatory faucets and faucet accessories, showerheads, flushing urinals, and weather-based irrigation controllers.



# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Zoo breeds a rare silverspot butterfly

**OR** PORTLAND — Conservationists have successfully bred the extremely rare Oregon silverspot butterfly in captivity, a potential breakthrough for saving a species that once was found in coastal regions from California to British Columbia but is now reduced to five isolated populations, the Oregon Zoo said.

The captive breeding resulted in 269 silverspot caterpillars that will be released into the wild once they transform into butterflies.

"This is a really exciting breakthrough," Tia Perry, a keeper in the butterfly conservation lab, said.

## Hundreds of bison to be culled this winter

**MT** BOZEMAN — National park officials in Wyoming announced plans to selectively slaughter between 600 and 900 Yellowstone bison this winter to help manage population numbers and monitor annual tribal hunts.

The Bozeman Daily Chronicle reported that Yellowstone National Park officials expect most of the animals to be taken by hunters or shipped to slaughter while some would stay alive sitting in corrals or under park quarantine.

State, federal and tribal agencies managing bison said the winter plan was finalized under the Interagency Bison Management Plan a day after a judge rejected an attempt to block bison hunts this year.

## 19 people rescued from snowed-in cabin

**MI** SPALDING TOWNSHIP — Authorities

in Michigan's Upper Peninsula rescued 19 members of a family who became marooned in a snowed-in cabin after blizzard conditions swept the area.

The Menominee County Road Commission said a joint rescue team rescued 10 children and nine adults from the cabin in Menominee County's Spalding Township using a Polaris Ranger.

The cabin is located about six miles off the main road along an unplowed road that was buried under a two-foot snowfall, WLUC-TV reported.

Road Commission Assistant Engineer Darrell Cass said a plow truck sent to the site got stuck before a grader freed it. That vehicle then got within a quarter-mile of the cabin and Emergency Medical Services took over and got the family out safely.

## Cemetery workers stole, sold memorials

**GA** VILLA RICA — Two Georgia cemetery employees were charged with stealing dozens of bronze memorial markers and selling them at a recycling center for about \$300,000.

The Carroll County Sheriff's Office responded to complaints that markers were disappearing from Meadowbrook Memory Gardens in Villa Rica, according to a statement released by the agency. Cemetery officials told deputies they thought two employees were responsible for stealing more than 70 memorials valued at about \$4,500 each.

Deputies arrested Brent Thomas McAdams and Anna Millwood after conducting a search at their home in Haralson County and discovering stolen items and drugs inside, the statement said. The two workers are charged with felo-

ny theft by taking, the sheriff's office confirmed.

## Truck lugs snowmobiles, gets stuck in snow

**MT** BILLINGS — Wyoming highway authorities rescued a semi-truck driver and a passenger stuck on a snowy mountain road closed for the season.

The Billings Gazette reported that the truck was hauling snowmobiles on a Wyoming state highway before turning east on Highway 212 toward Red Lodge in Montana.

Authorities said the driver followed GPS directions and drove past warning signs that indicated the road was closed before the truck got stuck.

## Bail hearing set for man tried 6 times on murder

**MS** JACKSON — A bail hearing has been set for a Mississippi man who has been tried six times for murder.

Montgomery County Circuit Judge Joseph Loper scheduled the hearing for Dec. 16 in Walthall.

The U.S. Supreme Court overturned Curtis Flowers' conviction in June, finding racially biased jury selection. Prosecutors said Flowers killed four people in a Winona furniture store in 1996. He was sentenced to death in 2010's sixth trial.

Lawyer Rob McDuff argues Mississippi law requires bail after two capital murder mistrials. Flowers' fourth and fifth trials ended in mistrials.

He urges the judge to reject a seventh trial and quash charges, citing prosecutorial misconduct and arguing a limit to trials.

## 'Unicorn puppy' will stay with rescue mission

**MO** CAPE GIRARDEAU — A dog who was dubbed the unicorn puppy because of a tail-like growth between his eyes will remain with the founder of a Missouri rescue group, despite more than 300 offers to adopt him.

The beagle-mix puppy, named Narwhal the Little Magical Furry Unicorn, was rescued in November by Mac's Mission in southeast Missouri. He drew international attention when his picture hit social media, prompting all the adoption offers but also some negative attention, including death threats, said Rochelle Steffen, founder of the Mac's Mission in Jackson.

Those two factors — plus the dog's winning personality — convinced Steffen to reverse an earlier decision to find a new home for Narwhal, she told The Southeast Missourian.

## Cyclist trying to hitch ride, killed by truck

**FL** TAMARAC — Authorities in South Florida said a teenager was run over and killed while trying to have a truck pull him on his bicycle.

A statement by the Broward Sheriff's Office said Lasvillie Sean Edwards Jr. died at an intersection in Tamarac a day before his 16th birthday.

Deputies said Edwards was riding his bike on a busy street when he quickly changed lanes and grabbed onto a handle mounted on the passenger side of a Freightliner truck as if to hitch a ride. When the truck began to make a right turn, Edwards lost control and rolled under the truck.

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STARS AND STRIPES®

# Oregon shatters Utah's playoff dreams

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — The one constant all season for Utah was the ability to control the trenches against any opponent.

With a possible playoff berth and first Pac-12 title in school history on the line, the Utes more than met their match against Oregon.

CJ Verdell ran for 208 yards and broke open the game with two long touchdown runs in the fourth quarter, and No. 13 Oregon spoiled No. 5 Utah's playoff hopes with a 37-15 victory in the Pac-12 championship game Friday night.

"Unfortunately we came up short tonight," coach Kyle Whittingham said. "Disappointing thing is we lost in the one area we've been undefeated this year: line of scrimmage. We didn't win the line of scrimmage for the first time all season, which is, like I say, disappointing. Surprising, really."

The Utes (11-2, No. 5 CFP) came into the game hoping to make a case for one of the four playoff spots with a conference title but instead got over-

matched by Oregon (11-2, No. 13 CFP) and lost their second straight Pac-12 championship game.

Utah held 11 of 12 opponents to less than 100 yards rushing and led the nation by allowing 56.3 yards rushing per game, prompting plenty of pregame talk about how the Utes' physical dominance could be the determining factor.

The Ducks took that personally and responded.

"Definitely put a little chip on our shoulders," Verdell said. "We try not to focus on the outside noise too much. Hearing they're the most physical team in the Pac-12 made us want to come out here and work even harder."

The Utes fell into a 20-0 hole in the first half and then gave up a 70-yard TD run to Verdell after cutting the deficit to 23-15, paving the way for the winner of the Big 12 title game between Oklahoma and Baylor to get into the playoff as long as No. 1 LSU beats No. 4 Georgia for the SEC championship.

"We didn't really think far ahead but it's obvious what was at stake, more than just the

Rose Bowl," left tackle Darrin Paulo said. "It's disappointing. I can't really wrap my head around it right now. We knew that Oregon was a good team and we knew that we can't overlook them so we didn't look beyond that but we knew, everyone knew, what was at stake besides the Rose Bowl."

The Utes got back into the game with TD passes from Tyler Huntley to Zack Moss and Samson Nacua in the third quarter to cut the deficit to 23-15.

Utah then drove into Oregon territory before Huntley was sacked by Keyvon Thibodeaux on second down, leading to a punt on fourth-and-4 from the 40.

Verdell struck with his big run five plays later and added a 31-yard score later in the fourth against the nation's top-ranked rushing defense to put the game out of reach.

That gave quarterback Justin Herbert and the rest of the senior class a Rose Bowl berth after starting their careers with a 4-8 mark in 2016.

"It's validation," coach Mario Cristobal said. "It's valida-

tion for all that they've done. I don't know if anyone here has been through a 4-8 season. I've been through one of those. It's about as horrible and miserable as it gets. It causes some people to break down, some people to quit, some people to leave. Then there's a core that just puts their foot in the ground and says, 'We're going to change things.'"

The Ducks sent the tone early when they stuffed Moss for no gain on two short-yardage attempts from the Oregon 33 on the opening drive. Oregon drove down and took the lead for good on Verdell's 3-yard run.

The Utes kept making more mistakes and the Ducks only added to the lead. After forcing a three-and-out, Oregon got a field goal on the next drive, then blocked a punt after Utah committed a false start on fourth-and-1 before Brady Breeze intercepted a pass in the end zone.

Oregon then struck on a 45-yard strike from Herbert to Johnny Johnson III and led 20-0 at the break.

## Inconsistent Eagles still in hunt for NFC East crown

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — There are several reasons why the Philadelphia Eagles have been inconsistent on offense this season.

Now isn't the time for excuses.

Despite an up-and-down offense that showed up last week only to see the defense collapse, the Eagles (5-7) still control their playoff hopes. They would win the NFC East if they win their last four games.

First, they have to snap a three-game losing streak when they host the New York Giants (2-10) on Monday night. A victory would put Philadelphia in a first-place tie with Dallas (6-7). The Cowboys already beat the Eagles and the teams meet

in Philly in Week 16.

"We're in a must-win situation. We know that," coach Doug Pederson said.

The Eagles weren't supposed to be in this position in December. They were Super Bowl contenders at the start of the season but things unraveled quickly.

Injuries turned a dynamic offense into a mediocre one. The Eagles haven't recovered from losing wide receiver DeSean Jackson. The speedster had eight catches for 154 yards and two touchdowns of 50-plus yards in Week 1. But he briefly appeared in two other games before abdominal surgery ended his regular season.

Fellow wideout Alshon Jeffery has missed three games and leading rusher Jordan

Howard hasn't played since Nov. 3.

Suddenly critics are wondering whether Carson Wentz is a franchise quarterback. They're questioning Pederson's job security less than two years after he won a Super Bowl and many are calling for assistant coaches to be fired.

"It seems almost every week it's something different," Wentz said. "We're either shooting ourselves in the foot, I'm turning the ball over, missing throws. It's the consistency. The lack of it is frustrating."

Wentz got the offense back on track in Miami last Sunday. He threw for 310 yards and three touchdowns, connecting with Jeffery nine times for 137 yards and one score.

But a defense that limited

the Patriots and Seahawks to 17 points apiece in consecutive losses surrendered 37 to the dismal Dolphins.

"We always feel if you give us 20 points we should win the game, and we certainly got more than 20," defensive coordinator Jim Schwartz said. "We didn't do our jobs in that game."

The offense certainly missed opportunities to score more points. Zach Ertz dropped two passes, one in the end zone and one at the 5. Jake Elliott missed a 49-yard field goal, snapping a streak of 20 straight. Wentz took a big loss on a sack before that miss. A false start on left tackle Jason Peters negated a converted fourth down, forcing the Eagles to settle for a field goal.



# Knicks part ways with Fizdale, Smart

Associated Press

NEW YORK — David Fizdale was the latest coach tasked with trying to turn around the New York Knicks.

He was given barely 100 games before the longtime losers decided to try someone else.

The Knicks cut ties with Fizdale and promoted assistant Mike Miller to interim head coach Friday after two straight blowout losses dropped them to 4-18.

Fizdale ran practice earlier in the day, but was then fired along with assistant Keith Smart. The Knicks made no comment on the decision to release Fizdale after he went 21-83, a .202 winning percentage.

The Knicks have lost eight straight games, with the last two by scores of 132-88 to Milwaukee on Monday night and 129-92 to Denver on Thursday night. They have the worst record in the Eastern Conference after finishing with the worst record in the NBA last season in Fizdale's first season.

The Knicks went 17-65 in 2018-19 to match the worst record in franchise history and

they are on pace to be even worse this season. New York missed out on the top stars that were available in free agency and the players they did get haven't meshed nearly well enough.

Still, team executives expected better results, saying so with an unusual press conference to express their disappointment after a loss to Cleveland on Nov. 10 dropped them to 2-8.

Team President Steve Mills and general manager Scott Perry said then they remained confident in Fizdale. But things didn't get better from there, especially once the schedule turned tougher this month.

And it led to the second straight quick exit for Fizdale as a head coach. The former Miami assistant led Memphis to the playoffs in his first season, but was fired after the Grizzlies got off to a 7-12 start in 2017-18 and he clashed with center Marc Gasol.

Heat coach Erik Spoelstra worked with Fizdale in Miami, and the two were texting Thursday about the birth of Spoelstra's second child this week — with no mention of job

security.

A day later, they texted again with Spoelstra upset about the fate of both Fizdale and Smart. Like Fizdale, Smart also is a former Heat assistant.

"It's disappointing. I'm bummed about it," Spoelstra said. "Fiz, obviously, is somebody very dear to me. I just think he's an extremely talented coach. Things just take time in this league and it's really unfortunate that he wasn't given the time to really do some work. There's a lot of rolling up your sleeves that has to be done there and you have to build a foundation and build a culture and standards."

New York will turn to its 13th coach since Jeff Van Gundy resigned in the 2001-02 season. The Knicks have been one of the worst franchises in sports since, with just a single playoff series victory and a current stretch of six straight losing seasons.

They believed a turnaround could begin last summer, when they had enough money to sign two superstars after trading All-Star Kristaps Porzingis to Dallas last summer.

But Kevin Durant and Kyrie Irving agreed to join Brooklyn in the opening hours of free agency and the Knicks had to move on to players that included Julius Randle, Bobby Portis, Taj Gibson and Marcus Morris — who largely play the same position.

Fizdale replaced Jeff Hornacek after Hornacek had also lasted only two seasons. Perry and Mills interviewed 11 candidates before choosing Fizdale, who also was in the running for other jobs.

But the Knicks struggled early last season while Porzingis was recovering from a torn ACL, then appeared to be more interested in angling for lottery position than trying to win games after dealing him before he returned. New York ended up with the third pick and RJ Barrett, who has been one of the few bright spots thus far.

But injuries and inconsistency have left Fizdale without an obvious answer as the starting point guard, and the Knicks have managed a league-low 100.5 points per game — three worse than any other team.

## Top-ranked Louisville pulls away from Pittsburgh

Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — The most impressive thing about Louisville's response to Pittsburgh's comeback attempt was how quickly and effectively the No. 1 Cardinals shut it down.

Not unlike the way they started.

Jordan Nwora scored 19 points, Malik Williams had 13 points and 11 rebounds off the bench, and Louisville used a 17-4 second-half run to pull away from Pittsburgh for a 64-46 victory Friday night.

After shooting 37% in their previous game against No. 4 Michigan, the Cardinals (9-0, 2-0 Atlantic Coast Conference) came out firing from long range. Every player had at least one three-pointer as they

went 9-for-17 from behind the arc and 13-for-26 overall in the first half. Nwora was the last to join the party but made shots from elsewhere before hitting another three as Louisville finished with 11 in all.

Nwora left the game briefly in the second half after injuring his left shoulder, part of a cold stretch for Louisville that allowed Pittsburgh (7-3, 1-1) to trim the margin to 43-38. The Cardinals answered with their big run that featured 13 straight points and Nwora's steal and breakaway dunk.

"I think it's two games in a row where we got stops, we didn't allow second shots," coach Chris Mack said. "We ran the clock on offense. We got great looks. We got layups. And

that's a killer."

**No. 4 Michigan 103, Iowa 91:** Franz Wagner led a balanced scoring effort with 18 points, and the host Wolverines overcame Luka Garza's 44 points to open Big Ten play with a victory against the Hawkeyes.

Michigan (8-1, 1-0) rebounded from its 58-43 loss to top-ranked Louisville on Tuesday night. In fact, the Wolverines exceeded their point total from Tuesday before halftime against Iowa. Garza scored 27 points in the first half, including 15 of Iowa's first 17, but it was the defensive end that prevented the Hawkeyes (6-3, 0-1) from winning this one.

Jon Teske and Xavier Simpson added 16 points each for

Michigan, which had six players with at least 12.

**No. 10 Duke 77, Virginia Tech 63:** Tre Jones scored 15 points and the visiting Blue Devils rallied after a slow start to beat the Hokies.

Vernon Carey Jr. and Wendell Moore Jr. added 12 points each for Duke (9-1, 1-0 Atlantic Coast Conference), which used runs of 12-2 just after halftime and 12-3 a short time later to take command after trailing for almost the entire first half.

P.J. Horne scored 15 points to lead Virginia Tech (6-3, 1-1), which lost its third in a row and ended its three-game home winning streak against the Blue Devils. Wabisa Bede and Tyrece Radford added 12 points each.

## NBA roundup

# Streaking Bucks win 14th straight game

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Giannis Antetokounmpo had 27 points and 11 rebounds to lead the Milwaukee Bucks to their 14th straight victory, a 119-91 rout of the Los Angeles Clippers on Friday night.

Antetokounmpo, on his 25th birthday, made 11 of 20 shots and had his 21st double-double of the season.

Antetokounmpo left the game with Milwaukee ahead by 36 with 8:56 to play. The Bucks led by as many as 41 and extended their longest winning streak since winning 16 consecutive games over two seasons in 1973.

Kawhi Leonard had 17 points and Paul George added 13 for

the Clippers.

**Lakers 136, Trail Blazers 113:** Anthony Davis scored 39 points, LeBron James added 31 and Los Angeles routed host Portland.

The game was costly for the Trail Blazers. Starting forward Rodney Hood was injured in the first quarter and the team later announced that he had torn his left Achilles tendon.

**Celtics 108, Nuggets 95:** Jayson Tatum scored 26 points, Jaylen Brown added 21 and host Boston beat Denver to remain perfect at home for the season.

Kemba Walker added 19 points. The Celtics improved to 9-0 at home. No Boston-area pro team has lost a home game since the Baltimore Orioles

beat the Red Sox at Fenway Park on Sept. 28.

**Thunder 139, Timberwolves 127 (OT):** Chris Paul scored a season-high 30 points and Oklahoma City pulled off an improbable overtime victory over visiting Minnesota.

**Nets 111, Hornets 104:** Joe Harris scored 22 points, DeAndre Jordan had 16 points and 13 rebounds, and Brooklyn continued its recent strong road play, beating Charlotte.

**Warriors 100, Bulls 98:** Glenn Robinson III scored the go-ahead basket and finished with 20 points to help visiting Golden State beat Chicago for the second time.

**Heat 112, Wizards 103:** Jimmy Butler scored 28 points and had his second triple-dou-

ble of the week, Bam Adebayo had a career-high 24 points and host Miami beat Washington.

**Spurs 105, Kings 104 (OT)** LaMarcus Aldridge had 19 points and 13 rebounds in his return from an injury and San Antonio rallied from nine points down in the final 1:50 of regulation before beating visiting Sacramento in overtime.

**Pistons 108, Pacers 101:** Blake Griffin broke a tie with a three-pointer with 41 seconds left and scored 25 points as host Detroit beat Indiana.

**Magic 93, Cavaliers 87:** Terrence Ross scored 21 points, Evan Fournier added 18 and Aaron Gordon had a big dunk in the final 20 seconds to lead Orlando past Cleveland.

## NHL roundup

# Jarry, Penguins spoil Kessel's return to Pittsburgh

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Tristan Jarry spoiled Phil Kessel's return to Pittsburgh, turning aside all 33 shots to post his second consecutive shutout as the Penguins edged the Arizona Coyotes 2-0 Friday night.

Kessel helped Pittsburgh to back-to-back Stanley Cup titles in 2016 and 2017 before being traded to the Coyotes in exchange for Alex Galchenyuk last summer. He received a rousing ovation during the first period and played 21 inspired minutes but couldn't solve Jarry.

Jarry won for the fifth time in six starts and is making a serious case to supplant Matt Murray as Pittsburgh's top goaltender.

Evgeni Malkin broke a scoreless tie 7:13 into the third period to put the Penguins in front. Brandon Tanev chipped in an empty netter with two seconds remaining as the Penguins won

their fifth straight meeting with the Coyotes.

Antti Raanta finished with 24 saves but couldn't quite match Jarry, who stole the show during Kessel's highly anticipated return.

**Canadiens 2, Rangers 1:** Nate Thompson scored with less than two minutes left in the third period and visiting Montreal beat New York for its second victory in the last 11 games.

Brendan Gallagher also scored for the Canadiens. Carey Price made 29 saves and improved to 7-2-0 in his last nine games at Madison Square Garden.

Brendan Smith scored for the Rangers. Alexandar Georgiev made 31 saves in his second straight start in place of Henrik Lundqvist, who was feeling under the weather.

The loss was the Rangers' 17th in their last 23 games against the Canadiens since the start of 2013.

When these teams met in Montreal on Nov. 23, they played an instant classic. The Canadiens led 4-0 before the Rangers stormed back to win 6-5.

**Blackhawks 2, Devils 1 (SO):** Kirby Dach scored in the fifth round of the shootout to lift visiting Chicago over New Jersey.

Chicago won its second game in two nights. Corey Crawford preserved the victory by stopping Jack Hughes on the final shootout attempt to cap a night in which he won his 250th game. He had 29 saves.

Alex DeBrincat scored in the second period for Chicago, and Jonathan Toews and Patrick Kane also connected in the shootout.

Taylor Hall scored for the Devils, who are 0-2 under interim coach Alain Nasreddine. Mackenzie Blackwood had 28 saves, but he was defenseless when Dach roofed his shootout attempt.

Nikita Gusev and Jesper Bo-

qvist scored for New Jersey in the shootout, while Kyle Palmieri and Hall were stopped in addition to Hughes.

**Oilers 2, Kings 1:** Leon Draisaitl and Alex Chiasson each had a goal and an assist as host Edmonton moved back into the top spot in the Pacific Division with a win over Los Angeles.

Mikko Koskinen made 35 saves for the Oilers (18-10-3), who improved to 8-4-2 at home.

Michael Amadio scored for the Kings (11-17-2), who have lost three straight games and 10 in a row on the road.

**Capitals 3, Ducks 2:** Jakub Vrana scored the go-ahead goal less than two minutes into the third period and visiting Washington beat Anaheim in a physical battle.

Travis Boyd and Evgeny Kuznetsov also scored for Washington. Braden Holtby had 24 saves.

Ryan Getzlaf and Adam Henrique scored for Anaheim. Ryan Miller had 33 saves.