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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Flouting warnings, N. Korea holds test

By KIM GAMEL

Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea conducted the second test in a week at a long-range rocket site, state-run media said Saturday, despite U.S. warnings that such activity threatens to close the door on nuclear talks.

The announcement occurred days after the U.S. led a U.N. Security Council meeting to express concern about the resumption of tensions with the North.

“Another crucial test was successfully conducted at the Sohae Satellite Launching Ground from 22:41 to 22:48” on Friday, the Korean Central News Agency reported, citing the Academy of Defense Science.

“The research successes being registered by us ... will be applied to further bolstering up the reliable strategic nuclear deterrent of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea,” it added, using the North’s official name.

The news agency didn’t provide more details, but the tests have raised fears that the communist state might be preparing to launch an intercontinental ballistic missile, which President Donald Trump’s adminis-

tration has signaled would cross a red line.

North Korea has given the U.S. an end-of-year deadline to offer concessions that would salvage nuclear negotiations, which have stalled after reaching a high point with a series of summits last year.

A senior diplomat also has said that it’s up to the United States to decide what “Christmas present” it wants to receive.

Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un agreed on a vague promise to “work towards the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula” during their first summit in June 2018 in Singapore.

But the two sides have been unable to bridge the wide gap over what that means.

North Korea wants the United States to offer sanctions relief and security guarantees in exchange for limited disarmament steps already taken.

Washington has insisted it will maintain economic pressure until the North abandons its nuclear weapons program.

Experts have said the first test at Sohae, which occurred on Dec. 7, was likely a rocket engine that could be used in a long-range missile.

The North also has conducted 13 short-range missile tests since May as tensions

rise with the breakdown of diplomatic efforts following a second summit between Trump and leader Kim Jong Un in February in Vietnam.

Trump has dismissed most of those because the North stopped short of lifting its self-imposed moratorium on nuclear and long-range missile tests. However, the president has shown increasing frustration as the activity continued.

On Wednesday, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations called the missile tests “deeply counterproductive.”

“These actions also risk closing the door on this opportunity to find a better way for the future,” she said, while stressing that the Trump administration is “prepared to be flexible” and take concrete, parallel steps toward an agreement.

North Korea was not appeased by the signal of flexibility, calling Craft’s comments and a “hostile provocation.”

Friday’s test at Sohae came as the North’s ruling Workers’ Party is preparing to hold a plenary session of its central committee, which could signal plans for Kim Jong Un to announce a major policy shift in his traditional New Year’s Eve address.

Guard troops at border eligible for GI Bill benefits

By STEVE BEYNON

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon has approved GI Bill eligibility for National Guard troops stationed at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Defense Secretary Mark Esper wrote in a memo Thursday that National Guard troops performing active service responding to a national emergency declaration by the president can accrue GI Bill benefits, unlike most other domestic service, which does not entitle guard members to federal benefits.

Until now, guard troops deployed to the southern border weren’t accruing GI Bill benefits and there has been confusion on the ground and in Washington about whether responding to domestic emergencies entitles troops to those benefits.

Under the new guidance, troops will accrue GI Bill benefits for time deployed on the border since President Donald Trump’s emergency declaration on Feb. 15. The longer they are on active duty, the more valuable their GI Bill benefits become.

Trump declared a national emergency on the southern border on Feb. 15 to allocate money for his proposed border wall and expand other security efforts to combat illegal immigration.

Thousands of National Guard troops have been mobilized for the southern border mission, the bulk of them from the Texas National Guard, according to military records.

Some troops said they have spent months and even up to a year on the border.

In all cases, guard members are leaving their civilian employers for a sizable

amount of time — sometimes taking a pay cut to serve.

Esper approved up to 5,500 service members to continue operations along the U.S.-Mexico border in fiscal year 2020, which started Sept. 30.

More than 2,000 of the troops at the border are National Guard members.

Esper said the secretaries of the Army and Air Force will ensure guard troops serving on the border mission will have a record proving their eligibility for federal benefits.

To qualify for post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, troops must complete 90 days of active duty. Typical National Guard service is not considered active duty, with most guard members banking on their deployments overseas to cover a lot of the living costs while going to school.

Mattis defends Afghan rebuilding efforts

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Former defense secretary Jim Mattis defended American efforts to rebuild Afghanistan as part of the 18-year-old U.S. war there, saying Friday that “we had to try to do something in nation-building, as much as some people condemn it, and we probably weren’t that good at it.”

Mattis described the progress that has been made in Afghanistan since the U.S. military invaded after the September 2001 terrorist attacks. Speaking to journalists at The Washington Post, he cited an increase in the number of Afghan women who are educated, the development of Afghan diplomats and the inoculation of

civilians against disease.

Mattis, who oversaw the war as the four-star commander of U.S. Central Command from 2010 to 2013, said that violence in Afghanistan is “so heart-breaking that it can blind you to the progress,” and he acknowledged that the United States made a strategic mistake by not paying enough attention to the country as the administration of George W. Bush launched the war in Iraq in 2003.

“That we didn’t do things right, I mean, I’m an example of it,” Mattis said, recalling that as a one-star general, he was pulled out of Afghanistan in the spring of 2002, promoted and told to prepare for war in Iraq.

“I was dumbfounded,” he

said. “But we took our eye off of there.”

The comments came in response to questions about investigative reporting by The Washington Post that outlines mistakes made in the war. The series, called “The Afghanistan Papers,” includes previously unpublished interviews and memos in which senior officials privately expressed misgivings about the campaign, even as they publicly touted its progress.

As a general, Mattis was among those who frequently spoke about the progress he saw in Afghanistan.

In 2010, Mattis testified before Congress that the military component of the U.S. strategy in Afghanistan was sound and

that by “steadfastly executing our strategy we will win in Afghanistan.”

In March 2013, he testified that it was “obviously a combination of progress and violence” on the ground, but that the Afghan forces were “proving themselves capable.”

“I think we may have to look at how we’re measuring them since they’re measuring themselves against the enemy and they’re proving themselves there,” Mattis said.

By 2015, the United States was dispatching its own Special Operations troops to stave off security disasters in the south and had stopped a planned withdrawal as scores of Afghan soldiers were killed each month.

Insider attack on Afghan militiamen leaves 9 dead

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — At least one member of an Afghan militia opened fire on his fellow militiamen early Saturday, killing nine, in what the country’s interior ministry called an insider attack, an Afghan official said.

The Taliban, however, claimed the attack was actually a coordinated insurgent assault on the checkpoint where the shooting took place, killing over two dozen militiamen, according to Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid.

There was no immediate explanation for the discrepancy, but the Taliban often exaggerate their claims.

Details were sketchy and investigators were still looking into the attack in central Ghazni province’s Karabagh district, said Defense Ministry spokesman Fawad Aman. The number of attackers was also not immediately clear.

Afghan militias operate in

remote regions and are under the command of the country’s National Security Forces, which suffers near daily Taliban attacks.

The Taliban now control or hold sway over half the country.

Insider attacks have been steady throughout the 18-year conflict, with U.S. and NATO troops most often targeted. But when Afghan security forces are targeted, the casualty rate is often much higher.

In July, two U.S. service members were killed by an Afghan soldier in the southern Kandahar province. The shooter was wounded and arrested. In September, three U.S. military personnel were wounded when a member of the Afghan Civil Order Police fired on a military convoy, also in Kandahar.

Last Saturday, U.S. peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad began several days of meetings with Taliban representatives in Qatar, where the insurgents maintain a political office.

Minority WWI troops to be considered for MOH

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon would review the records of minority troops who served in World War I to determine whether they deserve the Medal of Honor under legislation approved by the House last week.

A provision in the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act calls on the service secretaries to reexamine the records of African American, Asian American, Hispanic American, Jewish American and Native American veterans of the war. The NDAA, which directs defense policy and spending plans, has support from Senate leadership and President Donald Trump so passage is expected.

The review would look at minority veterans who were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the Navy Cross, or the Croix de Guerre with Palm awarded by the French government, for actions that

occurred between April 6, 1917, and Nov. 11, 1918. The review would also determine whether the Defense Department has records for minority veterans who had been recommended for a Medal of Honor during that time period.

The Valor Medals Review Task Force, a project by the World War I Centennial Commission and the George S. Robb Centre for the Study of the Great War at Park University in Parkville, Mo., has identified World War I service records that the service secretaries can use to determine whether they should be reviewed further to be considered for the Medal of Honor, according to the NDAA conference report.

The review must be finished within five years of the NDAA becoming law, and the secretaries must submit a recommendation to the president for the veterans that they believe should be considered for the Medal of Honor.

Justices to rule on Trump's financial records

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court said Friday it will hear President Donald Trump's pleas to keep his tax, bank and financial records private, a major confrontation between the president and Congress that also could affect the 2020 presidential campaign.

Arguments will take place in late March, and the justices are poised to issue decisions in June as Trump is campaigning for a second term. Rulings against the president could result in the quick release of personal financial information that Trump has sought strenuously to keep private. The court also will decide whether the Manhat-

tan district attorney can obtain eight years of Trump's tax returns as part of an ongoing criminal investigation.

The subpoenas are separate from the ongoing impeachment proceedings against Trump, headed for a vote in the full House this week. Indeed, it's almost certain the court won't hear the cases until after a Senate trial over whether to remove Trump has ended.

Trump sued to prevent banks and accounting firms from complying with subpoenas for his records from three committees of the House of Representatives and Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr.

In three separate cases, he has so far lost at every step, but the records have not been turned over pending a final court ruling. Now it will be up to a court that includes two Trump appointees, Justices Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh, to decide in a case with significant implications regarding a president's power to refuse a formal request from Congress.

Trump attorney Jay Sekulow released a statement saying: "We are pleased that the Supreme Court granted review of the President's three pending cases. These cases raise significant constitutional issues. We look forward to presenting our written and oral arguments."

Former Ky. governor's pardons draw scrutiny

Associated Press

FRANKFORT, Ky. — Outrage over a spree of pardons by former Kentucky Gov. Matt Bevin spread to the state capitol Friday as lawmakers called on federal and state prosecutors to investigate the orders, including one for a convicted killer whose family raised campaign money for the governor.

Bevin, who lost to Democrat Andy Beshear last month in a close race, has issued more than 400 pardons since the Nov. 5 election, according to the Kentucky Secretary of State's office.

The fallout from Bevin's pardon-grant-

ing binge widened as the Republican Senate president called for a federal investigation and Democratic lawmakers called on Attorney General-elect Daniel Cameron to appoint a special prosecutor or a bipartisan team to investigate some of the ex-governor's pardons. Cameron takes office next week.

Senate President Robert Stivers condemned Bevin's actions as "a travesty and perversion of justice" and called on the U.S. attorney in Kentucky to investigate.

"Gov. Bevin's pardons show what is a shocking lack of judgment and potentially an abuse of our system of justice," Senate Minority Floor Leader Morgan McGarvey

told reporters.

Bevin's pardons also drew a rebuke Friday from the state's most powerful Republican, U.S. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell.

"Honestly, I don't approve," McConnell told reporters Friday at the Kentucky Capitol. "It seems to me it was completely inappropriate."

Cameron, the incoming Republican state attorney general, did not address the pardons or a potential investigation in a written statement Friday but said he believes "the pardon power should be used sparingly and only after great deliberation with due regard to public safety."

Calif. mounts raids on illegal marijuana shops in LA

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — California regulators mounted dozens of raids against illegal marijuana retailers in Los Angeles last week, the largest crackdown to date against the city's thriving black market, officials announced Friday.

The state has been under pressure from California's legal industry to do more to stop the underground pot economy, which in Los Angeles and other cities often operates in plain sight. According to some estimates, roughly 75% of sales in the state remain under the table, snatching profits from legal storefronts.

Investigators from the state Bureau of Cannabis Control and the Department of Consumer Affairs' Cannabis Enforcement Unit served search warrants at 24 unlicensed shops from Tuesday through

Thursday. They seized \$8.8 million in cannabis products, confiscated nearly 10,000 illegal vape pens and \$129,000 in cash, the bureau said.

The crackdown was praised by the United Cannabis Business Association, a Los Angeles-based industry group that has been urging the state to do more to shut down rogue operators.

"For a long time we have been playing a game of whack-a-mole, targeting and shutting down a small handful of illegal shops at a time, only to have them reopen days later in the same location or down the street," said Jerred Kiloh, who heads the group.

He called the raids "the type of systematic action required" to combat the vast illegal market. "Every day, illegal operators are distributing products that are not tested, taxed or tracked by the state, put-

ting not only the ongoing vitality of the legal industry at risk but also the health and well-being of Californians," Kiloh said in a statement.

California kicked off broad legal sales on Jan. 1, 2018. But the illegal market has continued a bustling business, in part because consumers can avoid steep tax rates by buying in unlicensed dispensaries.

But there's a trade-off for saving a buck. Illegal products have not met strict state testing standards and could be tainted by mold, pesticides, heavy metals — even human waste.

The state's top cannabis regulator, Lori Ajax, signaled that more was to come. "We look forward to working with local jurisdictions and law enforcement as we continue to shut down unlicensed operators," she said.

75th anniversary of famous WWII battle is marked

By KARIN ZEITVOGEL
Stars and Stripes

BASTOGNE, Belgium — American and Belgian flags flew side-by-side Saturday in commemoration of U.S. soldiers who fought 75 years ago in the six-week Battle of the Bulge, a victory that thwarted the last major German offensive on the Western Front during World War II.

Several dozen veterans who fought in the campaign were in Belgium for the anniversary event, along with a new generation of service members keeping alive the memory of the role Americans played in ending Nazi tyranny.

On a road leading into the center of Bastogne from the barracks that housed Allied forces during the war, Jack Lazebnik and Blake Ritchey, both captains in the 101st Airborne Division, which fought to defend Bastogne, were besieged by photo seekers that included service members from Belgium and Germany.

"I'm from the 326th Engineer Battalion and we had a crucial role in holding a small part of

the perimeter in the southwest of Bastogne," Ritchey said.

"He, as an infantryman," he said, pointing to Lazebnik, "they were on the eastern and northern sides. For us to be able to go to some of those spots has been incredible. The significance of the battle 75 years ago isn't lost on us."

A bipartisan U.S. congressional delegation and other dignitaries laid wreaths at monuments to Gen. George Patton, who led the 3rd Army as it broke through German lines around Bastogne, and Brig. Gen. Anthony McAuliffe, commander of U.S. forces in the city, who famously told the Germans "Nuts!" when they asked him to surrender.

The battle began north of Bastogne on Dec. 16, 1944, during a bitterly cold winter, and lasted until Jan. 25, 1945.

Between 63,222 and 98,000 Germans were killed, missing, wounded or captured during the campaign, while around 19,000 Americans were killed. It was the largest and bloodiest single battle fought by the United States in WWII.

Pensacola weighs options in wake of cyberattack

Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — A Florida city confirmed Friday that hackers seeking to extort money were responsible for crippling its computer systems earlier in the week but officials have yet to decide whether they will pay a reported \$1 million ransom.

If they do opt to fork over the money, they may have to dip into Pensacola city coffers; the city of about 52,000 in Florida's Panhandle — whose annual budget is roughly \$245 million — is not insured for such an attack.

Obtaining it in the future is "something that our risk manager will certainly be looking into," said city spokeswoman Kaycee Lagarde.

Lagarde confirmed that ransomware was behind the attack that brought down the city's computer network last weekend, less than a day after a Saudi aviation student killed three U.S. sailors and wounded eight other people at a nearby naval air station.

The FBI has said the attacks were not connected.

The cybersecurity blog BleepingComputer reported earlier this week that a group behind a ransomware strain known as Maze claimed responsibility for the attack and was demanding \$1 million from the city.

In emails exchanged with the website, the Maze hackers claimed they had stolen docu-

ments from the city but didn't say whether they had given Pensacola officials a deadline to pay for them or if they had threatened to release the documents if they didn't pay.

City officials declined to discuss who might have been responsible or any ransom amount demanded against the city. The city said it has restored some services, including email, phone services and utility online bill payments.

According to a new report released by the cybersecurity firm Emsisoft, more than 948 U.S. government agencies, educational institutions and health care providers were hit in an unprecedented barrage at a potential cost of more than \$7.5 billion.

New Jersey's largest hospital system and the city of New Orleans are among the most recent U.S. ransomware victims.

Hackensack Meridian Health, which operates 17 hospitals and other facilities, said Friday that it paid an undisclosed amount to regain control over systems disrupted a week ago — and that it had insurance for such emergencies.

In New Orleans, investigators discovered ransomware as they looked into a suspected cyberattack that led to a shutdown of city computers on Friday. City officials said they had not received a ransom demand, however, and it was initially unclear whether the attack did any damage to the city's system.

Santa, soldiers bring joy to beleaguered village in Alaska

Associated Press

NAPAKIAK, Alaska — A school employee wearing a traditional pink Alaska Native smock called a kuspuk breezed through the hubbub in the cafeteria adorned with murals of purely Alaska scenes, zigzagging through children clutching presents and past uniformed soldiers wearing Santa caps.

"Napakiak is happy today," she proclaimed to principal Sally Benedict.

That's a rare emotion of late for the 300 or so residents of this western Alaska com-

munity. "We're falling into the Kuskokwim River," Benedict explains, because of erosion that is forcing everyone to move their town farther inland.

But for one day this month, the Alaska National Guard gave folks a reason to smile, thanks to its "Operation Santa Claus" program, which featured the jolly old elf himself distributing gifts to the children.

"This lightens the load," said Benedict, a former Detroit educator who arrived last summer. "This is sunshine for us. It's a brightening of our day."

Now in its 63rd year, Operation Santa

Claus has become a rarity among National Guard units. Defense officials have shut down the program everywhere but Alaska, where the mission survives because the state is so large and some communities are so remote.

The program started in 1956 when the residents of St. Mary's, Alaska, had no money to buy children Christmas presents after flooding severely impacted hunting and fishing. Since then, Guard members try to visit at least two rural communities a year, delivering Christmas gifts and other needed supplies.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man used his car to impersonate officer

FL FORT MYERS — A Florida man was accused of impersonating a law enforcement officer by installing lights and a siren in his 2009 Bentley and attempting to pull over at least one driver.

Christopher Ted Duluk, 30, was arrested and charged with falsely impersonating a law enforcement officer, Lee County Sheriff's officials said in a Facebook post.

The Bentley also had a yellow Florida state license plate with LED police-style lights, the agency said. In addition, the car had a "speed measurement device" that is similar to what is commonly used by law enforcement officers.

Playful tigers injure woman at sanctuary

CA LOS ANGELES — A California woman suffered non-life-threatening injuries when she was caught in the midst of two roughhousing tigers at an animal sanctuary she founded.

The Los Angeles Times reported Patty Perry suffered head lacerations and puncture wounds on her neck at the Wildlife Environmental Conservation Inc. sanctuary in Moorpark.

Perry's friend, Michael Bradbury, said the tigers were playing with Perry inside a cage when a Bengal tiger wrapped its paws around her legs and she fell, and then the second tiger jumped on her.

Vandals hit 2 churches on the same street

KY EASTVIEW — Congregants entered two Kentucky churches to find their

houses of God in disarray, with items missing or destroyed.

Bibles, church records and numerous sacred items like crosses were stolen from the Needham Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the Smith Chapel United Methodist Church in Eastview.

Parishioners found a wrench in the pulpit of the 150-year-old Methodist church. It appeared to have been used to damage a wide array of items, including a piano, paintings, stained glass windows and more.

Ex-firefighter sentenced for setting 2 fires

PA MUNHILL — A judge sentenced a former volunteer firefighter who told investigators he set two fires because he was bored.

The judge sentenced Ryan Laubham, 20, to 18 to 36 months behind bars and 7 years probation.

Laubham's attorney had asked the court for house arrest so his client could continue treatment and his education. However, the judge insisted on incarceration because the December 2018 fires in Munhill could have resulted in deaths.

One of the fires occurred in a home where a woman was sleeping and the other took place in a home while a family was inside.

New museum to show off lunar meteorites

ME BETHEL — From an outsider's perspective, a museum that houses the five largest lunar meteorites may be as difficult to find as a space rock in a field.

The Maine Mineral & Gem Museum that opened last week is located a bit off the beaten path, in the town of Bethel in western Maine.

The museum displays more than 100 gemstones, 2,000 minerals and 250 meteorites.

Most of the meteorites on display are from asteroids, but some are known to have fallen from the moon. One of them weighs more than 120 pounds.

Donations sought for dog stabbed in neck

FL DELRAY BEACH — Donations are being raised to help with the medical costs of a dog that police said was stabbed by its owner's roommate.

Officials at the Peggy Adams Animal Rescue League said in a statement that the prognosis for Shiloh is day-to-day. The 2-year-old Weimaraner breed dog was stabbed multiple times in the neck. Medical costs are expected to exceed \$10,000.

The Palm Beach Post reported the dog's owner found her roommate walking around her Delray Beach home naked on Monday. The dog was yelping and a large amount of blood was on the bedroom floor.

Shiloh is being treated for cuts near his trachea, anemia resulting from blood loss and irregular heart rhythm.

Delray police arrested Adam Mizrach, 33, on Monday.

2 men spent \$11K using stolen credit cards

NH MANCHESTER — Two men rang up more than \$11,000 in purchases at a mall on stolen credit cards, police in New Hampshire said.

Police in Manchester said a wallet was taken out of a fitness club in Manchester on Nov. 18. It had multiple credit cards. Soon after the theft, the victim learned of numerous charges made at various stores at the Mall of New Hampshire in Manchester.

Police in search of a pant-less prowler

NC CLAYTON — Police in North Carolina said they're searching for a "sometimes half-naked man" who's been lurking in driveways.

The Raleigh News & Observer reported that the man sometimes wears no pants. He has been seen in a neighborhood in the town of Clayton.

Clayton police said in a Facebook post that the man has been seen "walking directly across driveways near front doors." In some security camera footage, police said the man "is clearly not wearing shorts and can be seen crouching down near a backyard grill."

Woman sentenced to jail for wedding injury scam

CA LOS ANGELES — A Southern California woman who tried to bilk the wedding-planning website The Knot out of \$20,000 by claiming she had to cancel her reception after tripping on her wedding dress was sentenced to five years in jail, authorities said.

Vermittya Miller filed a claim saying she had severely hurt herself after tripping on her wedding dress.

Miller provided medical reports and The Knot cut her a check, officials said.

About two months later, Miller emailed The Knot's insurer to report that the check had been stolen, and supplied a Vallejo Police Department crime report.

The suspicious insurer referred the claim to the state, which investigated.

Investigators also found that Miller had falsified the medical reports of her supposed injury, the agency said.

From wire reports

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Browns' Chubb only focused on wins

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — The chant began almost as a pleading cry and has grown into something of a commandment during Browns home games this season.

It goes, “Chubb! Chubb! Chubb!”

It slowly builds and reaches a crescendo whenever Cleveland's offense faces a pivotal situation or needs a big play. Before the ball is snapped, Browns fans make it clear to first-year coach Freddie Kitchens, who is also handling play-calling duties, by screaming what they want him to do with the ball.

Give it to Nick Chubb.

“Yeah, I hear it,” the unassuming running back said, flashing an easy smile. “It gets me hyped. It gets me excited.”

It gets him yardage and no back in the NFL has gained more this season than Chubb, the hard-working, second-year back from Georgia who heads into Sunday's game against Arizona with 1,281 yards — 38 more than Tennessee's Derrick Henry and 61 more than Carolina's Christian McCaffrey.

If he can hold off those two and finish the season on top, Chubb will be the first Browns player to lead the NFL in rushing since 1968, when Hall of Famer Leroy Kelly gained

1,239 yards in 14 games.

True to his nose-down, no-frills style, Chubb, who finished with 996 yards last season, said winning the rushing title belt wouldn't be anything special. To Chubb, it would represent the sweat and blood he's put into his craft during grueling, year-round weight-room workouts.

“It will mean a lot to me only because how hard I worked and it paid off for me,” he said this week as the Browns (6-7) prepared to play the Cardinals (3-9-1). “That's really the biggest thing for me is just when I work hard, it shows and I get the results that I want.”

Hard work. They should stitch that onto the back of Chubb's brown jersey, along with a blue collar.

Since the day he arrived in Cleveland, the second-round pick has impressed coaches and teammates with his relentless drive and a selflessness that seems out of place in a sport where individual success is celebrated.

Chubb doesn't just shun the spotlight. He hides from it.

During a game this season against the Miami Dolphins, Chubb wore a microphone for NFL films, which captured a moment that describes him perfectly.

As he sat on the sideline after a touchdown run, Chubb was approached by star wide re-

ceiver Odell Beckham Jr., who said to his teammate, “I wanna score a touchdown.”

Not missing a beat, Chubb replied, “I wanna win.”

That's Chubb in a nutshell. A very hard nutshell.

Chubb's guarded, almost defiant attitude could be off-putting to those who don't know him. But Browns left guard Joel Bitonio said that while Chubb may be on the brink of stardom, he remains the same humble 23-year-old who isn't worried about any stat than the final score.

Others can keep track of his yards and records, Chubb is counting only his reps on the squat rack. He's aware the rushing title is within reach, but he's not making it a priority.

“I work out with him every Wednesday morning and, just the same quiet guy, hasn't said a word about it,” Bitonio said. “You hear guys say all I want is the team to win, all I want is team success and I'm willing to bet Nick truly does want just team success and he wouldn't trade wins and everything for yards and touchdowns and it's a credit to him, man.”

“You get a team of 53 Nick Chubbs, you're going to be doing something right.”

Chubb, whose breakaway speed has surprised defensive backs, leads the league with 253 carries. However, it's not

shocking that he insists he feels “fresh” despite the workload. His 5.06-yards per carry average is also tops, and Chubb's 98.5 yards per game are the most by a Browns player since Hall of Famer Jim Brown, considered by many to be the greatest back in pro football history.

He's also the first Browns back to gain 1,000 yards from scrimmage in his first two seasons, one of the few feats Brown didn't accomplish.

Chubb sees it as a team award.

“We're all in this together,” he said. “I'm just happy to be able to do it for the Cleveland Browns and to be a part of this journey that I'm on. I'm happy I have everyone here with me going through it with me. Everybody plays a part. The blocking, the guys block on the outside, the receivers, the O-line — just everyone. It is not just me.”

Chubb's public persona hasn't changed, but he may be feeling a little like a superhero.

Last week on Instagram, Chubb posted a message for Browns fans.

“I'm whatever Cleveland needs me to be,” he wrote.

What did he mean?

“That's just a Batman quote. I like Batman,” he said. “That's pretty much it. Don't look too deep into it.”

Brady, Patriots try to get offense on track vs. Bengals

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Tom Brady says he is still having fun playing football, even in the midst of one of the most challenging seasons of his career.

“I love it,” he said on Friday, though he balked at saying whether he likes it as much as he used to.

The defending Super Bowl champions head into Sunday's game against Cincinnati in a prolonged slump, losing two in a row and three of their last five

games. Since the start of Week 9, they are 30th in the NFL with an average of 17.6 points per game; only the Bengals and Jaguars are worse.

Brady said the Patriots (10-3), who can clinch a playoff berth with a win Sunday, are making progress.

“Guys are working really hard and that's been great to see and that's what we've got to keep doing,” he said. “Things just don't kind of happen magically, so we're working pretty hard at it.”

It's not uncommon for the Patriots to have struggles during the regular season. They had a similar slump last year in December but went on to win their sixth Super Bowl since 2001.

“Every year, it's a little bit different. The challenges are different,” Brady said. “You just can't rely on, ‘Oh, well. We'll just do exactly what we used to do,’ or, ‘We'll do exactly what we did last week.’ You have to kind of reinvent yourself every week. ... It's always a little bit of a challenge, but football season is not supposed to be easy.”

The Patriots lost to the Houston Texans two weeks ago and Kansas City last week, just the ninth time since 2003 that they have lost back-to-back games. They have not lost three straight in that span.

Never in Brady's career has the offense struggled so much. It is 17th this season in third-down conversion percentage (37.4%) and scoring on 48% of trips inside the 20-yard line, which ranks 27th in the league.

“We've got to maximize our potential, and I don't know what our potential is,” Brady said.

International team leads US by 2 points

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — The International team has the lead going into the final day of golfing's Presidents Cup for the first time in 16 years, and it has a trio of rookies to thank for that.

Marc Leishman and unbeaten rookie Abraham Ancer staged a remarkable rally Saturday afternoon in foursomes, going from 5 down with eight holes to play to earn a most unlikely halve against Justin Thomas and Rickie Fowler.

Byeong Hun An and Joaquin Niemann never led in the final match and scratched out another half-point against Matt Kuchar and Tony Finau.

That gave the Internationals a 10-8 lead going into Sunday singles, and a real chance to win the Presidents Cup for only the second time in its 25-year history.

"We've given ourselves ... a great shot to win the session tomorrow and win this cup," said Adam Scott, who has been part of one tie and seven straight losses. "I think we've got to be pretty happy about that. Come out tomorrow, leave it all on the golf course."

Nothing inspired the Internationals more than to watch the final two teams on the course scratch out a half-point despite never leading at any point in the match.

"For us to scratch and scramble for one point, the guys were very excited about that," Els said.

It looked as though it could have been even larger, when the Internationals built a 9-5 lead after the morning session.

The Americans finally showed some fight, even with captain Tiger Woods sitting out for both sessions. And the caddie of Patrick Reed might

have shown too much fight. He confirmed in a statement to the Barstool Sports podcast "Foul Play" that he shoved a spectator who he felt got too close to Reed while cursing him.

Kessler Karrain, who is also Reed's brother-in-law, will not be on his bag for the final session. Reed said in a statement he respects the tour's decision and that everyone was focused on winning the cup.

It was the second straight week of scrutiny for the Reed camp, following his rules violation of scooping sand out of the way in the Bahamas that led to a two-shot penalty.

There was plenty of drama Saturday, and all that did was set the stage for 12 singles matches.

Woods put himself out first against Abraham Ancer, who got his first taste of a big stage when he was grouped with Woods at the World Golf Cham-

pionship in Mexico City in February.

Reed, a target of the fans all week, will play C.T. Pan in the third match. The International team needs six points from the 12 matches to claim the cup for the first time in 21 years.

Reed and Webb Simpson lost matches each of the first two days. Woods sent them out again Saturday morning, and they delivered a dud by making only one birdie in fourballs and losing, 5 and 3, to Hideki Matsuyama and Pan.

Even more curious was Woods, who won matches each of the first two days with Thomas, benching himself in the morning and afternoon, and saying it was best for his team. "I trust the guys," Woods said.

Dustin Johnson finally got on the board when he and Gary Woodland took down Adam Scott and Louis Oosthuizen.

No. 24 squanders lead, holds off Colorado State rally

Associated Press

FORT COLLINS, Colo. — The touch on Shane Gatling's jumper finally returned.

Bye-bye shooting slump.

Gatling scored a season-high 20 points to help No. 24 Colorado hold off Colorado State 56-48 on Friday night after squandering a 16-point lead.

He couldn't have picked a better time to break out of his funk as standout player McKinley Wright IV struggled with his shot.

"To have somebody step up that's in a slump all year and who hasn't played his best all year and hasn't made shots all year, to come up and make big-time shots like that is huge for us," said Wright, who had eight rebounds and three assists on a night when he was 1-for-11 from the floor. "That just shows how many weapons we have. Every night is not going to be my night. Every night is not going to be Tyler's night. I'm proud of him, man."

All that extra time in the gym

did wonders for Gatling.

"I've been waiting for this day to come," he said.

Leading 33-17 with 16:41 remaining, the Buffaloes (8-2) couldn't close out a cold-shooting Rams team that suddenly found their touch. Colorado State tied the game at 39 with 7:18 left.

Moments later, Gatling had a bucket to put the Buffaloes ahead for good.

Gatling also was originally credited with blocking a shot on Nico Carvacho down the stretch. That caught even him by surprise.

"I had a block? Oh," Gatling said. "Well, whoever blocked it, it was a big play."

The officials changed it to Tyler Bey.

Bottom line: Someone got a piece of it.

The Rams (7-6) rebounded from a sluggish start in which they shot 17.9% during the first half and scored just 12 points.

Then again, the Buffaloes knew they would respond.

"We didn't expect to see that big (of run)," Wright said. "We just had to hang our hats on defense."

Colorado did, too. The Rams were 2-for-22 from three-point range in a contest they never led.

"There's some eye-popping numbers that come off the (stat sheet) that say we probably didn't deserve to win that," Colorado coach Tad Boyle said. "The reality is we did because we defended at a very, very high level."

That blown lead, though, didn't exactly sit well with Boyle.

"We have a veteran team that's not playing like a veteran team," he said.

Wright didn't have his best night for the Buffaloes, who will more than likely fall out of the rankings after a loss to Northern Iowa earlier in the week. But the bench stepped up behind Gatling and Lucas Siewert (12 points).

Carvacho had nine points

and 10 rebounds for the Rams.

"We were there at the end," Rams coach Niko Medved said. "We couldn't get over the hump."

The opening half was anything but pretty for Colorado State, which missed all 10 attempts from three-point land. Although the Buffaloes led 27-12 at the break, it could've been more if not for their 12 turnovers.

The message at the half for the Rams was simple.

"We were told to keep working," said Isaiah Stevens, who finished with 10 points. "Just keep looking for shots. We started feeling it."

Big picture

Colorado: A win's a win, right? No style points, correct? The Buffaloes weren't at their offensive best, but the defense picked up the slack. Colorado leads the all-time series 91-38.

Colorado State: Looked like it might be a blowout. The Rams regained their composure.

NBA roundup

Lakers deal Heat their first home loss

Associated Press

MIAMI — Anthony Davis scored 33 points, LeBron James had 28 while coming within a rebound of a triple-double and the Los Angeles Lakers held off the Miami Heat 113-110 on Friday night.

James had 12 assists and nine rebounds and Davis grabbed 10 rebounds for the Lakers. They improved to 23-3 and extended the second-longest road winning streak in franchise history to 13 games.

They also dealt Miami its first home loss of the season, after an 11-0 start.

The Lakers outrebounded Miami 50-34, and the last of those was the biggest. Kentavious Caldwell-Pope missed a free throw with 8 seconds left to keep the Heat within two, but Miami couldn't get the rebound.

Caldwell-Pope went back to the line with 4.2 seconds left, made one of two again and the Lakers' lead was pushed to three.

Jimmy Butler took the last shot for Miami, a three-pointer with about a second left. It hit the rim and bounced off. The Heat argued that he was fouled to no avail, and the Lakers survived in James' lone trip this season to the city where he won championships in 2012 and 2013.

Clippers 124, Timberwolves 117: Paul George scored 46 points, Kawhi Leonard had 42 and visiting Los Angeles held on to beat Minnesota for its fourth consecutive victory.

It was the highest combined scoring output of the season for the Clippers' new superstar duo. Leonard and George's previous high came Dec. 1 when they

combined for 65 points against Washington. They became the first set of teammates in Clippers' history to each score 40 points. It was the 21st time in NBA history it has happened.

Rockets 130, Magic 107: James Harden scored 54 points, hitting 10 of 15 three-pointers and 19 of 31 shots overall, in Houston's win over host Orlando.

76ers 116, Pelicans 109: Tobias Harris scored 31 points, Ben Simmons had 24 points and 11 assists, and Philadelphia survived a late scare and beat visiting New Orleans.

Hornets 83, Bulls 73: Devonte' Graham scored 16 points, Miles Bridges and P.J. Washington each had 13 and visiting Charlotte bounced back after squandering an early 15-point lead, beating Chicago for its third straight win.

Pacers 110, Hawks 100: Malcolm Brogdon had 19 points and 12 assists, Domantas Sabonis had 12 points and 14 rebounds, and Indiana beat host Atlanta.

Bucks 127, Grizzlies 114: At Memphis, Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 17 of his 37 points in the fourth quarter to help Milwaukee pull away for its 17th straight victory.

Jazz 114, Warriors 106: Bojan Bogdanovic hit eight three-pointers and scored 32 points and Donovan Mitchell added 28 points in host Utah's win over Golden State.

Knicks 103, Kings 101: Elfrid Payton had seven of his 16 points in the fourth quarter, Marcus Morris scored off an offensive rebound with 9.1 seconds left and visiting New York rallied from 16 down to beat Sacramento.

NHL roundup

Pacioretty's OT goal lifts Golden Knights over Stars

Associated Press

DALLAS — The Vegas Golden Knights went on the offensive in OT, and the aggressive approach quickly paid off.

Max Pacioretty scored on a backhand just 51 seconds into overtime and the Knights beat the Dallas Stars 3-2 on Friday night.

Vegas coach Gerard Gallant put Pacioretty, the team's scoring leader, and Mark Stone on the ice to start the overtime.

"In the D-zone I worry about it," Gallant said. "But in the offensive zone, no. They are two good hockey players and I want to get them out there. We tried something better and it worked."

Dallas' Jamie Benn had tied it with 5:11 remaining in the third period. He worked a give-and-go, passing from behind the net to Tyler Seguin, then skating into the slot to deflect

Seguin's return pass past goalie Malcolm Subban.

Taylor Fedun put the Stars ahead 1-0 in the first period. The Golden Knights took a 2-1 lead in the second on goals by William Karlsson and newcomer Chandler Stephenson.

"You could see the difference when we were playing as a unit of five," Pacioretty said, "making sure we make life hard on (Dallas') forwards on the blue lines. We deserved, I felt, to come out with a win."

Subban made 28 saves for his first win in three career games against Dallas.

Ben Bishop stopped 28 shots for Dallas, which had won three in a row and 10 of 11 home games.

Fedun, a defenseman activated because John Klingberg was a late scratch because of a family illness, skated backward across the top of the slot and sent a wrist shot over Subban

at 15:14 of the first. Fedun had been a healthy scratch in all six games since Nov. 26.

Fedun was informed about an hour before the puck dropped that he would be playing.

"It doesn't matter what's happening behind the scenes in there," Fedun said. "You got to perform and that's what matters. However you go about doing that, you got to find a way to get it done."

Fedun's second goal this season was the only one of 16 shots on Subban in the first period.

"Malcolm was huge in the first," Gallant said. "He had a lot of good scoring chances against so he was the difference in the first, for sure."

In six games since being traded from Washington, Fedun has two goals and an assist while playing nearly three minutes more per game for Dallas.

Dallas is 1-0-1 since interim coach Rick Bowness took over

after head coach Jim Montgomery was fired.

Avalanche 3, Devils 1: Nathan MacKinnon had a goal and an assist to reach 50 points this season and lead host Colorado past New Jersey.

Colorado moved back atop the Western Conference standings with its eighth win in nine games. The Avalanche's only loss in that stretch came in overtime, giving them a nine-game points streak.

Gabriel Landeskog and Valeri Nichushkin also scored and Pavel Francouz had 37 saves for Colorado. Mirco Mueller scored for the Devils. They are 0-6-1 over their last seven games.

New Jersey pulled forward Taylor Hall from the lineup just before the game for precautionary reasons, the team said. Hall has been the subject of trade rumors of late and was not held out due to injury.