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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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DOD: No new threats found after Pensacola

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Defense Department has completed security screenings of all Saudi Arabian students in the U.S. for military training and found no indications of any immediate threats, the Pentagon said Thursday, nearly two weeks after a Saudi student killed three people and injured eight others at a Navy base in Florida.

Garry Reid, the director for defense intelligence, told reporters that as a result of an ongoing security review, the Pentagon will expand its role in vetting international students who come into the country for military training. He added that the department will now conduct additional vetting of all other international students who are in the U.S. for military

programs.

On Dec. 6, 2nd Lt. Mohammed Alshamrani, a 21-year-old Saudi Air Force officer, killed three U.S. sailors and injured eight other people at Naval Air Station Pensacola. Federal authorities say he legally bought the 9mm Glock pistol he used.

The incident raised questions about how well international military students are screened before they attend training at American bases.

As a result, the Pentagon last week ordered a broad review of the screening procedures. In a Dec. 10 memo, Deputy Defense Secretary David Norquist also ordered the suspension of all flight and other operational training for Saudi Arabian students in U.S. military programs.

In addition, the Pentagon also said that no new interna-

tional military students would come into the United States for training until new screening procedures are in place.

A senior U.S. defense official said Thursday that although the latest screening indicated no threat from Saudi students in the U.S., that doesn't reflect any other information that federal investigators may be gathering about what role any other individuals may have played in the Pensacola shooting. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss an ongoing investigation, also said that military bases have instituted other enhanced security procedures, including more random searches and perimeter checks.

The Pentagon has said that about 850 Saudi students are currently in U.S. military training programs. Officials

said it's not certain when flight and operational training would restart.

Overall there are about 5,000 international military students in U.S. programs. Currently, they go through screening by the State Department and the Department of Homeland Security. The U.S. mainly runs background and biometric checks on the students to determine if they are security risks.

For the most part, military installation commanders have the authority to set their own security procedures, including base entry screenings and carry permits for guns. There is a baseline level of security that must be met, but commanders can make any of their procedures more stringent if they believe it's necessary.

President seething over delay in impeachment process

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump railed behind closed doors about House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's decision to delay sending articles of impeachment to the Republican-controlled Senate, putting an expected trial in limbo.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, a staunch Trump GOP ally, emerged from a White House meeting with the president with a message.

"He is demanding his day in court," Graham said in an interview on Fox News Channel on Thursday evening. "I just left President Trump. He's mad as hell that they would do this to him and now deny him his day in court." The White House did not immediately respond to questions about his account.

Trump has seen a Senate trial as his means for vindica-

tion, viewing acquittal as a partial antidote to impeachment's stain on his legacy. But that effort has been threatened by Pelosi's decision to delay sending the articles approved by the House on Wednesday to the Senate until, she says, Republican leaders offer more details about how they will handle an expected trial.

"So far we haven't seen anything that looks fair to us," she said late Wednesday, dropping a procedural bombshell just after the House cast its votes making Trump only the third president in the nation's history to be impeached. House Democrats had argued for weeks that Trump's impeachment was needed "urgently" to protect the nation.

Democrats do not have enough votes in the GOP-controlled Senate to convict Trump and remove him from

office, but have been pushing for a trial to include witnesses who declined to appear during House committee hearings, including acting White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney and former national security adviser John Bolton.

Trump, meanwhile, has been hoping the trial will serve as an opportunity for vindication, and continues to talk about parading his own witness list, including former Vice President and 2020 Democratic candidate Joe Biden, even though there is little appetite for that among Senate leaders.

"The reason the Democrats don't want to submit the Articles of Impeachment to the Senate is that they don't want corrupt politician Adam Schiff to testify under oath, nor do they want the Whistleblower, the missing second Whistleblower, the informer,

the Bidens, to testify!" Trump tweeted late Thursday.

One White House official mused that Pelosi's decision to indefinitely delay the trial would be an even more effective talking point for the president than his expected acquittal because, they argued, it would highlight how Pelosi has manipulated the process to deny Trump the opportunity to defend himself.

Such messaging has been effective in driving outrage among the president's core supporters, which Trump's campaign hopes will help propel him to reelection next year.

But Graham made clear the president has not been swayed by that argument, calling the delay a "constitutional outrage" and insisting everyone should have their day in court.

Mattis recounts hack by smitten Marine

By CHAD GARLAND

Stars and Stripes

A young Marine once “hacked” then-Maj. Gen. Jim Mattis’s computer and sent an email from the two-star’s account to a female Marine that the private first class had a crush on, the former defense secretary told a crowd at a luncheon Wednesday near his hometown.

“By the way, Pfc. So-and-So is the greatest Marine in the entire division,” read the message to the young woman, Mattis told the nearly 1,000

people at the sold-out event in a convention center in Kennewick, Wash., before adding: “Great initiative, not the best judgment.”

The anecdote was meant to illustrate the qualities of initiative and assertiveness that the Marine Corps seeks to instill in its members, the Tri-City Herald reported.

“It’s like all organizations in the world, the leadership of the Marine Corps gets the behavior they reward,” said Mattis, who has himself come to embody those characteristics.

The email incident appears

to have happened while he was leading the storied 1st Marine Division. In that same post in March 2003, his rare battlefield firing of a regimental commander as the Marines advanced on Baghdad grabbed headlines. The colonel’s reluctance to take on more risk for his men to speed up the offensive led to the dismissal, Mattis wrote in his new bestselling memoir “Call Sign Chaos: Learning to Lead.”

His talk focused on what he had learned in more than 40 years of service, such as distinguishing between a mistake

and a lack of discipline, as well as giving subordinates ownership of their work by clearly articulating objectives and letting them plan how to accomplish them, the Tri-City Herald reported.

But what happened to that young Marine who sent the ill-advised email?

“He was young enough to make a mistake like that, which would have been an ethical mistake up above,” Mattis said. “He got punished by being assigned to my personal staff.”

It’s unclear if he got the girl.

Bill requires Pentagon to remove offensive forms

CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — The defense authorization bill that President Donald Trump is expected to sign into law soon would require the Defense Department to report to Congress on efforts to rid official military documents of “racially or ethnically insensitive” terms.

An earlier House-passed version of the defense authorization bill for fiscal 2020 included a provision that would require the Pentagon to review all its forms to locate and replace offensive terminology.

The provision in the NDAA was written by Democrat Alcee L. Hastings of Florida, Resilard’s congressman, and was strongly supported by Maryland Democrat Anthony G. Brown, a member of the House Armed Services Committee. In the Senate, Illinois Democrat Tammy Duckworth sponsored similar legislation.

House aides said in July that Defense Department officials had expressed extreme reluctance to begin reviewing all their forms, which number in the thousands. Defense Department officials had nonethe-

less looked through more than 1,000 forms at that time and found just one objectionable one, a Pentagon spokeswoman said at that time.

The final version of the NDAA did not include the House-passed requirement that the Pentagon review all its forms. Instead, the House-Senate conference committee directed the Pentagon to brief lawmakers within six months on the military’s efforts to find and fix documents with offensive language. And within the next year, the bill would require department leaders to give Congress a plan for how to find any other offensive forms that may still be undiscovered.

“The fact that some documents have retained descriptions for skin color such as ‘Yellow’ for Asian Americans, ‘Red’ for Native Americans and ‘Negroid’ for African Americans is deeply offensive and quite simply unacceptable,” Hastings told CQ Roll Call in a statement. “I expect the Secretary of Defense to address this issue judiciously and am confident that these oversights will be corrected.”

DOD ordered to turn over transgender ban papers

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A federal judge on Wednesday ordered the Pentagon to turn over thousands of documents that the Defense Department has refused to release to the public but has said it used to justify its decision to ban most transgender people from military service.

U.S. District Judge Marsha Pechman ruled the Pentagon must turn over drafts, communications and documents used by Defense Department officials in shaping and justifying its 48-page policy released in February 2018 that effectively ended open service for transgender people. That policy, which faces several legal challenges, went into effect in April, barring the enlistment of nearly any person with a diagnosis of gender dysphoria, the medical condition associated with individuals who do not identify with their birth sex.

Pentagon officials under President Donald Trump’s administration have long argued that policy does not constitute

a blanket ban. Moreover, they have stated publicly that the department gathered specific data during a study of transgender troops that showed their service brought “substantial risks” to the military. Among the concerns raised in the policy, which was informally dubbed “the Mattis plan” for then-Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, were that transgender troops’ medical conditions could “impede readiness, limit deployability and burden the military with additional costs.” But the Defense Department has declined to make any of that data public or describe it in detail, even when pressed by journalists to do so.

Pentagon lawyers sought to keep the documents private, claiming they were privileged information, and their release could damage the department’s ability to hold frank internal deliberations for fear such debate could be released to the public.

Lawyers for the transgender plaintiffs had sought about 35,000 documents. Pechman wrote in her decision that the Pentagon had agreed to turn them over by Friday.

US watching N. Korea for 'Christmas gift'

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. is closely watching North Korea for signs of a possible missile launch or nuclear test in the coming days that officials are referring to as a "Christmas surprise."

A significant launch or test would mean the end of North Korea's self-imposed moratorium and raise tensions in the region. It would also be a major blow to one of the Trump administration's major foreign policy initiatives: the drive to get North Korea back to negotiations to eliminate its nuclear weapons and missiles.

Earlier this month, the North conducted what U.S. officials say was an engine test. North Korea described it as "crucial" and experts believe that it may have involved an engine for a space launch vehicle or long-range missile. Officials worry that it could be a prelude to the possible launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile in the coming days or weeks.

Any test involving an ICBM would have the most serious impact on the diplomatic effort because it would be considered a move by North Korea to acquire the ability to strike the United States, or, even worse, to show they already have it.

"North Korea has been advancing. It has been building new capabilities," said Anthony Wier, a former State Department official who tracks nuclear disarmament for the Friends Committee on National Legislation. "As long as that continues, they gain new capabilities to try new missiles to threaten us and our allies in new ways,"

The North Koreans warned of a possible "Christmas gift" in early December, saying the Trump administration was running out of time to salvage nuclear negotiations, and it was up to the U.S. to choose what "Christmas gift" it gets from the North.

Victor Cha, a Korea expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said a review of the possible launch sites in North Korea show that they are a "basically ready to go." He said the expected launch could be a test of a sea-based ballistic missile or a solid-fuel rocket.

Using solid fuel allows North Korea to more quickly fuel up a rocket, providing less lead time for the U.S. or others to prepare for a launch. Sea-based launches are also more difficult to locate and would give less warning or time for the U.S. to react.

Buttigieg-Warren clash on campaign spills into debate

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The long-festering feud between Elizabeth Warren and Pete Buttigieg erupted Thursday night in a high-stakes debate that tested the strength of the Democratic Party's shrinking pool of presidential contenders just six weeks before primary voting begins.

Buttigieg, the 37-year-old mayor of South Bend, Ind., has emerged as an unlikely presidential power player, gaining ground with a centrist message. Warren, the Massachusetts senator who has become his progressive foil, attacked Buttigieg's fundraising practices. And Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar, who is competing with Buttigieg for moderate voters, challenged his limited governing experience.

The forum highlighted the choice Democrats will have to make between progressive and moderate, older and younger, men and women and the issues that will sway the small but critical segment of voters who will determine the election. The candidates sharply disagreed about the role of money

in politics, the value and meaning of experience and the direction of the American health care system.

In the most pointed exchange, Warren zeroed in on Buttigieg's recent private meeting with wealthy donors inside a California "wine cave," the details of which were recounted in a recent Associated Press story.

"Billionaires in wine caves should not pick the next president of the United States," she charged.

Buttigieg, who has surged into the top tier of the Democratic Party's 2020 primary in part because of his fundraising success, did not back down.

"We need to defeat Donald Trump," he responded, noting that Trump's reelection campaign has already accumulated hundreds of millions of dollars. "We shouldn't try to do it with one hand tied behind our back."

The focus on Buttigieg at the Los Angeles debate highlighted his strength in the Democratic Party's turbulent primary contest just 46 days before voting begins, with polls showing him at or near the lead in Iowa's kickoff caucus.

Senate passes \$1.4 trillion government spending bill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Senate passed a \$1.4 trillion government spending package Thursday in a last bipartisan burst of legislating before bolting for the holidays from a Capitol riven by impeachment.

Lawmakers cleared the two-bill package in a set of votes, sending it to President Donald Trump in time to forestall a possible government shutdown this weekend. The White House said Trump would sign it before Friday's midnight deadline.

The first measure, covering domestic programs, passed by a 71-23 vote. A Pentagon and homeland security measure passed hours later in an 81-11 vote that was the last Senate tally for the year.

The legislation delivers Trump a victory on his U.S.-Mexico border fence and gives Democrats long-sought domestic spending increases and a repeal of Obama-era taxes on high-cost health insurance plans. It blends spending increases for both sides — reelection fodder for lawmakers — with tax and benefit add-ons that will mean a roughly \$400 billion boost to the deficit over

10 years.

The split-their-differences legislation was carrying a large number of unrelated provisions into law, drawing protests from fiscal conservatives.

It would put in place an earlier spending deal that reversed unpopular and unworkable automatic spending cuts to defense and domestic programs — at a \$1.6 trillion or so cost over the coming decade.

"These spending bills are a fiscal dumpster fire," said Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah. "This is embarrassing."

Key provisions include an expensive repeal of Obama-era taxes on high-cost health plans, help for retired coal miner, and an increase from 18 to 21 in the nationwide legal age to buy tobacco products. The tobacco measure was pushed by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky.

The almost 2,400-page package reflects the reality of divided government and the enduring strength of the Capitol's appropriations process, which allows lawmakers to go to bat for their states and congressional districts.

Virginia biochemist wins Miss America

Associated Press

UNCASVILLE, Conn. — Organizers wanted to make it clear the 99th Miss America competition isn't your grandmother's beauty pageant, and their winner did just that on Thursday.

Virginia biochemist Camille Schrier won the crown just minutes after wowing the crowd with science. Dressed in a lab coat, she gave a colorful chemistry demonstration of the catalytic decomposition of hydrogen peroxide.

Schrier, a native of Pennsylvania, said she hopes to "break stereotypes about what it means to be a Miss America in 2020" by being a "woman of science" who is authentic to herself.

"I'm not the beauty queen," she said. "I'm the brand ambassador for this organization and I'm more than just someone with a crown on my head."

Victoria Hill of Georgia placed first runner-up.

No longer called contestants, the 51

women "candidates," who hailed from all 50 states and the District of Columbia, competed for a \$50,000 scholarship and the "job" of Miss America, a one-year paid position they hope to use as a public platform for their "social impact initiative."

For the second year in a row, women were not judged in a swimsuit or how they look in an evening gown. Instead, a series of interviews and talent demonstrations will determine who is best qualified to wear this year's crown.

"To make it relevant for these young women, it was important for us as a scholarship and service organization to make sure that we were reflective of this generation, meaning that you no longer had to be defined by some sort of ideal," said Regina Hopper, president & CEO of the Miss America Organization.

Schrier, 24, who spoke on stage about having tackled an eating disorder, said she decided to compete for Miss America after the swimsuit competition was ditched, along with other changes that have been

made to modernize the organization.

"I kind of figured that I would never get on that stage because I was a woman who did not want to get into a swimsuit on stage. And I didn't have a performing talent, which is really ironic now," she said, adding how she's the first Miss America to win with a science experiment, a presentation she brings to schools.

Schrier is a cum laude graduate of Virginia Tech with dual bachelor of science degrees in biochemistry and systems biology and is currently studying to obtain a doctor of pharmacy degree. Her platform issue is drug safety.

While Hopper acknowledges there has been some push-back from "old pageant" people who liked the old way of doing things, she said there's been greater interest in the competition since the roll-out of Miss America 2.0.

Schrier succeeds 2019 Miss America Nia Franklin, a classically trained opera singer from New York.

Boeing's Starliner hits snag following takeoff

Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — Boeing's new Starliner capsule went off course after launch Friday and won't dock with the International Space Station during its first test flight.

It was supposed to be a crucial dress rehearsal for next year's inaugural launch with astronauts.

The blastoff from Cape Canaveral went flawlessly as the Atlas V rocket lifted off with the capsule. But a half-hour into the flight, Boeing reported that the capsule didn't get into the right orbit to reach the

space station. The capsule is still in space and will be brought back to Earth, landing in New Mexico as early as Sunday.

Boeing is one of two companies hired by NASA to launch astronauts from the U.S. The space agency has been relying on Russian rockets to travel to the space station since the retirement of the space shuttle nine years ago.

Officials said the capsule was in a safe and stable orbit. NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine said in a tweet that the capsule burned up more fuel than planned and controllers were using its thrusters to raise its orbit.

With less fuel on board, it put the rest of the flight in jeopardy. The Starliner was supposed to reach the space station on Saturday and stay for a week.

This was Boeing's chance to catch up with SpaceX, NASA's other commercial crew provider that successfully completed a similar demonstration in March. SpaceX has one last hurdle — a launch abort test — before carrying two NASA astronauts in its Dragon capsule, possibly by spring.

A successful Starliner demo could have seen Boeing launching astronauts by summer. But that might not be possible now.

Brexit bill is approved; EU departure set for Jan. 31

Associated Press

LONDON — British lawmakers approved in principle Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Brexit bill, clearing the way for the U.K. to leave the European Union next month.

The House of Commons voted 358-234 on Friday for the Withdrawal Agreement Bill. It will receive more scrutiny and possible amendment next

month, and also has to be approved by Parliament's upper chamber, the House of Lords.

But Johnson's commanding majority in Parliament means it is almost certain to become law in January. Britain will then leave the EU on Jan. 31.

Johnson said Friday that passing the bill would end the "acrimony and anguish" that has consumed the country

since it voted in 2016 to leave the EU. Opponents argue that leaving the EU will only trigger more uncertainty over Britain's future trade relations with the bloc.

Johnson urged lawmakers on Friday to back his Brexit bill to end the "acrimony and anguish" that has consumed the country since it voted in 2016 to leave the European Union.

The U.K.'s departure will open a new phase of Brexit, as Britain and the EU race to strike new relationships for trade, security and host of other areas by the end of 2020.

Johnson, however, painted Friday's vote as a moment of closure. Opening debate on the bill he said, optimistically, that after Jan. 31, "Brexit will be done, it will be over."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man steals fake gifts from police lobby

WA PULLMAN — Pullman Police say a man just released from jail helped himself to some presents under a Christmas tree in the police department's lobby — only to find out they were fake.

News outlets reported video from the Pullman Police Department shows a 20-year-old Washington State University student after he had been held on suspicion of underage drinking walk up to the tree and take several packages. But as he walks outside, the video shows him realize the packages were just there for show and were in fact empty. Video then shows the man tossing the empty boxes across the parking lot in frustration.

Motorist, 90, crashes into buggy, keeps going

MI MARLETTE — Police in Michigan's Thumb region say a 90-year-old motorist crashed into a horse-drawn buggy in broad daylight and then continued home without stopping.

Michigan State Police said Monday afternoon's hit-and-run crash in Sanilac County's Marlette Township left the sole occupant of the Amish buggy with minor injuries.

The impact separated the buggy from its wheels and caused the horse to tumble off the roadway before it got up and ran along the road, pulling the buggy's frame behind it.

Troopers recovered debris at the crash scene indicating that the vehicle which hit the buggy was a red Ford Fusion with damage to its front passenger side.

Police said the motorist called their insurance company to make a claim and was told to contact police. The hit-

and-run suspect then contacted Marlette police, The Bay City Times reported.

Police: Woman tried to set boyfriend on fire

AZ AVONDALE — An Avondale woman is facing charges that she tried to set her boyfriend on fire because he wouldn't celebrate her new job at a Subway restaurant.

Kathy Elizabeth Jones, 46, was arrested last week on one count each of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon and criminal damage, according to charging documents obtained Wednesday.

Police responded to Jones' apartment Dec. 11 and found matches and clothing with lighter fluid on them.

Jones' boyfriend told officers that she had sprayed him with lighter fluid and then threw lit matches at him. He then locked her out of the apartment.

Hoot, hoot, hooray: Owl freed from car's grille

NC SOUTHERN SHORES — An owl that got trapped in the grille of a vehicle has lived to fly another day.

A barred owl took an unexpected three-hour ride to the Outer Banks of North Carolina over the weekend, said Lou Browning, the founder and president of Hatteras Island Wildlife Rehabilitation.

A family from Wilmington heard something hit their car on the drive to Southern Shores but kept going when nothing appeared out of the ordinary, Browning told news outlets. The owl was found after the family got to their destination, according to a Facebook post from the wildlife group.

"Nothing's broken," Browning said of the freed owl's condition. "Just bruising."

Teen sneaks into plane, drives it into fence

CA FRESNO — A 17-year-old girl was arrested Wednesday after authorities say she sneaked into a small plane at an airport in central California and drove it into a chain-link fence.

The teenager breached the fence of Fresno Yosemite International Airport, started up the plane and crashed it into a fence, airport spokeswoman Vikkie Calderon told The Fresno Bee.

Airport officials said officers found the teen in the pilot's seat, wearing the pilot's headset.

No one was injured. No passenger planes were in danger, Calderon said.

The teen was arrested on suspicion of theft of an aircraft. She will be booked into the juvenile hall after officers finish questioning her.

The girl's mother told Fresno news station KFSN-TV that she hadn't heard from her daughter since Tuesday night.

Secret Santa makes traffic stops joyful

KS SHAWNEE — Getting stopped by police was joyful for residents of one Kansas City suburb.

KMBC-TV reported that Officer Ryanne Stevens was among the elves dolling out \$100 bills on Wednesday in Shawnee, Kan.

After pulling over a van for a minor traffic infraction, she learned that the driver's wife has multiple sclerosis. She explained that a Secret Santa had donated cash and that she thought the man "might be a good recipient of that money."

Another unsuspecting driver hugged Stevens, telling her, "Thank you so much, God bless you."

This is the fifth year the Se-

cret Santa has donated \$10,000 for Shawnee police to hand out.

Man downs his liquor after train hits his car

FL TITUSVILLE — A Florida man told police he drank two bottles of liquor immediately after his car was struck by a train because he was terrified.

Titusville police say Danny Wyatt, 43, was driving home from the liquor store last week when he made a wrong turn and his car got stuck on the tracks. He quickly exited the vehicle before it was struck by a train.

Police say he then grabbed a bag from the car and drank two bottles of liquor.

He was charged with felony DUI for the third or subsequent offense within 10 years. Florida Today reported he was also charged with refusing a DUI test after his license was suspended.

Dog mending after being tossed from car

IL CHICAGO — A dog that was badly injured after being thrown from a moving car in Chicago is recovering after surgery, an official said.

Witnesses said someone threw the 3-year-old bichon from a car on the city's South Side on Sunday night, WLS-TV reported. Police haven't caught whoever threw the dog from the car.

The dog, which has been named Elf, suffered a broken pelvis and dislocated hip but is mending at Friends of Chicago Animal Care and Control, a nonprofit that works to save the lives of animals that end up with animal control, said Charlie Propsom, an official with the group.

From wire reports

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Texans aim to wrap up AFC South title

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — A fourth AFC South title in five years is within reach for the Houston Texans, who are determined to finish the job.

Clinching another division crown and playoff berth doesn't figure to be easy Saturday against the suddenly red-hot Tampa Bay Buccaneers, who've put together a strong stretch run despite already being eliminated from postseason contention.

The Texans (9-5) took sole possession of first place in the division by beating Tennessee 24-21 last week and can clinch their second straight AFC South championship by beating

the Bucs (7-7), who have won four straight, with Jameis Winston making a strong case for a new contract.

Houston could also clinch with some outside help. However, the Texans prefer to take care of business themselves.

"It's a lot on the line. We all know that. But at the same time, you can't look past these guys and you can't take it for granted," quarterback Deshaun Watson said. "Tampa Bay is playing good right now, playing with a lot of confidence, and Jameis is putting up a lot of points and a lot of yards."

Winston is earning nearly \$21 million in the final year of the contract he signed as the No. 1

overall pick in the 2015 draft. His NFL-leading 24 interceptions are one of the reasons the Bucs will miss the playoffs for the 12th consecutive season. Conversely, his league-leading 4,573 passing yards and 30 touchdown passes have helped his team remain in the running for a winning record.

The fifth-year quarterback is coming off back-to-back games with over 450 yards passing, including a career-best 458 last week at Detroit, where he continued to flourish despite playing with an injury-depleted group of receivers.

Pro Bowl selections Mike Evans and Chris Godwin — both 1,000-yard receivers —

won't be available to Winston against the Texans. Nevertheless, the Bucs relish the challenge of gauging their progress against a playoff contender.

"For us, it is a big December game. It's a good measuring stick even without whoever is not playing. It doesn't matter. It's still going to be a team going to the playoffs," Bucs coach Bruce Arians said. "We've beaten one team that was almost in the playoffs. We went to overtime with a No. 1 seed in their place. (Those are) the things I think you judge on when you look back, when you get to that rear view mirror, and you start evaluating where we're at next year."

49ers' defense has faded after dominant start

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — San Francisco's dominant defense that completely flummoxed Jared Goff the first time the 49ers played the Los Angeles Rams has gone missing of late.

Whether it's because of attrition from injuries to key cogs like Dee Ford and Kwon Alexander or facing a slate of more talented quarterbacks, the Niners (11-3) head into the rematch with the Rams (8-6) on Saturday with several questions about the defense.

A unit that ranked second in the NFL with only 11 points allowed the first seven games has given up 25.9 per game over the last seven as quarterbacks like Kyler Murray, Russell Wilson and Drew Brees found plenty of success moving the ball.

"From a statistical standpoint, it was almost historic over those first (seven) games," defensive coordinator Robert Saleh said. "I almost feel like we kind of spoiled people."

The 49ers were at their best in a stretch surrounding the first game against the Rams, a 20-7 victory for San Francisco. The Niners allowed only 23 points during a four-game stretch, holding all of those teams to 100 yards or fewer passing.

But that kind of play has been lacking of late with Alexander on injured reserve with a torn pectoral; Ford out with a hamstring injury; safety Jaquiski Tartt missing the past two games with injured ribs; and cornerback Richard Sherman sitting out last week.

That has contributed to San Francisco getting only three sacks the past three games and only one interception over the past seven contests.

"The more we have had people out, I think the chances of turnovers does go down, but if we want to win we've got to find ways to create them and hopefully our guys can get going and create some more," coach Kyle Shanahan said. "If not, we've got to do something schematically, but it's tough to win when you don't get turnovers and we've got to make sure we find a way to do it."

While the 49ers have gotten worse defensively since the first meeting, Goff has played much better than he did that day when he went 13-for-24 for 78 yards, setting career lows in yards and yards per attempt (3.3).

"They did a good job on defense and we didn't execute," Goff said. "We didn't do anything that we're nearly capable of and they did a great job on defense."

That was part of a midseason slump for Goff, who then failed to throw a single TD pass in three games in November.

But he has bounced back, averaging 333.7 yards passing the past three weeks, with two TD passes in each game.

"Hopefully, we'll have a better showing, but we certainly know what a great challenge it will be, because of what a great job Robert Saleh does leading the way, and then all the great players that they have executing the scheme," coach Sean McVay said.

Playoff talk: The Niners will earn the top seed in the NFC if they win their final two

games. The situation is much more complicated for the Rams, who need to win their final two games and hope Minnesota loses twice to get a wild-card spot.

Which defense shows up?: The Rams' defense has been among the NFL's steadiest, most dependable units in 11 of its 14 games. The other three — losses to Tampa Bay, Baltimore and last week against Dallas — were awful. The coaching staff has struggled to explain those blips from a defense that has held every other opponent under 28 points, including the Niners in October.

"If I knew, I'd change it," coordinator Wade Phillips said. "Or I'd change something going into it."

Gurley's shot: Todd Gurley missed the Rams' first meeting with San Francisco to rest a bruised thigh. He has played in only five of a possible nine games against the Niners during his career because of various injuries and rest, and he has only two 100-yard games against Los Angeles' up-state rivals.

"I feel like when I do play against them, I usually do fairly well," Gurley said before incorrectly suggesting he didn't play against the Niners during his rookie year back in St. Louis (he played once and rushed for 133 yards).

The formerly prolific running back has only two chances left to get his first 100-yard rushing game of the season, snapping a streak of 15 consecutive regular-season games without hitting triple digits. He is a modest 18th in the league with 741 yards rushing.

NHL roundup

Stars rally, down Lightning in overtime

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Tyler Seguin scored three minutes into overtime, Anton Khudobin stopped 45 shots, and the Dallas Stars beat the Tampa Bay Lightning 4-3 on Thursday night.

After Tampa Bay's Tyler Johnson missed a shot from close range, Alexander Radulov passed to Seguin, who skated in from the left wing boards and got the winner from the low slot.

Dallas also got goals from Radulov, Radek Faksa and Jason Dickinson. Khudobin stopped Yanni Gourde's shot during a 2-on-none break in the third.

Mikhail Sergachev, Alex Kilorn and Ondrej Palat scored, and Andrei Vasilevskiy made 16 saves for the Lightning. Nikita Kucherov, the NHL MVP last season, had an assist after being benched for the third pe-

riod and overtime in Tuesday night's 4-3 win over Ottawa following a costly turnover.

Flyers 6, Sabres 1: James van Riemsdyk scored twice and host Philadelphia took advantage of some sloppy defense and a strong power play to beat short-handed Buffalo.

The Sabres were without captain Jack Eichel, the NHL's second-leading goal scorer, who was a late scratch after participating in pregame workouts with what was called an upper-body injury.

Blue Jackets 3, Kings 2 (OT): Pierre-Luc Dubois scored in overtime, Zach Werenski had a goal and an assist, and host Columbus rallied to beat Los Angeles.

Boone Jenner scored with 1:43 remaining to force overtime for the Blue Jackets, who won after trailing in the first period for the second time this season. Dubois got the winner

1:11 into overtime when he took a tape-to-tape pass from Gustav Nyquist on a 2-on-2 rush.

Islanders 3, Bruins 2 (SO): Matthew Barzal scored in regulation and the shootout as visiting New York beat Boston.

In the shootout, Jordan Eberle and Barzal scored for the Islanders. David Pastrnak scored for the Bruins. Brad Marchand's attempt to extend the shootout was stymied by Islanders goalie Semyon Varlamov.

Senators 5, Predators 4 (OT): Anthony Duclair scored a power-play goal 2:40 into overtime, giving goaltender Marcus Hogberg his first NHL win as host Ottawa beat Nashville.

Hogberg, an emergency recall for the Senators after Anders Nilsson became ill, stopped 33 shots. Colin White, Vladimir Namestnikov, Artem Anisimov and Brady Tkachuk also scored for the Senators,

who recovered after blowing a 4-1 lead.

Blackhawks 4, Jets 1: Patrick Kane scored his 19th goal of the season and had three assists in visiting Chicago's victory over Winnipeg.

Hurricanes 3, Avalanche 1: Andrei Svechnikov and Jaccob Slavin scored 1:17 apart and visiting Carolina rallied past Colorado.

Canadiens 4, Flames 3 (OT): Max Domi beat goalie Dave Rittich on an end-to-end overtime rush to give visiting Montreal the win over Calgary.

Wild 8, Coyotes 5: Marcus Foligno, Eric Staal and Mats Zuccarello each had a goal and two assists and visiting Minnesota edged Arizona in a high-scoring game.

Canucks 5, Golden Knights 4 (OT): Chris Tanev scored at 1:30 of overtime and host Vancouver edged Vegas.

NBA roundup

Antetokounmpo, Bucks win showdown with Lakers

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Giannis Antetokounmpo looked over at LeBron James and Anthony Davis and thought about his past.

"I wasn't supposed to be here," the 6-foot-11 Greek Freak said.

Hardly looked that way Thursday night.

Antetokounmpo had 34 points and 11 rebounds, and the Milwaukee Bucks beat James, Davis and the Los Angeles Lakers 111-104 in a showdown of the NBA's top teams.

The reigning MVP had seven assists and a career-best five three-pointers as Milwaukee improved to 25-4 after ending an 18-game winning streak against Dallas on Monday night.

"I wasn't the No. 1 pick,

AD was, LeBron was," Antetokounmpo said. "I wasn't supposed to be here. I wasn't supposed to go up against these two beasts."

James had 21 points, 12 rebounds and 11 assists for his seventh triple-double of the season, and Davis had 36 points and 10 rebounds.

Spurs 118, Nets 105: Patty Mills had 27 points and host San Antonio overcame a career-high 41 points from Spencer Dinwiddie to beat Brooklyn.

Mills had 21 points in the second half, shooting 5-for-8 on three-pointers as the Spurs rallied from a 14-point deficit to beat the Nets for the 17th straight home game.

LaMarcus Aldridge added 20 points and 10 rebounds for San Antonio.

Brooklyn's Kyrie Irving

missed his 17th straight game with a right shoulder impingement. Dinwiddie tried to cover by shooting 14-for-29 from the field, eclipsing his career high by two points.

Jazz 111, Hawks 106: Donovan Mitchell scored two of his 30 points on a tricky baseline drive that put visiting Utah ahead for good.

Mitchell faked a pass from under the basket before slamming the breaks and connecting from beneath the backboard with 3:47 left. That made it 101-99, and he cemented the win with two free throws with 13 seconds left.

The Jazz won their fourth straight game by dominating near the rim. They outscored the Hawks 62-46 in the paint and outrebounded them 52-39. Rudy Gobert had 20 points and

13 rebounds for Utah.

Point guard Trae Young led the Hawks with 30 points, but Atlanta lost its sixth consecutive game.

Rockets 122, Clippers 117: Russell Westbrook scored a season-high 40 points, James Harden added 28 and visiting Houston rallied from a 16-point deficit in the second half to beat Los Angeles.

After Houston turned a 77-61 deficit into a 101-89 lead, Los Angeles went on a spurt of its own to lead 113-107 with 4:29 left. The Rockets closed on a 15-4 run to snap the Clippers' 10-game home winning streak.

Paul George led the Clippers with 34 points and Kawhi Leonard added 25.

It was the second straight game Houston rallied from a large deficit.

Memphis' Wiseman drops out of school

Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — James Wiseman's college career has come to an end after just three games with the Memphis center and likely NBA lottery pick saying on social media he has withdrawn from school to begin focusing on his pro career rather than sitting out the rest of a 12-game NCAA suspension.

The 7-foot-1 freshman announced his decision Thursday in an Instagram post, saying he was leaving school to start "preparing for the next chapter of my life."

"Ever since I was a little kid, it's been a dream of mine to play in the NBA," Wiseman wrote.

Wiseman was the top 2019 high school prospect and is considered the potential No. 1 pick in the 2020 NBA Draft.

This decision ends Wiseman's tumultuous college career and his battles with the NCAA. Wiseman was the biggest prize in a Memphis recruiting class

that was ranked as the nation's best, but he had been serving an NCAA suspension for most of the season.

"We wish nothing but the best for James in his future endeavors as he follows his dreams," Memphis coach Penny Hardaway said. "He will truly be missed."

University of Memphis officials said in a statement that Wiseman's announcement was disappointing.

"The UofM supports James and his family in his decision to leave to prepare for the 2020 NBA Draft and will continue to follow James in what will certainly prove to be a successful career," officials said in the statement.

The NCAA suspended Wiseman 12 games because his family received \$11,500 from Hardaway to assist in a move from Nashville to Memphis in the summer of 2017. Although Hardaway wasn't Memphis' coach at the time, the NCAA ruled the payment wasn't al-

lowed, counting him as a booster for giving \$1 million in 2008 to his alma mater for the university's sports hall of fame.

The NCAA had ruled Wiseman needed to donate \$11,500 to a charity of his choice to regain his eligibility — though that now seems like a moot point.

After the NCAA notified Memphis that Wiseman was "likely ineligible" just before the start of the season, Wiseman went to court and sued the NCAA and the University of Memphis. He played two games under a temporary restraining order obtained Nov. 8 in dramatic fashion less than an hour before tipoff of the Tigers' second game of the season.

But in another turn of events, Wiseman ordered his attorneys to drop the lawsuit Nov. 14, which led to Memphis ruling him ineligible immediately. The NCAA announced the suspension Nov. 20 and denied Memphis' appeal on Nov. 27.

Wiseman averaged 19.7

points and 10.7 rebounds in Memphis' first three games. Wiseman had been due to sit out five more games before being able to return to the Tigers' lineup Jan. 12 at USF.

He thanked Memphis' coaches, staff and his teammates for pushing him in practice.

"This was not how I expected my freshman season to be, but I'm thankful for everyone who has supported my family and me throughout this process ...," Wiseman wrote.

"I feel blessed for the opportunity to be a Tiger and for having the honor to play with these special group of guys. I can't wait to see what all they accomplish this season. The friends and fans of Tiger Nation will always hold a place in my heart."

Without Wiseman, Memphis (9-1) currently is ranked No. 11 in the country and has won seven straight, including a 51-47 win over then-No. 19 Tennessee last week.

College basketball roundup

Undermanned Seton Hall knocks off No. 7 Maryland

Associated Press

NEWARK, N.J. — Coming off an embarrassing loss to Rutgers and missing its two best players against No. 7 Maryland, Seton Hall turned to Quincy McKnight and a stifling defense to revive a once hopeful season that was fading quickly.

McKnight scored a season-high 17 points and undermanned Seton Hall used a swarming, shot-blocking defense to stun Maryland 52-48 Thursday night.

"Today we proved to everyone we can still play and we got a good win," said McKnight, who added eight rebounds, six assists and two steals. "This is a confidence booster to everyone on the court today."

The Pirates (7-4) held the

Terrapins to 27% shooting, blocked 15 shots and forced 17 turnovers in ending a two-game losing streak and handing Maryland (10-2) its second straight loss.

Seton Hall won without Big East Conference preseason player of the year Myles Powell (concussion) and power forward Sando Mamukelashvili (broken wrist).

"This was a big program win for us," said forward Jared Rhoden, who had eight points and 12 rebounds. "That's all coach (Kevin Willard) kept reiterating to us at practice all week, that we lost two of our star players and guys had to step up. It was a collective win. We all stepped up."

Seton Hall seemed in control when Anthony Nelson hit a layup for a 49-42 edge with

about a minute to play. Then the Pirates missed three free throws and turned the ball over, setting up Anthony Cowan Jr. to try a tying three-pointer with 22 seconds left.

Cowan missed, and Seton Hall got the rebound and made a free throw to ice it.

Cowan led Maryland with 16 points on 3-for-14 shooting. Jalen Smith and Aaron Wiggins added 11 points apiece.

No. 4 Duke 86, Wofford 57: Joey Baker had career highs of 22 points and five three-pointers to help the host Blue Devils beat the Terriers.

Freshman Vernon Carey Jr. added 20 points and 10 rebounds for Duke (10-1), which shot 54% in its return from a nearly two-week pause in the schedule.

The Blue Devils played with-

out starting point guard Tre Jones due to what the school described as a "mild sprain" in his left foot from a recent practice. In a release, coach Mike Krzyzewski said the decision to hold Jones out was "out of an abundance of caution" and that the team believes it is a "minor" issue.

No. 12 Auburn 79, North Carolina State 73: Samir Doughty scored 11 of his 24 points over the final 4:33 and the host Tigers beat the Wolfpack.

Auburn (10-0) remained the only unbeaten Power Five team with perhaps its toughest win of the season.

North Carolina State (8-3) briefly took a lead on Braxton Beverly's layup with 5:23 left but couldn't score again for the next four-plus minutes.