

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## Space Force now sixth branch of military

By COREY DICKSTEIN

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Space Force now exists, but it could be months before it has its own troops.

The sixth branch of the U.S. military became reality Friday evening when President Donald Trump signed into law the fiscal year 2020 National Defense Authorization Act, the annual bill that sets Pentagon policy. The NDAA directs the Pentagon to create the Space Force, which is the first new branch of service since the Air Force was carved out of the Army Air Corps in 1947.

Top Air Force officials on Friday described the Space Force's birth as a historic moment that signaled how important space operations are to the nation. It comes at a critical time as China and Russia hone their own space abilities and close a capabilities gap in the domain that the United States has long dominated.

"Let there be no mistake, the United States is the best in the world in space today, and today we're even better," said Air Force Gen. Jay Raymond, the commander of U.S. Space Command, who has led Pentagon efforts in space for months and who Trump picked Friday to be the first commander of the Space Force. "The United States Space Force will ensure that we compete, deter and win from a position of strength in securing our way of life and our national security."

Space Force now exists on paper, but it is staffed almost entirely by troops who, for now, will remain in the Air Force. Many other decisions remain to be made about the service, its makeup and its culture. Congress gave the Defense Department 18 months to build the service. Decisions on uniforms, insignia, marketing strategies, rank structure and even who exactly will become a member of the Space Force all have yet

to be made.

Those details are "not something we're going to be able to roll out on Day 1," Raymond said. "This is really important for our nation. I can't foot stomp that enough ... It's critical that we get this right."

Trump said the United States would soon be "leading by a lot in space," noting he and Pence found early in their administration a "spirit" and "love" for the idea of a Space Force that would be "important to our defense, to our future, and [that would] blend in so well into our military."

Space Force's creation marks the second major organizational change for the Defense Department in 2019 focused on space. In August, the Pentagon created Space Command, the new warfighting command and control headquarters focused on all military operations related to space. Senior Air Force officials said Friday that the Space Force ultimately will be

charged with providing trained and equipped operators for Space Command to use to defend U.S. assets in orbit.

But for now, Space Force will consist almost entirely of the roughly 16,000 active-duty and civilian Air Force personnel who have been assigned to Air Force Space Command. That unit was essentially pulled out of the Air Force and rebranded as the Space Force in the NDAA by lawmakers. Senior Air Force officials said Friday that the initial group includes about 3,400 Air Force officers, 6,200 enlisted airmen and some 8,000 civilian personnel.

Congress provided the Pentagon about \$40 million to jump-start Space Force in its appropriations bill passed last week. Raymond, Barrett and the other officials declined to discuss in detail their funding plans, including whether the department would submit a Space Force budget proposal for fiscal year 2021 separately from the Air Force budget.

## Investigation finds no racist intent in hand gestures

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Hand gestures flashed by West Point cadets and Naval Academy midshipmen during the televised Army-Navy football game were not racist signals, military investigations have concluded.

A Navy probe of the event found that the students were participating in a "sophomoric game" on Saturday and had no racist intent. An Army statement Friday also rejected any racist overtones, saying the hand gestures were "not associated with ideologies or movements that are contrary to the Army values."

The Navy said officials are, however, disappointed in the immature behavior of the students and "their actions will be appropriately addressed." There were no details

about their exact punishment, but a Navy report on the investigation said the two midshipmen should face "administrative action" for "failure to use good judgment."

Clips of the hand gestures by the students went viral on social media and immediately raised questions about whether they were using a "white power" sign. But others suggested it was part of what's called the "circle game," in which someone flashes an upside-down OK sign below the waist and punches anyone who looks at it.

The Navy said that reviews of the footage, more than two dozen interviews and background checks by the Naval Criminal Investigative Service and the FBI determined that the two freshmen midshipmen were participating in the "circle game" with West Point cadets.

The investigation added that the two naval academy students "exhibited genuine shock" and said they were not aware of the racist connotation of the hand gestures. It said interviews with friends, roommates and other commanders also found no links to the white power movement.

Navy Adm. Mike Gilday, chief of naval operations, said sailors are expected to conduct themselves with integrity and character at all times.

"To be clear, the Navy does not tolerate racism in any form," said Gilday. "And while the investigation determined there was no racist intent behind these actions, our behavior must be professional at all times and not give cause for others to question our core values of honor, courage and commitment."

# Top general defends Afghanistan war

*The Washington Post.*

The Pentagon's top general defended the war in Afghanistan on Friday, saying there was not "some coordinated lie" by senior officials to mischaracterize the conflict and noting that no terrorist attack originating in Afghanistan has been carried out on American soil in the past 18 years.

Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said he does not believe U.S. troops died in vain in the war.

"I do not. I absolutely do not," he said. "I could not look at myself in the mirror. I couldn't answer myself at 2 or 3 in the morning when my eyes pop open and I see the dead roll in

front of my eyes. So no, I don't think anybody has died in vain, per se."

The comments came in response to questions prompted by The Afghanistan Papers, The Washington Post's recent reporting about the war based on documents. The documents, obtained through the Freedom of Information Act after a three-year court battle, detail not only dysfunction during the conflict but how U.S. officials often publicly touted progress while privately harboring doubts about the war's long-term outcome.

Milley, who served three tours in Afghanistan and often cited progress there, disagreed with assertions he has seen that

senior U.S. officials deceived the American public or Congress. He addressed this issue while standing alongside Defense Secretary Mark Esper at a Pentagon news conference.

"More than a stretch — I find that a mischaracterization in my own personal experience," Milley said. "You are looking at probably hundreds of general officers, State Department employees, CIA, Department of Defense folks. I just don't think you can get that level of coordination to that kind of deception."

Esper said the war "has been very transparent," noting that the media and members of Congress have traveled to Afghanistan on numerous occa-

sions over the past 18 years.

"It's not like this war was hiding somewhere, and now there has been a revelation," Esper said. "So I think, between all of the people looking at this conflict over all the years, some type of insinuation that there has been this large-scale conspiracy is just, to me, ridiculous, and I certainly echo the chairman's comments on that front."

The Post's reporting did not say there had been a conspiracy or coordinated lie, but rather that a succession of senior officials have made "rosy pronouncements they knew to be false" while "hiding unmistakable evidence the war had become unwinnable."

## COLA allowances to fall for stateside service members

*Stars and Stripes*

Fewer service members living stateside will receive a cost of living allowance in 2020, according to an announcement from the Defense Department on Friday.

The department will pay about \$20.2 million in cost of living allowances, known as COLA, for service members living in expensive areas of the continental United States.

This includes about 12,300 service members — down 2,600 from last year — living within 16 identified areas, according to the DOD release. The decrease dropped annual COLA spending by about \$1.9 million.

To determine what locations receive the taxable allowance, a contractor provides cost data for each military housing area and it is compared to a national average, according to the release. Any area at least 8% higher than that average is eligible to receive cost of living allowances. Categories that determine cost data include

transportation, goods and services, federal income taxes, sales taxes and miscellaneous expenses. Data is also adjusted based on access to commissaries and exchange stores.

Oakland and San Francisco, Calif., and Staten Island, N.Y., will have the highest COLA rates in 2020. Saint Joseph, Mo., will see the largest increase, rising by two percentage points.

Service members stationed in Fresno, Marin/Sonoma, Sacramento, and Stockton, Calif.; New Haven/Fairfield, Conn.; Nantucket, Mass., and Columbia/Jefferson City and Saint Joseph, Mo., were added to the COLA list, while San Bernardino, Calif., Boston and Essex County, Mass., Detroit, Atlantic City, N.J., West Point and Westchester County, N.Y., and Willow Grove, Pa., were removed.

Other locations remaining on the list are Santa Clara County and Bridgeport, Calif., Long Island, N.Y., New York City, Philadelphia and Camden, N.J.

## Canine deaths prompt halt in bomb-sniffing program

*Stars and Stripes*

The U.S. is temporarily halting a program under which bomb-sniffing dogs were sent to countries in the Middle East after a report released Friday found at least five more of the specially trained dogs had died in Jordan and Egypt following poor care, mistreatment or negligence.

One of the dogs in Jordan died after overheating in June, and another was poisoned by insecticide sprayed near its kennel in September, the report by the State Department's Inspector General said.

Three of 10 dogs the U.S. has provided to Egypt in the past year have also died — one from lung cancer, one from a ruptured gall bladder and one from heat stroke, the report said.

The announcement that the program is being stopped comes months after American inspectors found that at least 12 of the U.S.-trained canines sent to Jordan under an antiterrorism program had died from

medical problems. Others were overworked, unhealthy and forced to live in kennels with "barely existent" sanitation, the officials said in September.

At the time, the IG called for the U.S. to stop sending dogs to Jordan until a plan could be put in place to ensure the animals' health and welfare, but State Department officials refused to do so. The department's top security and counterterrorism officials said their divisions were taking steps to improve monitoring of the health and training of dogs. But the IG learned through a hotline complaint after the original report that two additional dogs had died in Jordan of "non-natural," preventable causes.

"The death of two canines from non-natural causes — namely, hyperthermia and poisoning — since June 2019 raises serious questions about the Department's contention that it has taken adequate steps to protect their health and safety," said the report Friday.



# Holiday break upends impeachment plans

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump is in sunny Florida after his historic impeachment, while plans for his speedy trial back in Washington remained clouded. Senate leaders jockeying for leverage have failed to agree on procedures for the trial.

Trump is still expected to be acquitted of both charges in the Senate, where Republicans have the majority, in what will be only the third presidential impeachment trial in U.S. history. Proceedings are expected to begin in January.

But the impasse between

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer over whether there will be new witnesses and testimony — along with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's refusal so far to send the articles of impeachment to the Senate — have left the situation unresolved.

"Nancy Pelosi is looking for a Quid Pro Quo with the Senate. Why aren't we impeaching her?" Trump tweeted, mocking one of the accusations against him before heading out for a two-week stay at his Mar-a-Lago resort for the holidays.

McConnell, Trump's most powerful GOP ally in the Sen-

ate, welcomed the president's emerging defense team Friday for a walk-through of the Senate chamber. White House counsel Pat Cipollone and legislative affairs director Eric Ueland came to Capitol Hill to assess logistics.

A six-term veteran of the Senate, McConnell is acting very much though he has the votes to ensure a trial uncluttered by witnesses — despite the protests of top Democrats Pelosi and Schumer.

"We have this fascinating situation where, following House Democrats' rush to impeachment, following weeks of pronouncements about the urgency

of this situation, the prosecutors have now developed cold feet," McConnell, R-Ky., said late Thursday as senators left town for the year.

"We'll continue to see how this develops, and whether the House Democrats ever work up the courage to take their accusations to trial."

McConnell has all but promised an easy acquittal of the president. He appears to have united Republicans behind an approach that would begin the trial with presentations and arguments, lasting perhaps two weeks, before he tries drawing the proceedings to a close. The Senate will reconvene Jan. 3.

## Trump signs spending bills, averts shutdown

CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump signed two behemoth spending packages totaling \$1.4 trillion on Friday night, preventing another year-end government shutdown with an hour and a half to spare.

The existing stopgap funding law was set to expire at midnight Eastern time.

Unlike the 35-day shutdown that ended in January, another lapse would have affected every federal agency. The 12 spending bills for the fiscal year ending Sept. 30, 2020, were bundled into two separate packages, one carrying security-related mea-

sures and another containing domestic programs and foreign aid as well as a collection of tax breaks, health care legislation and more.

The president also signed the fiscal 2020 defense authorization bill at an event at Joint Base Andrews in Maryland on Friday night. That measure includes Trump's prized provisions establishing a new Space Force branch of the U.S. military, as well as up to 12 weeks of paid parental leave for federal workers.

Trump's signatures on the fiscal 2020 spending bills end months of back-and-forth be-

tween Republicans and Democrats over how best to divvy up this year's discretionary funding and solve problematic issues like border wall spending — a topic many feared could lead to another shutdown.

The seemingly endless stalemate over the wall ended just over a week ago when appropriators reached agreement to spend \$1.375 billion on border barrier construction during fiscal 2020, keeping funding level with the previous fiscal year.

Negotiators left the Trump administration's ability to reprogram funding from certain accounts to the border

wall intact, but didn't backfill \$3.6 billion the White House diverted from military construction projects to barrier construction.

Neither side was particularly happy with the compromise; in fact, House Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee Chairwoman Lucille Roybal-Allard, D-Calif., voted against her own bill. But bipartisan majorities in both chambers were willing to accept the trade-offs in the end, brushing off critiques about a rushed process and essentially just breaking one giant omnibus package into two pieces.

## Watchdog: No misconduct in death of 2 migrant kids

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Department of Homeland Security's internal watchdog found no wrongdoing or misconduct by immigration officials in the deaths of two migrant children last December.

The Inspector General for the Department of Homeland Security released two brief statements Friday evening on the deaths of Jakelin Amei Rosmery Caal Maquin, who died Dec. 8, and Felipe Gomez Alonzo, who died Dec. 24.

Their deaths ushered in a growing border crisis that caught immigration officials unprepared to manage a crush of Central American families seeking asylum in the U.S. and raised questions on medical care and treatment. Border crossings have since declined in recent months following major crackdowns.

"We are still saddened by the tragic loss of these young lives, and we continue to bolster medical screenings and care at DHS facilities on the border," a spokeswoman

for Homeland Security said. "The men and women of Border Patrol are committed to the highest standards of professionalism and care."

Both children made their way over the U.S.-Mexico border with a parent.

The deaths pushed U.S. Customs and Border protection to increase medical checks. But increasingly more family members would cross the border, overwhelming border facilities in the months after their deaths.

# Vitamin E blamed for most vape illnesses

Associated Press

Health officials now blame vitamin E acetate for the “vast majority” of cases in the U.S. outbreak of vaping illnesses and they say doctors should monitor patients more closely after they go home from the hospital.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced the updated advice Friday.

And, in a related move Friday, authorities investigating how patients obtained possibly tainted vape products said they have shut down 44 websites advertising the sale of illicit vaping cartridges containing THC.

The new medical advice is based on a close look at about 3% of vaping illness patients who returned to the hospital

after discharge and seven who died after hospital discharge.

The study suggests that vaping illnesses can get worse, even deadly, after patients leave the hospital and doctors should check on patients within two days of sending them home.

The two-day followup after hospital discharge is shorter than the previous recommendation of one to two weeks.

Compared to other vaping illness patients, those who went back to the hospital were more likely to have chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease or other breathing problems such as sleep apnea. Those who died after hospital discharge were more likely to be 50 or older.

The CDC also released new information that continues to point to a culprit: vitamin E ac-

etate, a thickening agent that's been added to illicit THC vaping liquids. THC is the chemical in marijuana that makes users feel high.

A report published in the New England Journal of Medicine identified the substance in the lung fluid of 48 out of 51 vaping illness patients and did not find it in the lung fluid of healthy people. Vitamin E acetate also has been found in vaping product samples.

In the strongest language yet about what's caused the outbreak, Dr. Anne Schuchat of the CDC told reporters during a telephone briefing Friday that it is her “conclusion” that vitamin E acetate caused the illness in “the vast majority of patients.”

The nation's outbreak of vaping-related lung injuries con-

tinues, but new cases are on the decline. More than 2,500 cases of vaping illness have been reported by all 50 states. There have been 54 deaths and more deaths are under investigation.

Interviews with patients and families led investigators to some of the websites that were shut down by the Food and Drug Administration and the Drug Enforcement Administration. The agencies did not announce any criminal charges.

The 44 website domains — with names including Stoners Marketplace and Anonymous Meds — now direct visitors to a message in red letters that says “This Site Has Been Seized.”

Investigators have said they are not interested in taking action against individuals who use vaping products, and are focused instead on suppliers.

## MS-13 arrests, charges deal big blow to gang leadership

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Authorities said Friday they have dealt an unprecedented blow to the violent MS-13 street gang, announcing charges against nearly 100 of the group's members and associates on Long Island.

Suffolk County District Attorney Timothy Sini revealed a sweeping indictment that he said “decimated” the gang's leadership and drug suppliers on Long Island. He described the case as the largest of its kind against MS-13 in New York, where the gang has been blamed for dozens of killings since 2016.

The two-year investigation by state and federal authorities thwarted more than a half-dozen murder plots, Sini said, and also provided authorities insights into the gang's structure and recruiting patterns. The investigation was bolstered by an expansive wire tap in which the authorities monitored calls from more than 200 phone numbers.

Gang members on Long Island conspired with colleagues from as far away as Europe and Oklahoma, collecting cash from drug sales and sending that money to the organization's leaders in El Salvador, according to the 77-count indictment handed up Monday.

The gang feuded against rivals and would even kill its own members who showed signs of disloyalty or failed to perform “required tasks,” the indictment says.

“MS-13 is a ruthless, savage gang,” Sini said at a news conference, pointing to a machete recovered by law enforcement, the gang's signature weapon. “They will attempt to recalculate and send individuals to take up leadership roles in Suffolk County. That's why we have to stay vigilant.”

Authorities said they seized more than 10 kilograms of cocaine, hundreds of fentanyl pills, drug ledgers, long guns and other firearms, and more than \$200,000 cash.

## US diplomat's wife charged in UK teen's death in crash

Associated Press

LONDON — An American diplomat's wife who left the U.K. after being involved in a road accident that killed a British teenager has been charged with causing death by dangerous driving, British prosecutors said Friday.

The Crown Prosecution Service said it had begun extradition proceedings against Anne Sacoolas.

The decision to charge Sacoolas, who has claimed diplomatic immunity, has caused tensions between the U.K. and the United States. British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab welcomed the move but the State Department called it unhelpful.

British police say 19-year-old motorcycle rider Harry Dunn died in August when he was hit by a car driven by Sacoolas, whose husband was an intelligence officer at RAF Croughton, a military base in central England used by U.S. forces.

Sacoolas claimed diplomatic immunity and left Britain after the crash.

Dunn's family has urged her to return and face British justice and met with U.S. President Donald Trump in Washington as part of their campaign.

Britain's prosecution service said it had authorized police to charge Sacoolas with causing death by dangerous driving — which carries a maximum sentence of 14 years in prison — “following a thorough review of the evidence available.”

Prosecutors said they had begun extradition proceedings although it is up to the government to formally ask through diplomatic channels for Sacoolas to be sent back to Britain.

Sacoolas's lawyer, Amy Jeffress, said her client had co-operated fully with the investigation but “will not return voluntarily to the United Kingdom to face a potential jail sentence for what was a terrible but unintentional accident.”



# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Skydiving Santa sent to hospital for hard landing

**FL** COCOA BEACH — Without reindeer or a sleigh, a skydiving Santa in Florida made a hard landing on the beach and had to be taken to a hospital.

Organizers of the Skydiving Santas event in Cocoa Beach said the woman was conscious and breathing when she was airlifted by helicopter to a nearby hospital. She wasn't identified and her condition wasn't known.

Orlando television station WESH reported that almost 100 skydivers dressed in Santa's red suit and white beard took part in the event on Florida's Space Coast.

## Boy, 3, shoots sleeping father in buttocks

**PA** ERIE — A 3-year-old Erie boy shot his sleeping father in the buttocks with a gun he found in their Pennsylvania home, authorities said.

The shooting happened about in Erie, when the child found a loaded, small-caliber handgun and fired it at his 26-year-old father. The dad was being treated at a hospital for wounds that are not considered life-threatening. His name was not released.

It's not clear how the child found the handgun, authorities said. Two other children in the house at the time were not injured.

## Family adopts sick dog after wanders into home

**PA** PHILADELPHIA — A malnourished dog that wandered into a Philadelphia home during a storm was adopted.

Sports podcast host Jack Jokinen said his wife found the

dog when she went to grab a pacifier for their baby early in the morning. She woke Jokinen up, and he rushed downstairs, where all the doors and windows were closed.

After watching surveillance footage of his home, Jokinen figured out that the wind had blown his front door wide open for several hours, he said in a video he posted on Twitter.

The footage showed a dog limp through the door at about 3:15 a.m. About 30 minutes later, a man walked up and shut the door.

## Falling tree barely misses passing car

**MA** LEICESTER — It was a close call between a Massachusetts driver and a falling tree that barely missed the car.

The Leicester Police Department's surveillance system captured the close call.

The footage shows the large tree starting to fall as a black car drives down the road with no sign of slowing down. The car drives past the tree just before it crashes to the ground, blocking both sides of Route 9.

## Artifact found in 1973 may be 3,000 years old

**NC** MONROE — An item found in North Carolina in 1973 may be thousands of years old, according to the state's office of archaeology.

The 7-inch carved artifact found by a Monroe landowner is suspected to be a grooved adz, a tool used for smoothing or trimming wood, The Charlotte Observer reported.

The item's age is unclear, but likely dates to the Late Archaic period between 3,000-1,000 B.C.

## Mayor pardons pigs ahead of holiday dinner

**FL** MIAMI — Miami has a little different take on the presidential turkey pardoning. Mayor Carlos Gimenez adds some caliente to the tradition by pardoning a pig.

Roasted pig or lechon is the centerpiece of many South Florida Christmas feasts.

The two lucky pigs, Peppa and Petra, were rescued from a local slaughterhouse by the Aguacate Sanctuary of Love.

## Man dragged deputy trying to stop car

**NE** GRAND ISLAND — A man was sentenced for dragging a Nebraska sheriff's deputy as the deputy tried to stop a car the man was driving.

Hall County District Court records said Tristan Bush was given two to three years last month after pleading no contest to several charges, including assault on a police officer and using a deadly weapon in resisting arrest.

Bush was a passenger in the car but slid over and began driving away to keep the deputy from arresting him on several warrants, authorities said.

## Man given 15 years in Testicle Festival crash

**MT** MISSOULA — A judge sentenced a 44-year-old man to 15 years in prison after he pleaded guilty to causing the fatal crash of a shuttle car after leaving a festival in western Montana.

Prosecutors said Bayford was riding in the shuttle to Missoula after being kicked out of the now-defunct Testicle Festival in August 2017. They said he jerked the steering wheel, caus-

ing the modified Jeep Wrangler to roll over on Interstate 90.

Killed in the crash were Vanessa Anderson, 33, and Donny Barlow, 36.

## 4 accused of smuggling meth from Mexico

**CA** RIVERSIDE — Authorities arrested four men suspected in an operation to use an ultralight to fly nearly 200 pounds of methamphetamine into Southern California from Mexico, the U.S. Attorney's Office announced.

The arrests came after U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents detected the glider-like aircraft crossing into the U.S. from Calexico, Mexico, according to a statement.

Victor Bugarin Perez, 28; Juan Favela Paredez, 25; Juan Carlos Iturriaga Centeno, 33, and Centeno's brother, Leonardo Iturriaga Centeno, 28, could face charges including possession and intent to distribute meth, prosecutors said.

## Rare white deer herd tour to come to an end

**NY** ROMULUS — Tours of a rare white deer herd on a wildlife sanctuary at a former Cold War weapons depot are slated to end soon because of financial troubles, but the property owner said he'll continue protection of the herd and look for ways to resume public access.

The board of directors of the nonprofit Seneca White Deer, Inc., voted to end tours at the former Seneca Army Depot because donations weren't meeting expenses, said the organization's president, Dennis Money. He said more than 15,000 people have taken tours since they started two years ago, but operations will end Dec. 29.

From wire reports

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# Jets' Bell prepares to face former team

Associated Press

FLORHAM PARK, N.J. — Le'Veon Bell will jog onto the field at MetLife Stadium on Sunday and spot plenty of Jets fans in the stands wearing his green and white jersey.

The New York running back knows lots of well-traveled Steelers fans will also make the trek from Pittsburgh, where he spent his first six NFL seasons. Some might even be decked out in his old black and gold No. 26, rooting for their team while also paying homage to one of the Steelers' best players in recent years.

Others might, well, remind Bell he's an enemy now.

"I think it'll probably be 50-50," Bell said Thursday of the reception he expects from visiting Steelers fans. "I think it'll be half that are happy to see me and still love me, and half that hate me, despise me. It is what it is."

"I'm going to show love, regardless, to everybody wearing my jersey on both sides and things like that, so that'll be fun."

Bell facing familiar foes

makes for a juicy storyline to a late-season showdown between the team he once played for that's trying to keep pace in the playoff hunt and the struggling squad he's on now that has been ravaged by injuries and inconsistency.

Still, the man nicknamed "Juice" refused to add any extra to the matchup, maintaining a reserved approach while talking about the Steelers.

"Going out there against guys that I practiced with for a long time and actually get a chance to compete against them," Bell said, "it's going to be fun."

There's no animosity from either side, with the Steelers players also not taking any cheap shots at their former teammate.

"I love the dude," Pittsburgh defensive tackle Cam Heyward said. "Even though he's on a different team, we play football and we're trying to get after him. In the right mind, we appreciate what he's done here. He's going to be going at us, too. We don't expect him to be going light."

"We have to make sure we bring our hard hat because he's

going to be trying to get some payback. I know that."

Bell was drafted by the Steelers in the second round out of Michigan State in 2013 and quickly established himself as one of the NFL's most versatile running backs.

He made three Pro Bowls during his first five seasons and put up monstrous numbers on the ground and as a pass catcher out of the backfield. Bell used a deliberate running style to become a dynamic force for Pittsburgh — and a fan favorite.

Then, came contract squabbles. First in 2017, when the Steelers placed the franchise tag on him. Then, last year, when they did it again and Bell refused to sign it. He ended up sitting out the entire season, then signed a four-year, \$52.5 million contract with the Jets that included \$35 million guaranteed.

"Last year is last year and two years ago is two years ago," Bell said. "I'm over it now, I'm past it. I'm here. I'm with the New York Jets and I'm happy."

But the numbers wouldn't necessarily show it.

Bell has rushed for just 676 yards and three touchdowns with an average of 3.3 yards per carry, which is a career low. He has yet to run for more than 100 yards in any game, with last week's 87-yard performance at Baltimore his season high. Bell is second on the Jets with 57 catches for 404 yards and a score, but he has not been the elite playmaking presence most expected when he came to New York.

And, because of that, some label Bell a free-agent bust.

"People look at stats and just go off the stats, which is OK," he said. "I mean, it's not their fault. I think people who understand football and break down the film and watch it, they know exactly what's going on, what type of player I am, how I've been performing."

"Stats don't really show how well I've been playing. Regardless of the stats, I don't really care what people think. I know I've been playing very good football and I'm continuing to get better. ... I'm healthy. I feel good. It's Week 16. I'm happy right now."

## NASCAR 'Last American Hero' Johnson dies at 88

Associated Press

Robert Glenn "Junior" Johnson, the moonshine runner turned NASCAR driver described as "The Last American Hero" by author Tom Wolfe in a 1965 article for Esquire, died Friday. He was 88.

NASCAR announced the death of Johnson, the winner of 50 races as a driver and 132 as an owner. He was a member of the inaugural class inducted into the NASCAR Hall of Fame in 2010.

"From his early days running moonshine through the end of his life, Junior wholly embodied the NASCAR spirit," NASCAR Chairman Jim France said in a statement. "He was an inaugural NASCAR Hall of Famer, a nod to an extraordinary career as both a driver and team

owner. Between his on-track accomplishments and his introduction of (sponsor) Winston to the sport, few have contributed to the success of NASCAR as Junior has."

"The entire NASCAR family is saddened by the loss of a true giant of our sport, and we offer our deepest condolences to Junior's family and friends during this difficult time."

From North Wilkesboro, N.C., Johnson was named one of NASCAR's greatest drivers in 1998 after a 14-year career that ended in 1966 and included a win in the 1960 Daytona 500. He honed his driving skills running moonshine through the North Carolina hills, a crime for which he received a federal conviction in 1956 and a full presidential pardon in

1986 from President Ronald Reagan.

He was first immortalized by Wolfe in 1965 and later in a 1973 movie adaptation starring Jeff Bridges.

As a car owner for drivers that included Darrell Waltrip, Cale Yarborough, Bill Elliott and Terry Labonte, Johnson claimed six Cup championships. His last race win as an owner was the 1994 Southern 500 with Elliott.

Waltrip said he grew up only dreaming of one day meeting Johnson, but surpassed that by getting to drive for his hero.

"He became my boss and made me a champion, I loved that man, God Bless Jr and his family. You were the greatest!" Waltrip said on Twitter.

Johnson also is credited with

bringing the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company to NASCAR, which then led to Winston sponsoring its premier series from 1971-2003.

"The Last American Hero is gone and so leaves a huge dent in NASCAR racing. Junior Johnson was one of American sports' great characters and one of the best racer and car owners ever. His mountain man drawl and tricks were legendary," former race promoter Humpy Wheeler said. "He'll go down as one of racing's great ticket sellers."

Johnson is credited with discovering drafting — using the slipstream of the car in front of you on the track to keep up or slingshot past. Using that maneuver, he won the 1960 Daytona 500.



## College football roundup

# Kent State, Buffalo get first bowl wins

Associated Press

FRISCO, Texas — Kent State football players, as coach Sean Lewis said Thursday, haven't been able to call themselves winners for seven years. On Friday night, the Golden Flashes not only became winners but also achieved something that no other team in school history could claim — a bowl victory.

Dustin Crum passed for 289 yards and two touchdowns and ran for a career-high 147 yards and the clinching score to help Kent State beat Utah State 51-41 in the Frisco Bowl.

"I'm just so happy for the university," said Crum, who also was Kent State's leading rusher during the season. "We weren't supposed to be here, but here we are."

Kent State (7-6) closed with four straight wins to finish with a winning record for the first time since 2012.

"I love these boys," said second-year coach Lewis, whose first Kent State team finished 2-10. "Just tremendous resolve by them. It was a testament to

their character."

Matthew Trickett kicked five field goals to set a Kent State game record.

Crum threw a 78-yard touchdown pass to Isaiah McKoy down the right sideline on Kent State's third play from scrimmage. Crum flipped a 1-yard scoring pass to Antwan Dixon with 9:36 to play to put the Golden Flashes ahead for good, then scored with 1:56 left on a fourth-and-1 run from the 4.

"This is a group that fights together," said Lewis, the youngest head coach in the FBS at 33 years old. "They bolt tight when things get hard. They showed that tonight and, man, do they finish strong. They finished this game strong, the right way. They finished the season the right way."

Jordan Love passed for 308 yards and three touchdowns, two of them to Siaoisi Mariner, in his final game for Utah State (7-6). The junior announced last week that he'll bypass his senior season to enter the NFL Draft.

Deven Thompkins scored on

a 57-yard run and a 17-yard reception for the Aggies.

"That was our goal, to get home and take that trophy with us, and it didn't happen," Utah State coach Gary Andersen said. "So, that's extremely disappointing."

"We played hard the entire game but couldn't finish it," Thompkins said.

### Bahamas Bowl

**Buffalo 31, Charlotte 9:** At Nassau, Bahamas, Jaret Patterson Patterson ran for 173 yards and two touchdowns, Kyle Vantrease passed for a touchdown and ran for another and the Bulls got their first bowl win in four tries by beating the 49ers.

"I'm just really proud of this group of guys and how hard they worked," Bulls coach Lance Leipold said. "We overcame a lot."

Patterson had 32 carries for the Bulls (8-5), who were winless in three previous bowl appearances. He finished the year with a slew of school sin-

gle-season records, including 330 carries, 1,799 yards and 19 rushing touchdowns.

Antonio Nunn caught a 12-yard touchdown pass from Vantrease on the first Buffalo drive to open the scoring, and Vantrease capped a 15-play, 74-yard, 8½-minute drive by plunging in from the 1 with 3:33 left in the half to push the Bulls' lead to 14-0.

Patterson scored on a 6-yard run midway through the third quarter to make it 24-0, then sealed the win with a 10-yard TD rush late to cap a 16-play scoring drive.

"He wore us down," Charlotte coach Will Healy said.

Victor Tucker caught a 51-yard catch-and-run touchdown pass from Chris Reynolds late in the third quarter for Charlotte (7-6), which saw its five-game winning streak snapped. Charlotte was in a bowl game for the first time.

Reynolds completed 15 of 24 passes for 198 yards.

The bowl game was the first of 40 to be played this season.

## College basketball roundup

# No. 23 Penn State eases past Central Connecticut

Associated Press

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. — More than two decades had passed since Penn State celebrated a win as a ranked team in basketball.

The 23rd-ranked Nittany Lions, who snapped their 23-year drought with an 87-58 win over Central Connecticut on Friday, believe they can sustain their best stretch of play in coach Patrick Chambers' nine seasons.

"I truly believe our best basketball is ahead of us," Chambers said. "We haven't seen this team hit on all cylinders yet."

But the Nittany Lions appear to be close.

Myreon Jones scored 11 of his 21 points in the first half and the Nittany Lions (10-2) notched highlight after highlight in their third-straight win and 12th in a row at home dating to last season.

"I'm really just worried about winning right now. I don't worry about stats," Jones said.

Izaiah Brockington scored 11 points and Lamar Stevens added 10 for the Nittany Lions (10-2), who led for all but 53 seconds.

Ty Outlaw had 14 points for the Blue Devils (0-12), who trailed by as many as 32 points with just over six minutes to play.

Less than a minute in, Stevens got open under the basket and threw down a dunk without a blue jersey around him. That started a 27-10 run in which Penn State went 11-for-11 from the floor, including 5-for-5 from three-point range.

The Nittany Lions, who shot 62% from the floor in the first half, didn't miss until Curtis Jones clanked a three off the rim with 11:20 left in the half.

**Navy 59, Mount St. Mary's 48:** John Carter Jr. posted 17 points as the host Midshipmen defeated the Mountaineers.

Cam Davis had 15 points for Navy (6-4), and Greg Summers added 11 points. The Midship-

men trailed 14-9 before closing the first half with five three-pointers to take a 31-21 lead.

Malik Jefferson and Nana Opoku each had eight points for Mount St. Mary's (3-9), which has lost four straight games. The Mountaineers have losses to Georgetown, Washington, UAB and Kentucky this season.

Navy plays No. 9 Virginia on the road next Sunday. It will mark just the second time a Navy team has played the defending NCAA champion after facing Kentucky, the 1958 winner. Mount St. Mary's plays Coppin State at home next Friday.

## NBA roundup

## Jokic's fifth triple-double leads Denver

Associated Press

DENVER — Nikola Jokic had 22 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists for his fifth triple-double of the season, and Denver completed a sweep of a five-game homestand with a 109-100 win over Minnesota.

It was Jokic's eighth straight double-double and his second triple-double in that span. He has 33 career triple-doubles.

Minnesota, playing without center Karl-Anthony Towns for the second straight game due to a sprained left knee, has lost nine straight.

**Heat 129, Knicks 114:** Bam Adebayo scored 20 points and Miami's starters got the fourth quarter off in an easy win over visiting New York.

The Heat cruised to such a degree that Jimmy Butler was only called upon to take three shots. Butler finished with nine points and eight assists in 28 minutes.

**Warriors 106, Pelicans 102:** D'Angelo Russell made a tiebreaking 22-foot jumper with 32.9 seconds remaining,

and struggling host Golden State won after blowing a 20-point lead.

Russell finished with 25 points and seven assists as the Warriors (6-24) snapped a five-game losing streak with their second win over the Pelicans (7-23) this season.

**Thunder 126, Suns 108:** Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored a career-high 32 points and Oklahoma City rolled past visiting Phoenix.

Dennis Schroder scored 24 points and Danilo Gallinari scored 22 for the Thunder, who shot 56.3% from the field. Oklahoma City has won three straight to even its record at 14-14.

**Raptors 122, Wizards 118:** Kyle Lowry scored 26 points, Serge Ibaka had 23 points and 10 rebounds, and short-handed host Toronto overcame the absence of three injured starters to beat struggling Washington.

Bradley Beal scored 37 points, Ish Smith had 26 and Isaiah Thomas scored 12 as the Wizards lost for the eighth time in 10 December games.

**Celtics 114, Pistons 93:** Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown each scored 26 points in three quarters as Boston routed visiting Detroit.

Rookie Grant Williams added a career-high 18 points and Enes Kanter pulled down 18 rebounds for the Celtics, who finished with a 51-36 advantage on the boards.

**Cavaliers 114, Grizzlies 107:** Jordan Clarkson scored a season-high 33 points, Kevin Love hit the go-ahead three-pointer with just over a minute to play and host Cleveland beat Memphis.

Jaren Jackson led Memphis with 24 points while Dillon Brooks scored 16, but the Grizzlies took their second straight tough loss on a night rookie star Ja Morant matched a season low with eight points.

**Pacers 119, Kings 105:** T.J. Warren scored 23 points and Indiana beat visiting Sacramento for its fifth straight victory.

Myles Turner added 17 points, and Domantas Sabonis and T.J. McConnell each had

15, with Sabonis also grabbing nine rebounds as the Pacers improved to 20-9.

**Trail Blazers 118, Magic 103:** Damian Lillard scored 36 points, CJ McCollum had 31 and host Portland beat Orlando.

Portland earned its season-high third straight win despite losing Carmelo Anthony to a bruised left knee in the second quarter. The Trail Blazers improved to 8-7 since Anthony joined the team a month ago.

**Mavericks 117, 76ers 98:** Kristaps Porzingis had 22 points and a career-high 18 rebounds, Tim Hardaway Jr. added 27 points and visiting Dallas handed Philadelphia its second straight home loss.

The Mavericks improved to 11-2 on the road despite playing without second-year star guard Luka Doncic. The 20-year-old missed his third straight game with a right ankle sprain. Doncic, one of the league leaders in minutes, points, rebounds and assists, is averaging 29.3 points, 9.3 rebounds and 8.9 assists.

## NHL roundup

## Another Acciari hat trick pushes Panthers past Stars

Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. — Noel Acciari completed his second straight hat trick with a penalty shot and added an assist in Florida's five-goal second period in the Panthers' 7-4 victory over the Dallas Stars on Friday night.

Acciari had the natural hat trick in a Florida-record 3:59 span, pushing his season goals total to a career-high 11.

The 28-year-old former Providence player began the run at 7:26 of the second, struck again at 7:58, and slipped his first career penalty shot through goalie Anton Khudobin's pads with

8:35 left in the period to make it 7-1. Acciari got the short-handed penalty shot after he was hooked by John Klingberg on a breakaway.

Acciari had his first career three-goal game Tuesday night in a 6-1 victory over Ottawa.

Jonathan Huberdeau had a goal and three assists for a second consecutive four-point outing, and Vincent Trocheck added a goal and two assists.

**Capitals 6, Devils 3:** Nicklas Backstrom had two goals and two assists, and visiting Washington beat New Jersey.

Alex Ovechkin and John Carlson each had a goal and an assist as the Capitals rebound-

ed from Monday's 3-0 loss at Columbus, improving to 16-3-1 on the road. Jonas Siegenthaler and Richard Panik also scored, and rookie Ilya Samsonov made 24 saves.

Washington's 26-6-5 record is currently the NHL's best. It is the only team in the league not to lose consecutive games in regulation this season.

**Maple Leafs 6, Rangers 3:** William Nylander and Mitchell Marner each scored their second goal of the game early in the third period as visiting Toronto doubled up New York.

Pierre Engvall and Ilya Mikheyev also scored, and Frederik Andersen made 19

saves as Toronto won its third straight.

Brady Skjei, Ryan Strome and Pavel Buchnevich scored for New York. Alexandar Georgiev made 34 saves as the Rangers' losing streak reached three games.

**Penguins 5, Oilers 2:** Tristan Jarry made 26 saves, Jared McCann scored and visiting Pittsburgh beat Edmonton.

Chad Ruhwedel, Joseph Blandisi, Kris Letang and Brandon Tanev also scored for the Penguins, who have won four straight.

Zack Kassian and Riley Sheahan scored for the Oilers, who have lost six of seven.