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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Islamic State attacks air base in Iraq

Government forces kill all 8 attackers at facility where about 400 US troops are stationed

By JON HARPER
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Islamic State militants on Friday penetrated the perimeter of an Iraqi base where about 400 U.S. troops are stationed, according to military officials.

Eight insurgents attacked an Iraqi army facility on the Al Asad Air Base in Anbar province, according to a statement by Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve.

"The Iraqi Security Forces supported by Coalition surveillance assets defeated the attack, killing all eight attackers. The ISF have since re-secured their facility," CJTF-OIR said in the statement.

Australian army Maj. Sarah Hawke, a task force spokeswoman, said the militants penetrated the perimeter of the base, but coalition forces were not directly involved in the counterattack. Their contribution

was limited to aerial surveillance to assist the ISF.

"Coalition forces were several kilometers from the attack and at no stage were they under direct threat from this action," CJTF-OIR said in the statement.

Hawke said the militants are believed to have been on a suicide mission, but she did not know what types of weapons they used.

This isn't the first time that Al Asad has come under insurgent attack. For months, the Islamic State group has been regularly launching small-scale rocket and mortar attacks on the facility.

The base "has been subjected to ineffective, indirect fires ... on average several times per week for several months now," Pentagon spokesman Col. Steve Warren told reporters Thursday before the attack that breached the perimeter occurred. "Al Asad is a large and sprawling base. Thus

far, none of the indirect fire attacks that have been launched against it have had any impact at all — no American casualties, no American equipment damaged."

There are about 400 American troops at Al Asad training and advising ISF forces, who are battling the Islamic State group in Anbar and across Iraq. President Barack Obama has ruled out sending American ground forces into combat in Iraq, and the administration's strategy for defeating the Islamic State group relies heavily on local forces to retake captured territory.

The U.S. military plans to train nine ISF brigades and three peshmerga brigades. Iraqi forces are expected to launch major offensives to retake key terrain, perhaps as early as this spring.

There are about 2,600 total U.S. troops in Iraq.

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22 Marines exposed to fire retardant in Calif.

The Associated Press

TWENTYNINE PALMS, Calif. — Nearly two dozen Marines were treated for exposure to a fire retardant gas Thursday after an extinguishing system accidentally went off in an assault vehicle during a training exercise, but there were no serious injuries, officials said.

An equipment malfunction caused the fire-suppression system to go off inside a tank-like amphibious assault vehicle during an afternoon exercise at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in Twentynine Palms, base spokesman Dave Marks said.

There was no fire or explosion but 22 Marines were exposed to halon, Marks said.

All of them were taken to the base hospital. Three were kept overnight for observation and the rest were released to resume training, Marks said.

Halon gas is widely used in fire extinguisher systems because it is relatively nontoxic and leaves no residue, but it can cause breathing problems at high concentrations. The U.S. banned new production of halon in the 1990s because it can deplete ozone in the atmosphere, but its use is still allowed.

The Marines were from the 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, based in Hawaii and were participating in an integrated training exercise at the Southern California base, according to the Marine Corps.

They were inside an armored vehicle that is used to ferry Marines from ships to shore.

Twentynine Palms, 130 miles east of Los Angeles, is the largest Marine training base in the world. Thousands of Marines take part in live-fire drills in rugged terrain deep in the Mojave desert.

"Ninety percent of the Marines will cycle through here for their combined-arms training," Marks said.

In January, two Marine pilots, Capt. Elizabeth Kealey and 1st Lt. Adam Satterfield, were killed when their helicopter crashed during a training exercise at the base. The cause of the crash is under investigation.

Dramatic arrest detailed at Kyle trial

STEPHENVILLE, Texas — Eddie Ray Routh spoke of insanity, anarchy and the apocalypse when police tried to arrest him after the shooting deaths of "American Sniper" author Chris Kyle and his friend.

Much of the dramatic evidence presented by prosecutors so far in Routh's capital murder trial has outlined for jurors his actions and words on the day Kyle and Chad Littlefield were killed at a rural Texas shooting range two years ago.

Defense attorneys are mounting an insanity defense for the former Marine. Prosecutors have described Routh, 27, as a troubled drug user who knew right from wrong despite any history of mental illnesses.

If convicted, Routh faces life in prison without parole.

From The Associated Press

Bill: Publish names of military sex offenders

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Defense Department would be required to publish a database of all convicted military sex offenders under new legislation introduced Thursday by House lawmakers.

The bill, sponsored by Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., and Rep. Mike Coffman, R-Colo., is aimed at closing a legal loophole allowing servicemembers to self-report their convictions to law enforcement — civilians are automatically added to such registries — while also making DOD sex crime records available to communities across the country.

The lawmakers said they are concerned that those convicted in courts-martial are leaving the services and disappearing back into civilian life where their pasts are unknown. A recent investigation by news organization E.W. Scripps found that 242 military sex offenders out of 1,300 cases examined were never recorded on any public registry despite a federal law that makes it a felony to ignore reporting requirements.

“When you have somebody convicted of a sexual crime, the rate of recidivism is extremely high,” Coffman said. “Given the opportunity, they will reoffend.”

Speier said the bill creates a DOD registry for those convicted of rape, sexual assault and

other sex-based offenses similar to the registries kept by local governments, states and law enforcement agencies across the country. The registries are designed to reduce repeat offenses by letting communities know if a sex offender is living nearby and what crimes they committed.

Sex offenders are required to register immediately after their convictions or when they are released from prison and to report to authorities where they live, work and go to school. The bill would add the global and often-transient military community to the system by requiring the DOD to perform and publish its own registry, rather than relying on other civilian authorities to distribute the information.

Speier said the DOD database also would include descriptions of each offender’s crimes beyond a list of military convictions such as “conduct unbecoming” that can obscure the nature of what crime was committed. She recounted incidents in which a servicemember had several 12-year-olds walk on his chest in high heels and touch his genitals. In another case, an airman posed as a doctor and persuaded a woman to submit to pelvic exams even after a conviction for the same acts.

Speier said Thursday that there was no projected cost for the database and new reporting.

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Utah mother guilty of killing 6 newborns

PROVO, Utah — A woman who said she was too addicted to methamphetamine to raise more children pleaded guilty to charges that she killed six of her newborn babies and hid their bodies in her garage over a 10-year period.

Prosecutors said the plea deal means Megan Huntsman, 39, likely will spend the rest of

her life in prison over what authorities described as a heinous series of killings from 1996 to 2006.

Huntsman’s voice broke as she said “guilty” six times Thursday to answer for each count.

The infants’ remains were discovered by their father, Darren West, last April in the home they had shared in Pleasant Grove, a city of about 35,000.

From The Associated Press

Lawyers spar at trial of desertion suspect

The Associated Press

CAMP LEJEUNE, N.C. — The criminal case against a Marine accused of deserting his unit in Iraq a decade ago began taking shape when Navy criminal investigators assumed the worst about the Muslim corporal based on hearsay from other servicemembers, a defense attorney argued Thursday.

Prosecutors countered in their own opening statements that Cpl. Wassef Hassoun burned personal items and withdrew money before he disappeared from a base in Iraq in 2004; avoided some duties; and was unhappy he couldn’t join the woman with whom he’d entered an arranged marriage.

They displayed quotes attributed to Hassoun before his disappearance: “I’ll leave and go to Lebanon. I’m not kidding.”

Hassoun is charged with desertion, larceny and destruction of government property. If convicted of all counts at the bench

trial before a military judge, he faces a maximum of 27 years in prison.

Defense attorney Haytham Faraj acknowledged that Hassoun talked about being unhappy and wanting to leave the Marines, but he said many Marines make similar comments. He said prosecutors have no evidence that Hassoun fled his post in 2004. Prosecutors have acknowledged their case is circumstantial.

Faraj said the “rush to judgment” by the Naval Criminal Investigative Service was “worthy of a novel, a spy novel.”

After Hassoun disappeared in Fallujah in 2004, the defense attorney said, suspicious comrades told investigators about comments Hassoun made about the conflict between his native Lebanon and Israel. Soon, Faraj said, NCIS investigators were scrutinizing Hassoun’s relatives, “hoping to hit a jackpot” by tying them to a terror group.

Hormone treatment OK’d for Chelsea Manning

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Hormone treatment for gender reassignment has been approved for Chelsea Manning, the former intelligence analyst convicted of espionage for sending classified documents to the WikiLeaks website.

Defense Department officials said Thursday that the hormone therapy was approved Feb. 5 by Col. Erica Nelson, commandant of the U.S. Disciplinary Barracks at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., where Manning is serving a 35-year sentence.

The treatment would enable the Army private formerly known as Bradley Manning

to make the transition to a woman. Manning changed her legal name in April 2014.

The officials were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity. The memo approving Manning’s hormone treatment was first reported by USA Today.

The decision came after a lawsuit was filed in September in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. It alleged Manning, 26, was at a high risk of self-castration and suicide unless she received more focused treatment for gender dysphoria, the sense of not being the gender a person physically appears to be.

Cavs red hot at All-Star break

The Associated Press

CLEVELAND — As LeBron James dressed following a dominating win over the Miami Heat, the team he fled to return home, he pushed play on the stereo in his corner cubicle and cranked up the volume.

Suddenly, the Cleveland Cavaliers' locker room, still filled with reporters, was alive with thumping music, turning the space into a postgame dance club.

With rapper Lupe Fiasco's "Deliver" providing the beat, James bobbed his head and spit lyrics as if he had written them himself. Cavaliers guard Iman Shumpert, too, began to bounce, and it wasn't long before normally reserved All-Star guard Kyrie Irving showed off a few moves, grooving his way around reporters and toward the door.

As he left, James, Shumpert and J.R. Smith smiled and laughed along with him.

The Cavaliers have found their rhythm after a clumsy start.

Entering the All-Star break with 14 wins in 16 games following a 113-98 loss to the Bulls in Chicago on Thursday, the Cavs, revamped by two trades and James' two-week wellness break, have put a turmoil-filled few months behind them. They again look like a team capable of winning an NBA title.

They've found harmony on and off the floor, reflected on Wednesday in 32 assists in 44 field goals against the Heat, who could do little about a high-flying Cleveland team that took turns offering

up lob passes for dunks.

"It's the team," said James, re-energized by a recent hiatus. "We all care about the team, and we all care about each other right now. We're still growing, obviously. But it's fun basketball when everyone feels in a rhythm. When the ball is moving and popping from one side to the other, that's important to our success."

Nothing has meant more to Cleveland's success than James. The 30-year-old looks refreshed after resting a troublesome back and knee. More importantly, James appears confident that Cleveland's roster, bolstered by the acquisitions of Smith, Shumpert and center 7-foot-1 Timofey Mozgov, a Russian wrecking ball at both ends, can make a run at a championship.

The Cavs are 31-14 with James in the lineup, and just 2-8 without him, an imbalance that perhaps makes the best case why he might win a fifth league MVP award. Following the 113-93 dismantling of the Heat (who played without star Dwyane Wade) Cavs swingman Mike Miller, the team's resident chairman of positive vibes, yelled across the room to point out a TV screen showing James as an MVP candidate.

"I don't know why," James cracked. "I (stink)."

Hardly. In the 16 games since he returned, James is averaging 27 points on 49 percent shooting. But beyond his always gaudy stats, James is providing leadership to a Cavs team still working through some kinks. It hasn't always been smooth, as evidenced by this week's

strange situation when James posted a message on Twitter aimed at teammate Kevin Love, backtracked from his story, and then blamed the media for creating controversy.

But despite any issues with first-year coach David Blatt or Love's uneven transition — he's still averaging 17 points and 10 rebounds — the Cavs are flourishing and they may have only scratched their potential. James insists he won't know the team's true identity until the postseason, when every possession is magnified, and team's flaws are exposed in the back and forth of a seven-game series.

For now, though, there is a calm and confidence about the Cavaliers. Winning will do that.

Saddled with extreme expectations, they're fulfilling them.

Back in July when he announced his homecoming, James warned in an essay that any path to a title would be filled with challenges. He's done this before, which is why James hasn't allowed three months of twists and turns to deter him.

"Everyone wanted overnight success. It's not about that. It's about the process for me. I've always stayed even-keeled," he said. "I understand we have a lot of room to improve and we have to continue to work our habits in a good way."

James won't allow this year's extended All-Star breather to interrupt his team's rhythm. In fact, he believes it will only make the Cavaliers better.

"The break will allow me to get healthy," James said, smiling. "We'll be all right."

1 medal has to do for Vonn

The Associated Press

BEAVER CREEK, Colo. — Lindsey Vonn traded in her ski boots for dancing shoes as she attended a party Thursday night where the guest of honor was none other than herself.

A chance to unwind with her world championships now complete since she's skipping the slalom. It's been an exhausting two weeks for Vonn that's produced one medal (bronze in the super-G), a tender right knee (thank the bumpy course for that) and a few tears as the pressure of wanting to do well in front of the hometown wore on her.

"I tried my hardest," said Vonn, who arrived at a party in Vail, Colo., thrown to toast not only her medal at worlds but becoming the all-time winningest female World Cup racer earlier this season. "Even though I didn't get as many medals as everyone expected me to, I'm still happy with my performance."

Ever since a second knee surgery kept her out of the Sochi Games, Vonn's been looking forward to these world championships, treating it almost like the Olympics she didn't get to attend last February.

The Beaver Creek course appeared well-suited for Vonn, too. A home-slope advantage for sure.

Only, Vonn knew better. It was too twisty and technical. Not only that, but the course turned more and more icy and bumpy as the days wore on, which didn't sit well with her right knee.

"My meniscus has taken a pretty bad beating," Vonn said. "It's probably going to be like that forever. Thankfully I don't race on ice very often. It should be OK rest of season."

This course fit the likes of Tina Maze of Slovenia and Anna Fenninger of Austria way better — technical skiers who made themselves right at home on the tight terrain. That's why Vonn's not surprised Maze and Fenninger each have two gold medals and a silver so far.

"Those two can turn with the best of them," Vonn said. "I knew they were going to be big contenders. This isn't a gliders' downhill."

Still, Vonn insisted the hill wasn't in her head even if she struggled at times to find her rhythm.

"The icy conditions were just hard for me," Vonn said. "I felt like in all the races, I was mentally on my game. I was ready and confident, from doing so well in the World Cups. Mind over matter didn't work. When I got on the ice, it didn't work." Vonn's last race of the championships was a 14th place finish in the giant slalom. She struggled in the first run before finding speed in the second, finishing 3.22 seconds behind Fenninger's winning time.

When she finished her last run, Vonn blew kisses to the crowd. If she had a mulligan, Vonn insisted she wouldn't have done anything different leading up to these championships.

Leading NBA teams hope for continuity

The Associated Press

The Atlanta Hawks tried to get into the LeBron James sweepstakes last summer, but never really had a chance.

In fact, high-profile free agents for the last couple of years had been giving the Hawks the cold shoulder, forcing them to keep rolling with a roster long on talent but short on star power, and it may be the best thing that ever happened to them.

The Hawks have been the surprise story of the season, racking up an NBA-leading 43 victories as the All-Star break approaches. They've done it largely on the strength of a group of players that have grown together, learned to play with each other and how to complement one another to find a rare bit of stability and continuity in a volatile league.

"Bring back a lot of the guys, add a few guys around the edges, had a great summer, our guys' work ethic, their commitment to each other, to getting better every day from our players has been really, really high," coach Mike Budenholzer said. "Hopefully we can continue that going forward."

The Portland Trail Blazers, Memphis Grizzlies, Toronto Raptors, Washington Wizards, Golden State Warriors and Los Angeles Clippers are among the teams that have eschewed major roster changes for one reason or another and kept their

cores together, hoping to follow the San Antonio Spurs' model for success.

The Warriors changed coaches of course, replacing Mark Jackson with Steve Kerr. The Wizards essentially swapped Trevor Ariza for Paul Pierce and the Grizzlies brought in Jeff Green from the Celtics in a midseason trade. But these teams all have one thing in common — the core talent on their rosters has been largely unchanged for multiple years.

"We've been going through some battles together and just continuing to grow our chemistry and our unity in the locker room," Warriors guard Steph Curry said. "We have a solid core that's been together and it shows in the little things that come out in the course of a game throughout the season. Obviously with the new coaching staff that was a huge bonus for us to have, along with a couple of key additions, pretty much the same core."

In the NBA, it can be tempting to make wholesale changes when immediate results are not seen. But that strategy does have its pitfalls.

In Cleveland, where the Cavaliers brought in James, Kevin Love, Iman Shumpert, J.R. Smith and Timofey Mozgov, the start was a rough one. And even as the Cavs have found their footing with 13 wins in their last 14 games, there continue to be subplots bubbling under-

neath the surface that point to a lack of trust between teammates that can be expected in the early stages of partnership.

James saw similar struggles early in his first season with the Miami Heat in 2010, but they righted themselves and made it all the way to the NBA Finals before losing to the Dallas Mavericks. So there is still plenty of time for the Cavs to figure each other out, find that cohesion and get to where they want to be.

But when you begin the long grind of an NBA season with everyone on the same page, it makes it that much easier to navigate the inevitable points in the season where things just aren't clicking.

After losing to the Clippers in the first round last season, the Warriors could have traded for Love to add another All-Star to a talented team. But the Minnesota Timberwolves demanded Klay Thompson be part of the deal, and the Warriors declined.

At the time, many questioned that decision. But Thompson has emerged as a star, and the Warriors' tight-knit locker room has been a key to their surge to the top of the Western Conference this year.

"It's the key to the whole thing," Kerr said. "This team's been really good for two years now, 51 wins last year. The foundation was already set. But what happens in this game, the longer a group is together, the better they become. That made our job as a new staff much easier."



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Penguins top Senators in SO

The Associated Press

OTTAWA — The only thing Sidney Crosby liked about this one was the final score.

David Perron scored the shootout winner to lift the Pittsburgh Penguins to a 5-4 victory over the Ottawa Senators on Thursday night. Crosby, with two goals, Kris Letang and Evgeni Malkin also scored for the Penguins, while Thomas Greiss made 29 saves.

It was a struggle for the Penguins, though. They blew a 3-0 lead and needed Perron to beat goaltender Robin Lehner in the shootout to get both points.

"I don't think it started right in the third," Crosby said of Pittsburgh's slip-page. "I thought the second we weren't great as well. I think we had one shot in the second period. We didn't really set ourselves up for a good third."

And they didn't get one.

Down 3-0 to start the third period, the Senators made an impressive comeback to tie the game 4-4 late in the period. Mika Zibanejad, Mike Hoffman, Mark Stone and Kyle Turris scored for the Senators, playing their first of a five-game homestand. Lehner, making his career-high seventh consecutive start, stopped 25 shots.

After struggling to beat Greiss, Zibanejad got Ottawa on the board after taking a nifty pass from Bobby Ryan.

Ryan picked up his second assist of the night as he and Hoffman worked a give-and-go, culminating with Hoffman's 18th of the season.

Crosby regained the two-goal lead for the Penguins as he spotted a loose puck between Lehner's legs and pushed it in.

But Ottawa went on to score goals 13 seconds apart to tie the game. Stone took a pass from Turris in close to beat Greiss, then Turris scored through Greiss' pads to make it 4-4.

Blues 6, Lightning 3: Alexander Steen had a goal and two assists to help coach Ken Hitchcock move into sole possession of fourth place on the NHL wins list in host St. Louis victory over Tampa Bay.

Hitchcock's 693rd regular-season win broke a tie with Dick Irvin. The Blues coach only trails Joel Quenneville (739), Al Arbour (782) and Scotty Bowman (1,244).

Islanders 3, Maple Leafs 2: Anders Lee scored two goals, including the tiebreaker in the second period, and Jaroslav Halak made 32 saves for his 30th win of the season.

Lee scored in each of the first two periods, and Casey Cizikas added a goal for the Metropolitan Division-leading Islanders, who have won three straight and four of five.

Ducks 2, Hurricanes 1: Matt Beleskey had the go-ahead goal and an assist and visiting Anaheim snapped a three-game losing streak.

Francois Beauchemin and Beleskey scored 2:52 apart in the second period to help the Pacific Division leaders improve to 24-0-7 in one-goal games.

Oilers 4, Canadiens 3 (OT): Anton Lander scored at 1:47 of overtime to lift visiting Edmonton.

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins' second goal of the game tied it with 25 seconds left in regulation while Edmonton was playing

with an extra attacker.

Predators 3, Jets 1: Rookie Filip Forsberg set a franchise record with his 19th goal this season and also had an assist and host Nashville earned its fourth straight win.

Forsberg topped the mark previously held by Alexander Radulov in 2006-07 with a power-play goal that put Nashville up 2-1 in the second period.

Wild 2, Panthers 1: Jason Pominville and Zach Parise each scored on assists from Mikko Koivu, and Devan Dubnyk made 26 saves. Host Minnesota improved to 9-1-2 in their past 12 games, all with Dubnyk in net.

Nick Bjugstad scored in his return home, but goalie Roberto Luongo fell to 3-10-2 in his career at Xcel Energy Center as the Panthers started a stretch of seven out of eight games on the road.

Rangers 6, Avalanche 3: Kevin Hayes had a goal and two assists and visiting New York survived a third-period rally.

Rick Nash scored his NHL-leading 34th goal and Cam Talbot stopped 26 shots for New York.

Kings 5, Flames 3: Tyler Toffoli scored in all three periods for his first NHL hat trick, Dwight King and Jordan Nolan broke open a tie game with third-period goals.

Mason Raymond had two goals and David Jones also scored for the visiting Flames, who had won their three previous meetings this season with the defending Stanley Cup champions — all by one-goal margins.

Rose, Bulls knock off streaking Cavaliers

The Associated Press

CHICAGO — Derrick Rose drove hard to the rim and heard those familiar "MVP! MVP!" chants from the crowd. The star point guard was in top form, and so were the Bulls.

Rose scored 30 points, and Chicago handed Cleveland just its second loss in 16 games, beating the Cavaliers 113-98 Thursday night.

Pau Gasol added 18 points and 10 rebounds. Tony Snell scored 22, helping offset a 31-point performance by LeBron James, and the Bulls sent another strong signal that their recent struggles might be behind them.

They won their fourth straight after dropping 10 of 15 and entered the All-Star break with a 1½-game lead in the Central division over the Cavaliers. Leading the way was their former MVP point guard, a player who missed most of the previous two seasons because of injuries to each knee.

"I'm just letting my game come to me," Rose said. "That's all I'm doing. I'm being patient with the ball. ... I'm trying to read the defense and pass the ball to the right people that are open."

Is he happy with the way he's playing?

"Yes, very pleased," Rose said.

The Bulls led most of the way against the NBA's hottest team and pulled away in the fourth quarter.

Both teams were missing key players, with Chicago's Jimmy Butler nursing a strained right shoulder and Cleveland's Kevin Love out with an abrasion in his right eye. But the Bulls did enough to come out on top.

Rose was aggressive from the start, going right at the rim, and finished two points shy of his season high.

Gasol posted his 14th straight double-double, the longest streak by a Bulls player since Michael Jordan's 15-game run in 1988-89.

Snell came up big again after scoring a career-high 24 against Sacramento on Tuesday. He shot 9-for-11 for the second straight game and helped force eight turnovers by James.

Joakim Noah added 10 points, 15 rebounds and seven assists, and Taj Gibson scored 13.

For Cleveland, it was a lethargic showing coming off a victory over Miami the previous night. Even so, 14 wins in 16 games isn't a bad way to go into the break.

"We can go into the break feeling good about our chances going forward and with the knowledge there are several things we can improve on and do better," coach David Blatt said. "That's a good place to be."

James had little help with Love sidelined after getting accidentally poked in the eye by the Heat's Mario Chalmers, and his high turnover total only made things worse.

"I'll figure it out. That cannot happen, for sure, for us to win long-term," James said. Kyrie Irving had 17 points and seven assists but was 6-for-18 from the field. Timofey Mozgov added 13 points and 11 rebounds.

Up by seven at halftime, the Bulls scored the first eight points of the third quarter to increase their lead to 63-48.

Charles Rex Arbogast/AP
Chicago Bulls guard Derrick Rose, center, drives and scores past Cleveland's James Jones, left, and LeBron James during the second half of Thursday's game in Chicago.

Wiltjer leads No. 3 Gonzaga with 21

The Associated Press

SPOKANE, Wash. — Kyle Wiltjer scored 21 points and grabbed 10 rebounds as No. 3 Gonzaga routed Loyola Marymount 80-51 on Thursday night.

Przemek Karnowski and Byron Wesley each scored 11 points for Gonzaga (25-1, 13-0 West Coast), which has won 18 consecutive games. The Zags scored the first 20 points of the game.

David Humphries scored 11 points for Loyola Marymount (8-18, 4-10), which didn't make a field goal for the first 12 minutes to fall way behind early.

Gonzaga, whose only loss this season was at No. 7 Arizona, has won 39 consecutive home games, the nation's longest streak.

They are the first team in the nation to win 25 games.

Gonzaga, which leads the nation in field goal shooting at 53.2 percent, shot just 49 percent but ran away with the game. Loyola Marymount made just 29 percent of its field goal attempts (15 of 51). Gonzaga won the rebounding battle, 46-30.

Gonzaga took control early, with Wiltjer hitting a three-pointer and Wesley a layup in the opening seconds.

Loyola Marymount called a timeout barely a minute into the game, but it didn't help.

Gonzaga scored the first 20 points, as the Lions missed their first eight shots and committed six turnovers.

Loyola Marymount finally scored on Ayodeji Egbeyemi's free throw with 11:52 left in the first.

The Lions switched to a press, which slowed down the Zags' offense.

Gonzaga made 10 of its first 15 shots to build a 27-4 lead with 9:12 left in the first. All the Loyola points were on free throws.

After missing their first 12 attempts, the Lions finally got a field goal on Egbeyemi's short jumper with 7:57 left in the first. Wiltjer immediately replied with a three-pointer as the Zags took a 30-6 lead and the crowd chanted "mercy rule."

Gonzaga center Przemek Karnowski went down hard after a missed dunk late in the first, but he recovered to sink both free throws and steal a Loyola Marymount pass on the next possession.

Gonzaga led 44-15 at halftime, after shooting 57.7 percent. The Lions made just 3 of 25 field goals in the first half, for 12 percent. They missed all eight of their three-point attempts.

The Lions shot better in the second, scoring the first seven points of the half — including a three-pointer by Chase Flint — to cut Gonzaga's lead to 44-22.

But Wiltjer scored nine points during a 12-6 Gonzaga run that pushed their lead to 56-28.

Kevin Pangos hit consecutive three-pointers to lift the Zags to a 66-37 lead. The Lions did not threaten after that.

No. 11 Utah 75, Stanford 59: Utah coach Larry Krystkowiak was watching a college game Wednesday

when his teenage son Cam pointed out the empty stands on TV. The conversation turned to how grateful they were to not have those issues.

The No. 11-ranked Utes were energized by a sold-out home crowd Thursday night and overcame a slow start to run away from Stanford 75-59 for the 16th consecutive win inside the Jon M. Huntsman Center.

"For these young men, that's the experience they need to have," Krystkowiak said. "There's a lot of pride from years past and it's just fun to be part of getting

it kick-started again."

Delon Wright scored a game-high 15 points and grabbed five rebounds to lead Utah to victory. Dallin Bachynski finished with 13 points, while Jordan Loveridge and Brekkott Chapman added 12 for the Utes (19-4, 9-2 Pac-12), who opened the second half with a 15-2 run to cruise past the Cardinal. The run was highlighted by seven consecutive points from Loveridge.

Anthony Brown led Stanford (16-8, 7-5) with 15 points, and Marcus Allen scored a career-high 13, including 10 in the first half.

No. 25 SMU 75, Houston 69: After seeing their double-digit lead

cut to four with 4 minutes left, SMU didn't panic because it had been here before and knew how to close things out.

Markus Kennedy scored 17 points, Nic Moore had 15 and the visiting 25th-ranked Mustangs held off Houston.

Kennedy and Moore combined for 23 points in the second half as the Mustangs (20-5, 11-2 American Athletic Conference) extended their lead to 17 midway through the second half and fought off a furious Houston rally.

"We didn't do a good job of handling their late run," Kennedy said. "After the last TV timeout, we figured some things out. Me and Nic looked at the guys and told them that we have been here before. We have been in tough situations."

"We just got a tough road win last game. We know what it takes to win. That's why there was no let up. We had to just stay focused and keep our mindset right."

Ryan Manuel added 10 points for SMU, which moved into first place in the conference. The Mustangs shot 54 percent from the field, including 58 percent in the second half.