

# STARS AND STRIPES®

Wednesday, February 18, 2015

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## Hagel's swan song to brass: Improve ethics

USA Today

WASHINGTON — Senior military officers, such as the Navy admirals censured for their role in a bribery scandal, risk discrediting the military when it needs public support more than ever, according to a memo signed by then-Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and obtained by USA Today.

The Navy's ongoing "Fat Leonard" scandal involving bribes and prostitutes in exchange for secret information is one example of unethical behavior among senior military leaders that led to Hagel's high-level review of their behavior and the memo he signed Feb. 12.

The memo signed in one of Hagel's last acts on the job warns military brass and senior civilians at the Pentagon that "when senior leaders forfeit this trust through unprofessional, unethical or morally questionable behavior, their actions have an enormously negative effect on the profession."

Hagel's memo avoids specific remedies, suggesting instead general approaches such

as emphasizing "senior leader accountability" and the need to keep studying the problem. That likely was done to give his successor, Ashton Carter, who was sworn in Tuesday, flexibility to deal with the issue, said Jerry Hendrix, a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security and retired Navy captain.

"His last message out the door was not going to be a prescription," Hendrix said. "He's giving a diagnosis to his successors, advice to Ash Carter."

That diagnosis, while not terminal, isn't great. More than 15 generals and admirals have been disciplined for bad or criminal behavior since 2010. A historian, Hendrix said ethical problems among top leaders are as bad as they've been in the post-World War II era. The pressure to make hugely expensive weapon systems a success has bred scandal, including prison time for an Air Force officer in the service's effort to build a refueling tanker.

Current and recent scandals include:

■ The Navy's ongoing investigation of senior sailors who have pleaded guilty or have been charged or under investigation in the so-called "Fat Leonard" affair. It takes its name from Glenn Francis, the owner of a firm that serviced ships in Southeast Asia. Federal prosecutors say Leonard, a huge man, plied sailors with cash, gifts and prostitutes in exchange for secret information on ship movements and profited from it. Last week, the Navy censured three admirals for taking gifts and lavish meals from Leonard. They are retiring.

■ National Guard and Army recruiting programs hurt by fraud and waste. Last year, hundreds of National Guard soldiers were under criminal investigation for kickback schemes involving bonuses for signing up recruits. Last month, a former Army recruiter reaped nearly \$4 million in bonuses by setting up a website that appeared to be an official Army portal. Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., called on the Army to investigate.

■ The military still has a

major problem with sexual assaults in the ranks despite a 27 percent drop in estimated incidents from 2012. In 2014, the Pentagon estimates there were 19,000 incidents of unwanted sexual contact. Top brass has been part of the problem, including Brig. Gen. Jeffrey Sinclair, who last year was reprimanded and fined \$20,000 after admitting that he committed adultery and mistreated his former mistress who had nicknamed him Papa Panda Sexy Pants. He also pleaded guilty to possessing pornographic images.

■ The Air Force in recent years has fired or disciplined dozens of airmen involved in cheating on proficiency tests. The service also scolded a two-star general, Maj. Gen. Michael Carey, in its missile program after he went on a drunken binge in Moscow, offending his hosts and embarrassing members of the delegation he led.

The memo's advice is vintage Hagel, Hendrix said.

"This is a Nebraskan simply telling people to do better," Hendrix said. "He's calling to their better angels. He's old school."

## Littoral combat ship to debut at S. Korean exercise

Bloomberg News

SINGAPORE — The U.S. Navy will send its new combat ship tailored for Asia's shallow coastal waters to join military drills with South Korea that North Korea calls a prelude for invasion.

Carrying a helicopter, a vertical takeoff unmanned aerial vehicle, a 57 mm gun and 21 missiles, the USS Fort Worth will become the first littoral combat ship to take part in the annual Foal Eagle exercises starting next month off the coast of South Korea.

"The specific role that Fort Worth will play in Foal Eagle is really no different than any other Navy ship has for years," Rear Adm. Charles Williams told reporters Tuesday in Singapore on board Fort Worth. "Fort Worth's role will be just a normal part of that exercise," said Williams, who is Logistics Group Western Pacific commander.

The 389-foot LCS will operate in Asia for 16 months, primarily in Southeast Asia, within the 7th Fleet grouping. In North Asia, the ship will make port visits to Japan, a U.S. ally immersed in a territorial spat with China. Wil-

liams said the LCS could also operate in South Asia.

North Korea is demanding that the United States and South Korea end the Key Resolve and Foal Eagle exercises, which are held early each year in order to improve ties on the peninsula. The regime calls the drills preparations for war and routinely threatens to retaliate with nuclear force if its territory is violated during the exercises, which the U.S. and South Korea say are defensive in nature.

"I really am not in a position to even postulate on what they may or may not do," Cmdr. Matthew

Kawas, Fort Worth's commanding officer, said when asked if the ship's presence could risk inflaming tensions with North Korea. "We are looking to normalize having an LCS out here and send the LCS all over to start participating in exercises and make it more routine.

"We are able to operate a bit closer to shore, and we do have more speed than some of the other ships," Kawas said. "It's just something we're going to be actually exploring during the exercise and see what additional features we can bring."

## UN finds 22 percent rise in Afghan civilian casualties

By JOSH SMITH  
*Stars and Stripes*

KABUL, Afghanistan — Civilian casualties in Afghanistan sharply increased last year as government forces fought increasingly deadly battles with insurgents across the country, the United Nations reported Wednesday.

More than 3,600 noncombatants died and at least 6,849 were injured in 2014, the final year of the NATO-led coalition's combat mission in Afghanistan, the U.N. said in its annual report.

In 2013, the U.N. documented 8,615 civilian casualties with 2,959 civilian deaths and 5,656 injured.

Western leaders have declared an end to the combat mission in Afghanistan, but the casualty count in 2014 is the highest since the U.N. began counting in 2009, an indicator that the war is far from over.

"In communities across Afghanistan, increased ground fighting among parties to the conflict and more [improvised explosive device] attacks exacted a heavy toll on Afghan

civilians," the head of the U.N. Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Nicholas Haysom, said in a statement. "Rising civilian deaths and injuries in 2014 attest to a failure to fulfill commitments to protect Afghan civilians from harm."

For the first time since 2009, more civilians were killed or injured in ground battles than from IEDs or because of other causes, the report found.

But with Afghan forces now locked in significant fighting across the country, more families are being caught in the crossfire, the U.N. says.

As in past years, the U.N. said most casualties in 2014 were caused by anti-government forces such as the Taliban. Seventy-two percent of all casualties were attributed to insurgent groups.

Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid rejected the U.N. report as government "propaganda" and said the findings are based on biased data.

Zubair Babakarkhail contributed to this report.  
smith.josh@stripes.com  
Twitter: @joshjonsmith

## White House hosts summit on fighting extremism threats

*The Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The summit President Barack Obama is convening Wednesday on the threat of violent extremism is not the summit he envisioned.

Planned for last October, the summit never happened before the midterm elections. In the months since, the situation has gotten worse, with the Islamic State group metastasizing and European cities learning firsthand that extremism is not confined to the Middle East.

"In just a very short period of time we've come a long way in terrorist organizations' ability to communicate," Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson said Wednesday as he opened the second day of the three-day event. "They have the ability to reach into our communities and attempt to recruit and in-

spire individuals who may turn toward violence right here in the homeland."

As crises boil over in Yemen and Libya, Obama is asking Congress to take a tough vote backing his military plan to defeat Islamic State group extremists in Iraq and Syria. But U.S. military action has so far proven the wrong tool to combat a robust social media and propaganda operation whose success at recruiting fighters and jihadists from Western communities such as Denver and Chicago has been alarmingly impressive.

With that threat in mind, Obama is hoping to concentrate the world's focus on the need to combat the underlying ideologies that entice individuals to behead a nonbeliever, kidnap a schoolgirl or shoot up a synagogue.

### Sister: Routh said he 'took their souls'

STEPHENVILLE, Texas — The sister of the former Marine accused in the fatal shootings of "American Sniper" author Chris Kyle and another man has testified that when he came to her home on the day of the killings, she told him she loved him but hated his demons.

Laura Blevins testified as the defense began its first full day of testimony Wednesday. Eddie Ray Routh is on trial in the 2013 deaths of Kyle, the famed former Navy SEAL sniper who served four tours in Iraq, and Kyle's friend, Chad Littlefield.

The Dallas Morning News reported that Blevins testified how Routh told her "he took their souls before they could take his."

From The Associated Press

## Despite 'cease-fire,' rebels force exhausted Ukrainian troops to retreat from key town

*The Associated Press*

ARTEMIVSK, Ukraine — After weeks of relentless fighting, the embattled Ukrainian rail hub of Debaltseve fell Wednesday to Russia-backed separatists, who hoisted a flag in triumph over the town. The Ukrainian president confirmed that he had ordered troops to pull out and the rebels reported taking hundreds of soldiers captive.

Associated Press reporters saw several dozen Ukrainian troops retreating with their weapons Wednesday morning from the town in eastern Ukraine, covered in dirt and looking exhausted. Some were

driving to the nearby town of Artemivsk in trucks while several others, unshaven and visibly upset, were on foot.

One soldier spoke of heavy government losses, while another said they had not been able to get food or water because of the intense rebel shelling. A third spoke of hunkering down in bunkers for hours, unable to even go to the toilet because of the shelling. They smoked cigarettes in the frigid winter air and gratefully accepted plastic cups of tea given to them by locals.

Russian Channel One showed the rebels hoisting their flag over a high-rise building in Debaltseve. Russian state-owned

television also showed images of several dozen captured Ukrainian troops being escorted along a road by the rebels.

Semyon Semchenko, a volunteer battalion commander and a member of the Ukrainian parliament who was highly critical of the government's decision to retreat, said in a statement that 167 injured soldiers have been evacuated from Debaltseve.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg accused the separatists of refusing to respect a cease-fire agreement and urged Russia "to end support for separatists and to withdraw forces and military equipment from eastern Ukraine."

# NBA chase to top begins again

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — LeBron James isn't used to looking up at so many teams at the All-Star break.

The Golden State Warriors and Atlanta Hawks occupy his former perch atop the standings, and Stephen Curry and Paul Millsap think that's where their teams belong. The Western Conference is loaded as usual — so good that All-Star Game MVP Russell Westbrook wouldn't even be in the playoffs if they started now.

There are three teams between the Hawks and fifth-place Cleveland in the East, putting James in the rare position of chaser.

He can't wait to try.

"I'm excited. I'm excited what our team can accomplish," he said. "We entered the break playing some really, really good basketball; winning 14 of our last 16. I'm going to take these next couple of days off and get back in the gym on Wednesday a little bit, go hard on Thursday and get ready to play Washington on Friday."

The NBA has a longer midseason break than usual this season, with play not resuming until Friday. That gives Westbrook extra time to rest after pouring in 41 points Sunday in the West's 163-158 victory at Madison Square Garden.

His Oklahoma City Thunder have overcome injuries to he and Kevin Durant to win three straight, but they are still just outside the West's top eight. No such worries for the Warriors, who rolled into the break with a 42-9 record and an MVP candidate in Curry.

"It's fun right now. We have a great team that has aspirations this year. I think it's something that we're poised to go after," Curry said.

"You want to just embrace the higher expectations that we put on ourselves and that are surrounding our team. We talk about what we're trying to do this year. We want to back it up."

It won't be easy, with challenges throughout a rugged West where defending champion San Antonio will try to mount a charge from seventh place.

The East was widely expected to come down to Chicago and Cleveland, and maybe it still will. Besides the Cavaliers' strong run to the first-half finish, with James looking healthy and Kevin Love appearing more comfortable, the Bulls won their last four to surge into third place.

Neither is likely to catch the Hawks, who rode an undefeated January to a 43-11 record. Their balanced team play put four players in the All-Star Game, and in two

months they can try to prove it will work in the postseason.

Here are some things to watch when play resumes this week:

**Talking trades:** The trade deadline is Thursday afternoon, and teams such as Cleveland and Memphis have already shown this season how the right moves can pay off.

**More Melo:** With the Knicks last in the league and the All-Star Game in his home arena over, Carmelo Anthony will have to decide how much more to play — if he does at all — after battling a sore left knee much of the season.

**Watching Wade:** Dwyane Wade is expected to return from a hamstring injury that knocked him out of the All-Star Game on Friday at New York. The Heat need him, barely holding on to eighth place in the East. "We're ready to attack the second half," Heat All-Star Chris Bosh said. "We're looking forward to having him back."

**East's elite:** Friday's schedule could feature some East playoff previews. Toronto and Atlanta, the top two in the conference, square off, and the Cavs visit Washington — just as they would if the postseason opened that night.

# Hoop teams mull trades as deadline closes in

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — The East was a two-team race at last year's trade deadline, and Larry Bird made the move he thought would win it.

When the Indiana Pacers acquired Evan Turner from rebuilding Philadelphia, they hoped it would provide the scoring punch to beat out Miami and reach the NBA Finals. It didn't, and Turner is now in Boston.

Now the Pacers are trying to get in the postseason, two games out of eighth place.

"We're always looking to improve the team and obviously there's a lot of improvement that needs to be done," the Pacers' president said recently. "So we'll look around the league and talk to a lot of different people and see what's out there and hopefully we can do something that makes us better."

If not, he said, he'll wait until the summer.

That's what every NBA team has to decide in the next couple of days.

The trade deadline is Thursday afternoon, and with many teams in contention, the question is whether that makes them more conservative or cautious.

Houston signed Josh Smith after he was waived by Detroit, Amare Stoudemire is headed to the Mavericks once he clears waivers, and other veterans could be bought out and become free agents after the deadline.

One of the most intriguing moves could involve Ray Allen, who will have contending suitors if he opts to play after sitting out all season.

The teams most motivated to deal might be the disappointing ones. Brooklyn probably can't find a taker for Deron Williams with all his injuries and dollars left on the \$98.5 million contract he signed in 2012, but was close to moving Brook Lopez earlier this season. Denver's rocky season should have contenders calling to inquire about Arron Afflalo, Ty Lawson or Wilson Chandler.

Don't count on top stars changing teams — none have at the deadline since Utah surprisingly sent Williams to the Nets on the eve of the 2011 one. Teams more likely trade at this point to clear cap space for the summer, which is why the New York Knicks could seek a deal for Jose Calderon after already shipping out guards J.R. Smith and Iman Shumpert.

Cleveland acquired them and, along with getting Timofey Mozgov from Denver in a separate deal, perhaps proved the best moves for this season were already made.

Dallas acted quickly to acquire Rajon Rondo from Boston in December, not long before Memphis capitalized on the Celtics' youth movement to deal for Jeff Green.

For Golden State and Atlanta, the current NBA leaders, their winning moves maybe came long ago.

The Warriors got Andrew Bogut from Milwaukee at the 2012 deadline to provide some muscle in the rugged West. Five months later, the Hawks acquired Kyle Korver from Chicago, and he could be headed for the best perimeter-shooting season in NBA history.

# A-Rod apologizes ahead of return

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — It appears the only place Alex Rodriguez might detail his drug use is on a witness stand.

The ever-controversial New York Yankees star decided against holding a news conference ahead of his return to the team following a one-year absence. He issued a vague five-paragraph handwritten apology Tuesday "for the mistakes that led to my suspension" but failed to provide specifics about how and why he resumed using performance-enhancing drugs for at least the second stretch of his celebrated career.

Ready to report back to the Yankees following an unprecedented season-long ban for violating baseball's drug agreement and labor contract, Rodriguez apologized to team officials in person during a meeting at the ballpark on Feb. 10. They suggested he hold a news conference before the start of spring training this Friday and offered the use of Yankee Stadium. Rodriguez declined.

He held an apologetic session with reporters in 2009 at the team's facility in Tampa, Florida, after he admitted using banned PEDs while with Texas from 2001-03. That was before Major League Baseball had a drug agreement with penalties.

"The only thing I ask from this group today and the American people is to judge me from this day forward," he said then.

But he apparently did not want to face questions from media about his latest involvement with PEDs — although he could be required to testify in federal court if his cousin, Yuri Sucart, and former University of Miami pitching coach Lazaro Collazo go to trial on charges they committed crimes in their involvement with the Biogenesis of

America drug clinic. Rodriguez admitted in court documents he used PEDs.

ESPN The Magazine said it planned to release an interview Wednesday in which Rodriguez said he thinks Biogenesis owner Anthony Bosch gave him a placebo. Rodriguez also said he considered retirement early in his suspension, is in therapy and secretly visits colleges. He told ESPN he took a marketing class during his suspension and wants to complete his education.

Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig suspended the three-time AL MVP for 211 games in August 2013, citing conduct from 2010-12 uncovered during MLB's investigation of Biogenesis, which was based in Coral Gables, Fla., not far from Rodriguez's home.

Arbitrator Fredric Horowitz reduced the penalty to the 2014 season, finding "clear and convincing evidence" Rodriguez used three banned substances and twice tried to obstruct baseball's drug investigation.

Hoping to overcome the suspension and a pair of hip surgeries, Rodriguez is due to report to the Yankees on Feb. 25 and start workouts the following day. He has not played a full season since 2007.

Rodriguez addressed his statement "to the fans" and said "I take full responsibility for the mistakes that led to my suspension for the 2014 season" without explaining what those mistakes were.

"I regret that my actions made the situation worse than it needed to be," he wrote in legible blue script. "To Major League Baseball, the Yankees, the Steinbrenner family, the players' association and you, the fans, I can only say I'm sorry."

Rodriguez said "I accept the fact that many of you will not believe my apology or anything that I say at this point. I under-

stand why, and that's on me."

"It was gracious of the Yankees to offer me the use of Yankee Stadium for this apology but I decided the next time I am in Yankee Stadium, I should be in pinstripes doing my job," he said.

Bosch was sentenced to four years in prison on Tuesday after pleading guilty in October to a charge of conspiracy to distribute testosterone.

New York says Rodriguez, who turns 40 in July, has been replaced by Chase Headley at third base and will have to compete for playing time at designated hitter and as an infield backup.

Rodriguez is owed \$61 million over the final three seasons of his contract, and the Yankees say they do not plan to pay five \$6 million bonuses detailed in a marketing agreement for historic achievements he may reach. Rodriguez is fifth on the career list with 654 home runs, and the deal contemplates the first bonus being triggered when he ties Willie Mays at 660.

Before apologizing to the Yankees, Rodriguez met last month with Rob Manfred, who succeeded Selig as baseball commissioner on Jan. 25.

"I served the longest suspension in the history of the league for PED use," Rodriguez said. "The commissioner has said the matter is over. The players' association has said the same. The Yankees have said the next step is to play baseball. I'm ready to put this chapter behind me and play some ball. This game has been my single biggest passion since I was a teenager. When I go to spring training, I will do everything I can to be the best player and teammate possible, earn a spot on the Yankees and help us win."



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# Wildcats pass program record

The Associated Press

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. — Kentucky understands that its brand name often brings out the best efforts from opponents.

The top-ranked Wildcats have answered that challenge well enough to put together the best start in the program's storied history.

Devin Booker had 18 points and seven rebounds Tuesday night as Kentucky picked up its defense in the second half and pulled away for a 66-48 victory over Tennessee. Kentucky is 26-0 for the first time, though the Wildcats finished the 1953-54 season with a 25-0 mark.

"It's like that whether you're the best of Kentucky or you're the worst of Kentucky," Wildcats 7-footer Willie Cauley-Stein said. "They're still trying to beat Kentucky, so you have to come out ready to play with them. If not, then they

get beer muscles and they think they can play with you. You have to come out ready to swing. Otherwise you're going to get hit in the mouth."

Kentucky (13-0 SEC) took a few punches Tuesday before delivering the knockout blow.

The Wildcats won despite shooting 5-for-22 from three-point range and allowing the much-smaller Volunteers to match them 34-all in rebounds and outscore them 34-22 in the paint. Tennessee trailed by just four with 9 minutes left before Kentucky went on a 10-0 run to put the game away.

Kentucky has matched the best start for a team coached by John Calipari, who won his first 26 games at Massachusetts in 1995-96 and was 26-0 at Memphis in 2007-08. Both of those squads went on to reach the Final Four, though neither won the national championship.

"Every one of the teams was different," Calipari said. "They're all different. This team is the deepest of the three. The UMass team, I played five or six, my guards played 38 minutes. Totally different. The Memphis team, we were pretty good defensively there, too, but we didn't have the size this team has."

Andrew Harrison scored 14 points and Trey Lyles added 10 for Kentucky. Kevin Punter scored 14 and Josh Richardson had 10 for Tennessee (14-11, 6-7).

After shooting 54.2 percent (13-for-24) in the first half, Tennessee shot just 25 percent (8-for-32) in the second. The Volunteers went 2-for-17 from three-point range and 4 of 10 on free throws.

"We didn't shoot the ball very well, but all that is a credit to Kentucky because they're a heck of a defensive team," Tennessee coach Donnie Tyndall said.

# Oklahoma rallies past Texas 71-69

The Associated Press

NORMAN, Okla. — With Buddy Hield struggling, Oklahoma found points from unlikely sources.

Jordan Woodard scored 11 of his 13 points in the second half, Dinjyl Walker and Frank Booker each scored 10 points, and the 17th-ranked Sooners rallied for a 71-69 win over Texas on Tuesday.

Woodard is Oklahoma's only starter who doesn't average double figures, and Walker and Booker are reserves. The unexpected outbursts were needed because Hield, the Big 12's leading scorer, finished with just 12 points on 4-for-17 shooting.

Woodard had six points, a steal and an assist in the final 3:13 for the Sooners (18-8, 9-5 Big 12).

"It seemed like Texas had just a little bit of a step on us, maybe a little bit of a margin, and yet our guys kept working at it and made big plays down the stretch," Oklahoma coach Lon Kruger said.

Oklahoma swept the regular-season series with the Longhorns. The Sooners won the first meeting 70-49 in Austin. Oklahoma bounced back from a loss at Kansas State last Saturday and now has won six of seven.

Myles Turner had 17 points, 10 rebounds and six blocks, and Kendal Yancy added 14 points for the Longhorns (17-9, 6-7), who had won three straight. Texas coach Rick Barnes was seeking his 400th win at the school.

**No. 10 Notre Dame 88, Wake Forest 75:** Jerian Grant had 24 points and 10 assists to lead host Notre Dame.

Pat Connaughton added 13 points for the Irish (23-4, 11-3 Atlantic Coast Conference) who hit 27 of 28 at the free-throw line, including their last 19.

**No. 13 Wichita State 84, Southern Illinois 62:** Shaquille Morris scored a career-high 17 points to lead visiting Wichita State to its fifth straight win.

**No. 20 Baylor 54, Texas Tech 49:** Taurean Prince scored 18 of his 22 points in the first half, and Baylor held off host Texas Tech.

Prince didn't score in the second half until 8:32 remained.

**No. 25 VCU 74, Saint Louis 54:** Treveon Graham scored 16 points and host VCU used a 23-5 run spanning halftime to take command.

**Michigan State 80, Michigan 67:** Branden Dawson had 23 points and 13 rebounds, and Michigan State finished a regular-season sweep of rival Michigan.

**Georgetown 79, St. John's 57:** Isaac Copeland scored 12 points and grabbed a career-high 10 rebounds to lead a balanced Georgetown — in which all five starters reached double figures.

The Hoyas (17-8, 9-5 Big East) nailed their first seven three-point shots of the second half, boosting a 10-point halftime lead to 66-50 with 6:42 left to play.

**San Diego State 63, New Mexico 46:** San Diego State's stifling defense and Aqeel Quinn's 20 points were enough to give the visiting Aztecs a win.

San Diego State (21-6, 11-3 Mountain West) held the Lobos (14-12, 6-8) to its second worst shooting night of the season at 17-55 (30.9 percent) as they lost their fifth straight.

# Caps edge Penguins in testy win

The Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Alexander Ovechkin picked up his NHL-leading 37th goal and assisted on Joel Ward's winner with just over four minutes remaining to lift the Washington Capitals to a testy 3-1 win over the Pittsburgh Penguins on Tuesday night.

Ovechkin beat Marc-Andre Fleury on a breakaway in the first period. He then helped set up Ward's first career goal against the Penguins as Washington improved to 3-0 against Pittsburgh. John Carlson added a short-handed empty-net goal with 11 seconds remaining.

Braden Holtby made 30 saves for the Capitals, who pulled within a point of the third-place Penguins in the crowded Metropolitan Division.

Steve Downie collected his 10th goal of the season for Pittsburgh. Marc-Andre Fleury stopped 29 shots but surrendered a pair of power-play goals, including Ward's in a 5-on-3 with 4:13 to play.

Reunited in the same division and with the prospect of another playoff series looming, the longtime rivals returned to their antagonistic roots. The moment when the rivalry perhaps reignited came early in the third period, when Ovechkin clubbed Pittsburgh defenseman Kris Letang in the legs. There was no penalty called and Pittsburgh's attempts to retaliate led to a string of Washington power

plays.

Letang returned after a short stint in the training room, and with Chris Kunitz already off for boarding was called for slashing with 4:45 remaining to give the Capitals a two-man advantage. Fleury stopped Ovechkin's blast from the point, but the rebound went to Nicklas Backstrom, who slipped a pass to Ward. The veteran forward flipped it over Fleury for Ward's first goal in 17 career games against Pittsburgh.

The Capitals dominated the first two meetings, outscoring the Penguins 7-0 in a pair of lopsided victories. But they came in trailing Pittsburgh by three points in the cramped top half of the Metropolitan.

**Blue Jackets 5, Flyers 2:** Matt Calvert scored two goals, including the winner midway through the third period, to lift Columbus over host Philadelphia.

Brandon Dubinsky, Ryan Johansen and James Wisniewski also scored for the Blue Jackets, who snapped Philadelphia's nine-game points streak.

Wayne Simmonds and Michael Del Zotto had goals for the Flyers, who remained six points behind idle Boston for the Eastern Conference's final playoff spot.

**Islanders 4, Hurricanes 1:** Backup goalie Chad Johnson made 37 saves and four players scored to lead the visiting Islanders.

Carolina outshot New York 18-8 in the

second period and 38-30 overall, but couldn't dent Johnson until Jiri Tlustý's goal with 8:46 remaining.

**Predators 5, Sharks 1:** Pekka Rinne made a season-high 42 saves and Nashville extended its winning streak to a season-best six straight games by beating visiting San Jose.

The Predators padded their lead atop the NHL standings to 84 points, six ahead of Montreal.

**Stars 4, Blues 1:** Jamie Benn had his first career hat trick and Kari Lehtonen was stingy in net again for Dallas in a rout of host St. Louis.

Blues coach Ken Hitchcock yanked goalie Brian Elliott in favor of Jake Allen after the Stars took a 3-0 lead before the midway mark of the first period.

**Devils 2, Sabres 1 (SO):** Scott Gomez and Jacob Josefson scored in the shootout, and Cory Schneider denied both Buffalo attempts as host New Jersey snapped a four-game losing streak.

**Panthers 3, Maple Leafs 2:** Nick Bjugstad scored the go-ahead goal on a power play early in the second period and visiting Florida defeated struggling Toronto.

Jussi Jokinen and Jimmy Hayes also scored for the Panthers, who moved within two points of idle Boston for the final playoff spot in the Eastern Conference.

# Browns' Gordon files grievance for suspension

The Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Barred wide receiver Josh Gordon is fighting his one-game suspension by the Browns for the season finale because it will delay his free agency.

A person familiar with the process said the troubled former Pro Bowler is arguing he should not have been suspended for the last game in Baltimore.

The NFL Players Association filed the grievance last week on behalf of Gordon, the person told The Associated Press on Tuesday on condition of anonymity because the union does not make such protests public. Gordon was suspended by the Browns after he missed a walk-through before the team's flight to Maryland.

Gordon was suspended for the first 10

games for multiple drug violations, and his banishment from the last game cost him a sixth game he needed for an accrued season. He can't become a restricted free agent until after 2016 and unrestricted until following the 2017 season.

Following last season, Browns coach Mike Pettine said Gordon had been guilty of "multiple violations" of team rules and warned that he could be suspended.

Gordon, who led the league in yards receiving in 2013, was recently suspended by the NFL for one season without pay for violating the drug policy.

Gordon will have to apply for reinstatement with NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell next year as long as he complies with his program and stays clean.

## Cowboys mull franchise tag for Dez Bryant

INDIANAPOLIS — The Dallas Cowboys are still trying to come up with the perfect pitch to Dez Bryant.

With free agency looming and a March 2 deadline to use their franchise tag, the Cowboys are still debating whether to put the tag on Bryant, their top receiver, even as they try to work out a long-term deal. They still hope to keep running back DeMarco Murray, and they're hoping to find enough cap room to do both.

The presumption has been that if the NFC East champs can't work out a long-term deal with Bryant, they will use the one-year tag.