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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Breedlove pushes for Europe presence

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Pentagon budget cuts set to take effect next year could force additional troop reductions in Europe, putting at risk efforts to deter potential Russian aggression and reassure allies, top military officials told lawmakers on Wednesday.

“Our ability to sustain our posture in Europe is going to be at significant risk,” if mandatory budget cuts known as sequestration return in fiscal 2016, Christine Wormuth, undersecretary of defense for policy, told the House Armed Services Committee during a hearing on Europe’s emerging security challenges.

Wormuth, along with European Command chief Gen. Philip Breedlove, emphasized the need to maintain a steady forward presence of U.S. troops.

Breedlove said U.S. efforts in Europe were “essential.”

“There is simply no substitute for our forward force presence in Europe. It is the

bedrock of our ability to assure our allies, to deter real and potential adversaries and to act in a timely way should deterrence fail,” Breedlove said.

“Rotating presence is no substitute for permanent force presence,” Breedlove said. “Genuine and fully funded rotational presence can play a very important role in helping to meet requirements in our theater, if it is heel to toe and fully resourced.”

The renewed focus on a forward military presence, deemed by many critics an outdated Cold War presence only a year ago, has taken on added significance in the wake of Russia’s annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in March 2014 and its support for pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine.

Rep. Adam Smith, D-Wash., a supporter of supplying Ukrainian forces with defensive arms, said the crisis in that country has altered views about security in Europe and the U.S. military presence there.

“Now we realize our presence in Europe is more important than we used to,”

he said.

Breedlove, who also is NATO’s supreme allied commander, said Moscow’s support of the separatists is wide-ranging and continues despite a recent cease-fire agreement.

Breedlove said providing defensive military arms to Ukrainian forces to counter separatists should be given consideration, though stopped short of endorsing such a policy, which is currently under review by the Obama administration.

“Right now, we are not arming the Ukrainian with lethal weapons and what we see is Russia continues to build up its force,” Breedlove said.

Still, Russian President Vladimir Putin’s reaction to such support if it were given isn’t at all clear, Breedlove acknowledged.

“Clearly, we don’t know what Mr. Putin will do,” Breedlove said. “I think that we have to be cognizant it could cause positive results, it could cause negative results.”

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Top enlisted: budget uncertainties hurt morale

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Top enlisted military leaders said Wednesday that servicemembers and their families are stressed and worried about looming changes to compensation, benefits and support services.

That anxiety is threatening overall morale, and appears well-founded: Tight budgets for the coming year call for slashing such spending and will mean forcing out quality troops who in the past could have served a full 20-year career, the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force leaders testified to House lawmakers.

The testimony is part of a budget drama playing out on Capitol Hill, in which Congress is scrambling to find a solution to budget caps it passed in prior sessions. A defense spending

cap due to kick in this fall has triggered dire warnings from the Pentagon and many lawmakers, who say anemic funding is damaging the military’s ability to defend the country and fight wars.

Soldiers “see the future. They see it on the news every day, and they see uncertainty and it bothers them,” Army Command Sgt. Maj. Daniel Dailey told a House Appropriations subcommittee. “What I really need is them focused on the mission and saving their fellow soldiers’ lives.”

The services have said they are still reeling from an initial round of budget caps in 2013.

After Congress struck an agreement to put off the caps for two years, the spending limits are set to resume and hold the Department of Defense base budget at \$523 billion, allowing for a modest \$1.7-billion increase.

The Army is already facing reduced training, facilities in disrepair, decreased access to services and fewer opportunities for advancement due to a shrinking force, Dailey said.

Lawmakers are now considering major overhauls of the military retirement and health insurance systems as well as cuts to benefits such as commissaries to keep up with the spending limit for the coming year. A congressionally appointed panel has recommended replacing the current 20-year retirement with a 401(k)-style contribution system and abolishing Tricare health insurance in favor of a privatized marketplace.

Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Michael Stevens said sailors are most concerned about changes to the health insurance system. But changes on compensation and base support programs such as fleet and fam-

ily services and family readiness also loom large.

The ongoing discussion in Congress have created an air of uncertainty and anxiety — “just the wondering of what is going to be the future,” Stevens told lawmakers.

Rep. Martha Roby, R-Ala., said a community meeting about the issues Monday at her state’s Fort Rucker drew 1,600 people, and underscores the interest among troops.

“Our military families are not immune to the 24-hour news cycle,” which has closely followed the debate over defense spending, Roby said.

“This is not the right way to go about supporting our military families,” she said. “I just want to make my position clear: We’ve got to fix this.”

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Fate of abducted Christians unclear

BEIRUT — Islamic State group militants have moved a large group of Christian hostages to a city they control in northeastern Syria, while they continue to battle Kurdish and Christian militiamen for control of a chain of villages along the Khabur River, activists and state-run media said Wednesday.

In the pre-dawn hours, the group on Monday attacked communities nestled along the river, seizing at least 70 people, many of them women and children. Thousands of others fled to safer areas.

The state-run SANA news agency and the Assyrian Network for Human Rights in Syria said the hostages have been moved to the Islamic State-controlled city of Shaddadeh.

The United States and a coalition of regional partners are conducting a campaign of airstrikes against the group, and have on occasion struck Shaddadeh, a predominantly Arab town.

From The Associated Press

Ex-Marine guilty of killing Kyle

The Associated Press

STEPHENVILLE, Texas — A Texas jury has rejected the insanity defense of a former Marine in the deaths of famed “American Sniper” author Chris Kyle and another man.

After a two-week trial in which jurors heard testimony about defendant Eddie Ray Routh’s erratic behavior, including statements about anarchy, the apocalypse and pig-human hybrids, they convicted Routh on Tuesday night in the deaths of Kyle and Chad Littlefield at a Texas shooting range two years ago.

Routh showed no reaction as a judge sentenced him to life in prison without parole, an automatic sentence since prosecutors didn’t seek the death penalty in the capital murder case. As one of his victim’s siblings called him an “American disgrace” shortly after, Routh looked back at the man intensely but didn’t react otherwise.

The verdict capped an emotional trial in which prosecutors painted the 27-year-old as a troubled drug user who knew right from wrong, despite any mental illnesses. Defense attorneys said he suffered from schizophrenia and was suffering a psychotic episode at the time of the shootings. While trial testimony and evidence often included Routh making odd statements and referring to insanity, he also confessed several times, apologized for the crimes and tried to evade police after the crime.

“You took the lives of two heroes, men who tried to be a friend to you,” Chad Littlefield’s half brother Jerry Richardson told Routh after the verdict. “And you became an American disgrace.”

Routh’s trial drew intense interest, in part because of the blockbuster film based on former Navy SEAL Kyle’s memoir about his four tours in Iraq.

Kyle’s widow, Taya Kyle, had

left the courtroom during the defense’s closing statements earlier in the day and had not returned when the verdict was read. Chris Kyle’s brother and parents were among a group hugging and crying inside the courtroom after the verdict was read. They did not issue a statement.

Kyle and Littlefield had taken Routh to the shooting range at Rough Creek Lodge and Resort on Feb. 2, 2013, after Routh’s mother asked Kyle to help her troubled son.

Family members say Routh suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder from serving in Iraq and in Haiti after the devastating 2010 earthquake.

However, Richardson told Routh that Routh’s PTSD claims “have been an insult to every veteran who served with honor.”

Routh’s defense team said they would appeal the conviction.

Iran attacks ‘US carrier’ in drill

The Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran’s Revolutionary Guard launched large-scale naval and air defense drills near a strategic Gulf waterway on Wednesday in which dozens of speedboats swarmed a replica of a U.S. aircraft carrier.

The drill, named Great Prophet 9, was held near the Strait of Hormuz, through which one-fifth of the world’s oil passes. Iran’s regular army carried out naval drills near the strait in December.

State TV showed footage of missiles fired from the coast and the boats striking the mock carrier. The drills, which also included shooting down a drone and planting under-sea mines, were the first to involve a U.S. carrier replica.

“American aircraft carriers are very big ammunition depots housing a lot of missiles, rockets, torpedoes and everything

else,” the Guard’s navy chief, Adm. Ali Fadavi, said on state TV, adding that a direct hit by a missile could set off a large secondary explosion. Last month Fadavi said his force is capable of sinking American aircraft carriers in the event of war.

The Guard’s chief commander, Gen. Mohammad Ali Jafari, said the drills send a “message of [Iran’s] might” to “extraterritorial powers,” a reference to the United States.

Cmdr. Kevin Stephens, the spokesman for the U.S. Navy’s 5th Fleet in Bahrain, said the Iranian naval exercises began a few days ago and have had no effect on maritime traffic.

Stephens said the Americans were monitoring the drills, but downplayed the simulated attack on the carrier, saying the U.S. military was “not concerned about this exercise.”

“We’re quite confident of our naval forces’ ability to defend themselves,” he said.

Ex-Germantown command master chief convicted of lesser harassment charge

BY ERIK SLAVIN
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The former top enlisted sailor aboard the USS Germantown was found guilty Wednesday at a court-martial of violating a general order related to sexual harassment, but exonerated on more serious sexual assault charges.

Command Master Chief Petty Officer Jesus Galura was sentenced to a reduction in pay grade to E-7, fined \$10,000 and reprimanded for his treatment of a shipmate, as well as for charges related to researching prostitutes aboard the ship, to which he pleaded guilty in January.

The sentence included a

recommendation by military judge Capt. David Harrison to the Navy’s convening authority that Galura’s reduction be limited to E-8, which would allow him to retire as a senior chief petty officer. Prosecutors had asked that Galura be demoted to E-6, fined one year’s salary and jailed for 35 days.

The ruling brought the end to a 25-year Navy career for Galura, who apologized to his former commanders, shipmates, his wife and two children while reading an unsworn statement. He did not apologize, as co-prosecutor Lt. Cmdr. Jeffrey Pietrzyk later pointed out, to the shipmate whose statements led to the case against him.

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Midrange jumper a fading art

The Associated Press

AMES, Iowa — The midrange jumper used to be a staple of college basketball playbooks. Now, the shot isn't as essential as it used to be — it seems to be fading away.

Many college teams, including Iowa State, Indiana and Notre Dame, are increasingly passing up midrange jumpers, looking for space and uncontested shots — which these days are found closer to the rim or beyond the three-point line.

The Hoosiers and Fighting Irish are among 27 Division I teams that have taken two-point jumpers — defined by shot tracking site Hoop-math.com as anything other than a layup, tip-in, dunk or three-pointer — on less than 20 percent of their attempts.

That's up from just five teams in 2011-12.

"I didn't know there was a problem with it until I got here," Iowa State point guard Monte Morris said of the mid-range jumper. "Coach (Fred Hoiberg) doesn't really like them. He'd rather like layups or three-pointers."

The reasoning behind that line of thinking is quite simple.

It's been an unwritten rule that if a player is going to shoot a long two, he might as well step back and take a three-pointer. And of course if the player is going for

two points, he should take the easiest shot, which means getting as close to the basket as possible.

But the philosophy is becoming more prevalent and as a result, the mid-range jumper is becoming a lost art — actually vanishing from college playbooks with the three-point line 20.75 feet from the basket.

The average number of threes taken per game this season, 18.5, is the most since 2008. But the national average of 48.2 percent shooting on twos is in line with the previous decade, according to STATS LLC.

And teams like Wisconsin and Duke excel from inside the arc because they have highly skilled big men such as Frank Kaminsky and Jahliil Okafor — and stand-out three-point shooters that keep defenses honest.

"This year we have a guy who scores inside (in Okafor). We're going to get it inside. We have guys who can shoot the three. We want to do that. And we have guys who can score in between," said Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski, whose Blue Devils are fourth nationally in field-goal percentage. "You try to come up with a menu that fits the group that you have."

The dearth of midrange jumpers taken by the Fighting Irish is more about evolution than philosophy, according to coach Mike Brey.

Star point guard Jerian Grant demands so much attention that he allows Notre Dame to roll other players off for layups and dunks while also spreading the floor for its shooters. The Irish are hitting 40 percent of their threes this season, 13th-best in the country.

At Indiana, it's all about spacing. Hoosiers coach Tom Crean said his team's main focus on offense is to attack the rim and force the defense to collapse in the paint. That frees up the three-point shooters who are Indiana's strong suit this season.

The Fighting Irish rank second among high-major teams with 8.8 made threes per game.

Indiana is first among Power 5 teams at 9.3 three-pointers per game.

In the eyes of Xavier coach Chris Mack, forcing other teams to shoot challenged midrange jumpers can be just as important as avoiding them yourself.

Advanced data appears to back up Mack.

Hoop-math said as of Tuesday, 218 Division I teams were shooting at least 33.3 percent from three-point range.

Those teams would need to shoot at least 50 percent on two-pointers to earn the same amount of points — but none of them are.

Gonzaga leads the nation at 47.1 percent on two-point shots.

Maryland turns back Wisconsin

The Associated Press

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — Playing for the chance to earn at least a share of the Big Ten regular-season title, Wisconsin came up with a clunker of a first half that proved too much to overcome.

The fifth-ranked Badgers scored only 20 points before halftime against No. 14 Maryland, and a late rally didn't blunt the disappointment of a 59-53 defeat Tuesday night.

Dez Wells scored 26 points, and the Terrapins held off the Badgers, ruining their bid to clinch at least a share of the Big Ten title.

Melo Trimble added 16 points for second-place Maryland (23-5, 11-4 Big Ten), which finished the game with a 12-6 run.

"We knew we had the poise and toughness to win the game," Wells said.

The Terrapins improved to 9-0 in games decided by six points or fewer, and they've won their last three by a total of 17 points. Although Wisconsin had an opportunity to take the lead in the closing minutes, Maryland coach Mark Turgeon said it wouldn't have mattered.

"We've been in so many close games, we'd have just kept doing what we do," Turgeon said. "Our guys were really determined tonight, starting with Dez Wells."

Wells went 9-for-17 from the floor, nailed all seven of his free throws and led the team with seven rebounds and four assists.

"He was not going to let us lose," Turgeon said.

Wisconsin (25-3, 13-2) had its 10-game winning streak end and now must have to wait at least until the weekend to claim the conference crown.

Blame it on a first half in which the Badgers shot 30 percent, including 1-for-11 from beyond the arc. It was the fewest points scored by Wisconsin in a half this season.

"They played better in the first half," Wisconsin's Sam Dekker said. "They came at us right away. They were the aggressors. You got to react better to the game better than we did in the first half. In the second half, I thought we picked it up, but it was a little too late."

After trailing by 11 at the break, the Badgers pulled even at 47 with six minutes left before Maryland's 12-6 run.

"They made plays and we didn't down the stretch," Dekker said. "That's the difference between a win and a loss."

Frank Kaminsky scored 18 for Wisconsin and Dekker added 14. The Badgers' winning streak was their longest since an 11-game run in 1941 to win the national championship.

Wisconsin hadn't lost since Jan. 11 at Rutgers.

"We were close a couple of times but we just couldn't do it. It's definitely frustrating," Kaminsky said. "We've had a great season so far. We've haven't really been tested like this many times like this. ... I think we're going to learn a lot from it."

The victory improved Maryland's home record to 17-1.

N.C. State knocks off North Carolina

The Associated Press

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. — North Carolina State arrived at North Carolina focused more on getting another road win to help its NCAA tournament chances than trying to end its drought at the Smith Center.

The Wolfpack ended up taking care of both in impressive fashion.

Anthony "Cat" Barber scored 15 points and N.C. State beat the 15th-ranked Tar Heels 58-46 on Tuesday night, earning its first road win in the series in a dozen years.

Trevor Lacey and Ralston Turner each added 14 points for the Wolfpack (17-11, 8-7 Atlantic Coast Conference), who earned a second marquee road victory this month in pursuit of a fourth straight NCAA trip.

"Our focus was just to come in and win," Lacey said. "It wasn't make history or none of that."

N.C. State didn't shoot particularly well, but it played with toughness and composure while frustrating the Tar Heels (19-9, 9-6) just about all night.

By the end, N.C. State had held UNC to its lowest point total in its nearly three-decade run in the Smith Center. Not to mention beat a Roy Williams-coached Tar Heels team in Chapel Hill for the first time ever.

"I think our guys came in here with a great belief and great confidence in themselves," N.C. State coach Mark Gottfried said.

N.C. State has been living on the NCAA tournament bubble for a month. It fol-

lowed an upset of then-unbeaten Duke with six losses in eight games and looked sunk, only to follow that with an upset at top-10 Louisville on Feb. 14 and now another big one.

No. 6 Villanova 89, No. 25 Providence 61: Darrun Hilliard scored 19 of his 24 points in the second half, JayVaughn Pinkston added 16 points, and the host Wildcats clinched at least a share of their second straight Big East regular-season title.

Villanova (26-2 overall, 13-2 Big East) shot 53 percent from the field and 52 percent from three-point range en route to its ninth straight win.

Tyler Harris led Providence (19-9, 9-6) with 18 points on 8-for-11 shooting.

Syracuse 65, No. 9 Notre Dame 60: B.J. Johnson scored 19 points, Rakeem Christmas added 14 despite being in foul trouble and the visiting Orange held the Fighting Irish to 35 percent shooting.

The Irish trailed by 10 in the first half and by seven with less than 2 minutes left, but cut the lead to 59-57 with 39 seconds remaining. The Orange (18-10, 9-6 Atlantic Coast Conference) put the game away with a fastbreak three-point play by Johnson.

Notre Dame (24-5, 12-4) dropped to third place in the league standings.

No. 18 Arkansas 81, Texas A&M 75: Bobby Portis scored 22 points and his team won its seventh straight game, solidifying the host

Razorbacks' (23-5, 12-3 Southeastern Conference) hold on second place in the SEC heading into a showdown with No. 1 Kentucky on Saturday.

Daniel House led Texas A&M (19-8, 10-5) with 28 points.

No. 20 West Virginia 71, Texas 64: Devin Williams scored 14 points to lead the host Mountaineers (22-6, 10-5 Big 12) to a win over the Longhorns.

Boise State 76, New Mexico 65: Derrick Marks scored 30 points and Nick Duncan added a career-best 26 as the host Broncos defeated the Lobos.

The Broncos (21-7, 11-4 Mountain West) hit 15 three-pointers and have won 11 of their past 12 games, to set up a showdown with league-leading San Diego State on Saturday.

Pittsburgh 71, Boston College 65: Jamel Artis added 24 points and Michael Young had 22 points and nine rebounds as the host Panthers (19-10, 8-7 ACC) won for the sixth time in eight games to keep their hopes of a third straight NCAA tournament appearance alive.

LSU 84, Auburn 61: Jarell Martin scored 25 points for his second straight big game and visiting LSU shot a season-high 57.8 percent in a rout of Auburn.

LSU (20-8, 9-6 Southeastern Conference) made 37 of 64 shots from the floor and outscored Auburn (12-16, 4-11) 52-18 in the paint.



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Rose out again with hurt knee

The Associated Press

CHICAGO — Derrick Rose's knee has failed him again.

The Chicago Bulls star will have surgery on his right knee for the second straight season, casting doubt on whether the once dynamic point guard will ever be the same after a series of injuries.

The team announced Tuesday night that Rose was feeling pain in his knee, and an exam and MRI confirmed a medial meniscus tear.

The 2011 NBA MVP played in only 10 games last season before he had surgery for the same injury in November 2013, shelving him for the year, but the Bulls said a timetable for his return will be determined after the operation.

It's unclear when Rose re-injured the knee. He appeared to be rounding into form last month, averaging 22.6 points over his final 14 games before the All-Star break, but he had struggled since return-

ing to the court after the time off.

Rose became the latest NBA star to be sidelined for a significant period within the past few days.

Chris Bosh will miss the rest of the season after the Miami Heat announced blood clots were found on one of his lungs. Knicks forward Carmelo Anthony (left knee surgery) won't return this season, either.

Thunder star Kevin Durant had surgery on his right foot, and Pelicans big man Anthony Davis has a sprained right shoulder. Both are expected back this season.

Rose's status remains to be seen.

It's a big blow for the surging Bulls (36-21), who have won six of seven and appeared to be picking up steam after a tough stretch. They lead the Central Division by a half-game over Cleveland, but any extended absence for Rose will make it quite difficult for Chicago to hold off LeBron James and the Cavaliers.

Rose was limited to 39 games during the 2011-12 season, and tore the anterior cru-

ciate ligament in his left knee in Game 1 of the 2012 playoffs against Philadelphia. He missed the next season altogether, and then last season was cut short by the right knee surgery.

Rose, 26, is averaging 18.4 points and 5.0 assists in 46 games this season. He has flashed his MVP form at times, attacking the rim, but his outside shot has been unreliable. He is shooting just 40.7 percent, the second-lowest average of his career, and is committing 3.2 turnovers per game.

The Bulls have shuffled players in and out of the lineup because of various ailments and have struggled to develop continuity after making some big moves last summer.

They signed All-Star Pau Gasol, giving them a big scoring presence inside, and with Rose back after missing most of the past two years, the Bulls came in looking to contend for a championship.

Now they wait to see how long Rose will be out with this injury.

Curry, Warriors get past Wizards

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Considering the work-out he gave it Tuesday night, Stephen Curry's right foot appears to be just fine.

Curry returned from a one-game absence to lead all scorers with 32, Klay Thompson added 17 more and the Golden State Warriors defeated the Washington Wizards, 114-107.

Curry missed Sunday's loss at Indiana with the sore foot and played nearly 34 minutes. He hit 11 of 18 field-goal attempts — many with impressive degrees of difficulty — including five of nine from three-point range.

"It's still not pain-free, but it felt fine," he said of his foot.

Marreese Speights added 16 points off the bench for the Warriors, who have won five of six.

Paul Pierce led the Wizards with 25 points, 18 in the second half. Marcin Gortat added 16 points and 11 rebounds, while John Wall chipped in 16 and 11 assists.

Cavaliers 102, Pistons 93: Kevin Love tied a career-best with eight three-pointers for 24 points and LeBron James added 19 points and 11 assists as visiting Cleveland rallied in the second half.

James nearly had an odd triple-double, turning the ball over nine times, one short of his career high. Kyrie Irving added 18 points for Cleveland, which has won 17 of its last 19 games.

Thunder 105, Pacers 92: Russell Westbrook had 20 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists, and host Oklahoma City picked up its seventh straight win.

Westbrook claimed his third triple-double of the season and the 11th of his career, despite resting for the entire fourth quarter.

Mavericks 99, Raptors 92: Monta Ellis scored 20 points and Dirk Nowitzki had 18 as host Dallas hit seven of its first 10 shots of the fourth quarter to defeat Toronto.

The victory was Dallas' third straight and pulled the Mavericks within a half-game of second-place Houston in the Southwest Division.

Dallas' Rajon Rondo sat out the final 20 minutes after having words with Mavericks head coach Rick Carlisle during a timeout.

Kings stay hot, win 8th straight

The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — It was just about this time last season when the Los Angeles Kings went on an eight-game winning streak and used it as a springboard to their second Stanley Cup title in three years.

This season is beginning to look similar. The Kings won their eighth in a row Tuesday night, with Jonathan Quick earning his fourth shutout as Justin Williams' early power-play goal stood up for a 1-0 victory over the Detroit Red Wings.

"It's tough to compare teams. Every year is different and every situation is different," said Williams, last year's Conn Smythe Trophy winner as playoff MVP. "You go through ups and downs each season that are never really the same. But I look around here and I have faith in everybody on this team. There's a lot of familiar faces, and when push comes to shove, I know the guy sitting next to me is going to get it done."

The Kings handed the Red Wings their third shutout of the season. Quick, who has allowed just five goals in the last five games, made 20 saves to increase his club-record shutout total to 35. He was 1-7-1 with a 3.44 goals-against average in his previous nine games against Detroit.

The shutout was the 200th for the franchise during the regular season. Quick, the Kings' career leader in regular-season victories with 201, is one shy of tying

the longest winning streak of his eight-year career.

"He's been a rock throughout this winning streak, and he'll continue to be," Williams said. "He's got a heavy workload right now, but he's going to battle like he always does. It just feels like some nights you look at him and you look at the saves he makes and you think, you know what? He's not letting anyone score tonight."

Jonas Gustavsson stopped 26 shots in his fourth start of the season and first since losing 4-3 in overtime at the New York Rangers on Nov. 5.

Canucks 2, Bruins 1: Eddie Lack had 40 saves as the visiting Vancouver beat struggling Boston.

Lack stopped 20 shots in the second period and 13 more in the third as Vancouver held on after Zack Kassian's tiebreaking goal at 6:47 of the third.

Rangers 1, Flames 0: Kevin Hayes broke a scoreless tie 3:00 into the third period and Cam Talbot made 21 saves to lead host New York past Calgary.

Islanders 5, Coyotes 1: Matt Martin and Johnny Boychuk scored less than a minute apart early in the third to break a tie and lift host New York over Arizona.

Sabres 4, Blue Jackets 2: Zemgus Girgensons had a goal and an assist before leaving with a leg injury, while Cody Hodgson, Mark Pysyk and Chris

Stewart also scored for offense-starved Buffalo, which beat host Columbus.

Hurricanes 4, Flyers 1: Justin Faulk had a goal and an assist in the 500th NHL game for goalie Cam Ward during host Carolina's victory over Philadelphia.

Canadiens 5, Blues 2: Alex Galchenyuk and Brendan Gallagher had two goals apiece and Carey Price set a franchise record with his ninth straight road win in visiting Montreal's victory over St. Louis.

Predators 5, Avalanche 2: Calle Jarnkrok, Craig Smith, Roman Josi and Filip Forsberg scored to help host Nashville beat Colorado.

Oilers 2, Wild 1: Benoit Pouliot scored twice, Ben Scrivens made 33 saves and visiting Edmonton snapped Minnesota's three-game winning streak.

Jets 4, Stars 2: Adam Lowry put in his own rebound to break a second-period tie. Bryan Little, Dustin Byfuglien and Michael Frolik, with an empty-netter, also scored in host Winnipeg's victory over Dallas.

Blackhawks 3, Panthers 2 (SO): Host Chicago lost Patrick Kane to an injury in the first period and then blew a two-goal lead before escaping with a shootout victory over Florida.

Los Angeles-area city celebrates stadium deal, awaits NFL

The Associated Press

INGLEWOOD, Calif. — The Inglewood City Council unanimously approved a \$2 billion stadium plan backed by St. Louis Rams owner Stan Kroenke that clears a path for the NFL to return to the Los Angeles area for the first time in two decades.

But the approval that really matters — the NFL's blessing for a team to move into the nation's second-largest media market — is a major work in progress. And there's still no certainty Kroenke will move the team from St. Louis, where city

officials are working to come up with a suitable stadium deal.

Despite the remaining hurdles, Tuesday's 5-0 council vote prompted Mayor James T. Butts to declare it's "time to celebrate."

Kroenke is part of the Hollywood Park Land Co. development group that is promoting the project just south of Los Angeles. The vote takes an existing redevelopment plan for the site of the former Hollywood Park horse track and adds the 80,000-seat, 60-acre stadium. It also allowed the city to avoid a more time-

consuming approach involving a voter initiative and environmental reviews of noise, traffic and air pollution.

New urgency for Inglewood materialized last week with the announcement that the Oakland Raiders and the San Diego Chargers are proposing a shared stadium in nearby Carson if they don't get their current hometowns to cough up enough money to replace their aging arenas. Another stadium plan is alive for downtown Los Angeles, but it has no team attached.

Stadium proponents in Inglewood said

it is important to approve the concept as soon as possible to avoid delays in the redevelopment that already is underway. They would like construction to start by year's end to have a venue ready for the 2018 football season.

In other NFL news:

■ The New York Giants have released running back Peyton Hillis. The move was announced on Wednesday, a day after the team released veteran defensive lineman Mathias Kiwanuka. The two moves will save the Giants just under \$6 million in salary cap space.