

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Military a cross-section of US

A new “Population Representation” report on the U.S. military affirms that the four-decade-old volunteer force is a healthy cross-section of America, if just a little smarter, a little better educated and with a deeper southern drawl than the nation as a whole.

Congress has required an annual report on the composition of the armed forces since 1974, the year after conscription ended. This year’s report, prepared for the Department of Defense by CNA Corp., analyzes fresh data compiled by the Defense Manpower and Data Center through fiscal 2013.

It explains how the mix of volunteers has changed over time and why recruit quality, recently at an all-time high, likely won’t stay there.

A varied force

The percentage of female enlisted members has declined slightly over the past decade, to 14.5 percent, reflecting lower wartime retention rates, while the percentage of female officers continued to climb past 17 percent.

The racial, ethnic and socioeconomic mix is not too different from America itself. Among recent recruits, blacks are slightly overrepresented, at 18.7 percent versus 15.5 percent of recruit-aged youth. But the report notes important gains for blacks across the career-enlisted force.

“Contrary to what one might expect,” it says, “black servicemembers are underrepresented among junior enlisted pay grades (relative to whites) but overrepresented in the senior pay grades. This is particularly true for the top enlisted leadership positions (E8 and E9). It reflects both strong black accession percentages in the 1990s and black servicemembers’ high continuation rates

MILITARY UPDATE

Tom Philpott

and competitiveness in the promotion process.”

The number of Hispanics in uniform is climbing, though not at a pace to match Hispanic population growth nationwide. In 1978, the report notes, Hispanics were 6.1 percent of accessions; by 2013, they were 15.5 percent, still short of the 21.1 percent of Hispanics among all recruit-aged youth.

Asians are the fastest-growing ethnic group in the U.S., but their recruit numbers lag.

Goals exceeded

In 2013, all service branches, including the Coast Guard, met recruiting goals, taking “high percentages of high-quality recruits” and significantly exceeding their own goals, CNA officials noted in releasing the report.

“We cannot expect such good news in the future,” it warns, because recruiting success “is closely tied to the state of the economy. In 2013 the unemployment rate was 7.4 percent (15.5 percent among those 16 to 24 years old) and it was difficult to find employment.”

The jobless rate now is 5.8 percent.

“As the economy continues to expand, we can expect recruiting to get tougher and tougher,” CNA warns.

As of Sept. 30, 2013, active-duty strength stood at 1.37 million, down 41,000 over the previous two years. That was 600,000 fewer enlisted than were on active duty in 1973, when the draft ended.

The Marine Corps, the small-

est of the DOD services, had the same number of active-duty members in 2013 — 196,000 — as it did 40 years earlier. Yet over that period, Army active-duty strength fell 63 percent, to 528,000; Navy strength fell 54 percent, to 320,000; and the Air Force dropped by 46 percent, to under 327,000.

The all-volunteer force is far more senior than during the draft era, when skills were less technical and services needed fewer careerists. The services were flush with quality recruits from 2011 through 2013 due not only to a poor economy but to a postwar drawdown that allowed the Army and the Marine Corps, in particular, to be more selective than in the past.

Area of concern

Recruiters worry that every year, a smaller slice of the nation’s youth qualify for service. In 2013, only 13 percent were both available, meaning not in college, and able to meet recruiting standards without a waiver. An estimated 22 percent of youth would be disqualified for medical issues, 21 percent are overweight, 14 percent have mental issues and 8 percent used illegal drugs.

To assess how recruits track on a socioeconomic scale, the report uses census data to divide the nation into five strata of affluence, from poorest to wealthiest areas. It found most recruits hail from the three middle-income quintiles and underrepresent poorest and wealthiest neighborhoods.

Georgia and then Florida topped an “accession share” list, providing 47 percent and 44 percent more recruits, respectively, above their youth populations.

To comment, write Military Update, P.O. Box 231111, Centreville, VA, or email milupdate@aol.com or twitter: Tom Philpott @Military_Update

Health care program for vets stumbles

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A multi-billion-dollar program to provide outside health care to veterans caught up in long waits at the Department of Veterans Affairs is stumbling out of the gate and drawing only small numbers of participants, according to Senate testimony Thursday.

The Veterans Choice program — estimated by Congress to cost \$10 billion — has only resulted in 30,000 veteran appointments since the program was launched in November, Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Bob McDonald said.

A second facet of the program that offers vets outside care if they live more than 40 miles from a VA health care facility has been used by just 44 beneficiaries, he said.

The figures drew strong criticism from senators who were weighing the department’s budget request for the coming year and drilling down on the job performance of McDonald, who was confirmed last summer with the hope he could turn around the VA and root out poor management.

“The choice card program basically seems to be not working,” said Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn.

Blumenthal said the numbers make it clear the choice program is “shockingly underutilized,” but the reasons for that remain unclear despite discussion with McDonald and the VA.

The program was passed last summer as part of a massive federal law overhauling the VA following a nationwide scandal of long patient wait times and records manipulation.

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3 accused in Islamic State plot

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Two men arrested on charges of plotting to help the Islamic State group were vocal both online and in personal conversations about their commitment and desire to join the extremists, with one of them speaking of shooting President Barack Obama to “strike fear in the hearts of infidels,” federal authorities said.

The men were among three charged Wednesday with attempt and conspiracy to provide material support to a terrorist organization.

Akhror Saidakhmetov, 19, was arrested at Kennedy Airport in New York, where he was attempting to board a flight to Istanbul, with plans to head to

Syria, authorities said. Another man, Abdurasul Hasanovich Juraboev, 24, had a ticket to travel to Istanbul next month and was arrested in Brooklyn, federal prosecutors said.

The two were held without bail after a brief court appearance.

A third defendant, Abror Habibov, 30, is accused of helping fund Saidakhmetov's efforts. He was ordered held without bail in Florida.

If convicted, each faces a maximum of 15 years in prison.

New York Police Department Commissioner William Bratton said this was the first public case in New York involving possible fighters going to the Islamic State, but he hinted at other ongoing investigations.

“This is real,” Bratton said. “This is the concern about the lone wolf, inspired to act without ever going to the Mideast.”

Authorities said Juraboev first came to the attention of law enforcement in August, when he posted on an Uzbek-language website that propagates the Islamic State ideology.

“Greetings! We too want to pledge our allegiance and commit ourselves while not present there,” he wrote, according to federal authorities. “Is it possible to commit ourselves as dedicated martyrs anyway while here?”

“What I'm saying is, to shoot Obama and then get shot ourselves, will it do? That will strike fear in the hearts of infidels,” he wrote.

2 killed in NATO convoy attack

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — A suicide attack struck a NATO coalition convoy in downtown Kabul Thursday morning, killing two people.

At about 8:30 a.m. a suicide bomber in a Toyota Corolla attacked two vehicles belonging to Turkish members of the NATO-led Resolute Support mission, said Kabul police spokesman Hashmat Stanikzai.

The blast killed at least one Turkish individual and one Afghan civilian bystander, as well as the attacker, he said.

The Associated Press, citing the Turkish military, reported that one Turkish soldier was killed and another was wounded in the attack.

Coalition officials confirmed that it was one of their convoys but did not release any information on casualties.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack.

“The purpose of today's attack in Kabul was a U.S. convoy, the embassy or any other country nationals were not objective,” the group's spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid, wrote on Twitter.

The recently appointed NATO civilian representative to Afghanistan, Ismail Aramaz, who is Turkish, had been reported to be the target of the attack.

But NATO spokesman Chris Chambers told Stars and Stripes that Aramaz was at his residence, not in the vehicles, at the time of the blast.

Request for military force faces scrutiny

BY JON HARPER

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Defense experts and legal scholars ripped the Obama administration's request for congressional authorization to take military action against the Islamic State group, telling lawmakers Thursday that the draft document submitted to Congress is full of flaws.

The U.S. military has been bombing the militants since August. But earlier this month, President Barack Obama decided to put the war effort on stronger legal footing. Two weeks ago, he proposed legislation — an authorization for the use of military force — that included provisions about how the military campaign would

be conducted going forward.

The main restriction is that the proposed AUMF would not authorize “enduring offensive ground combat operations” against the group. Retired Gen. Jack Keane, the former Army vice chief of staff, said such a restriction should not be imposed.

“ISIS cannot be defeated in Iraq and Syria without a decisive ground force victory,” Keane told members of the House Armed Services Committee, using a common acronym for the Islamic State. Noting that it's unclear whether local forces will be able to defeat the group, Keane said, “Why put limits on the use of a ground force when it's widely recognized as the only means to defeat ISIS?”

Rep. Mac Thornberry, R-

Texas, the chairman of the committee, said the language of the ban is too legalistic.

“We already put too many encumbrances on our troops in carrying the missions they are assigned,” he said. “Going into battle with a lawyer nearby to decide whether a particular action is ending or offensive or a ground combat operation seems problematic.”

But the experts all agreed that passing an AUMF would be important for symbolic reasons.

“I just have a moral problem with the idea of asking U.S. troops ... to engage in a long term set of military operations without them knowing that the political branches ... of their government are behind them,” Wittes said.

Sept. 11 case halted after judges are ordered to move to Gitmo

Stars and Stripes

A military judge halted all proceedings Wednesday in the Sept. 11 terrorism case at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay, ruling that a Pentagon edict requiring trial judges to live there for the

trial's duration constituted unlawful influence.

Army Judge Col. James Pohl, chief of the Guantanamo military commission, issued the stay after a defense motion calling for a dismissal of charges against

Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the alleged al-Qaida mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, and four others accused as accomplices.

Pohl denied the dismissal motion but ordered the Pentagon to rescind the order aimed at him-

self or any other judge detailed to the Guantanamo commission.

The order could conceivably be viewed by outside parties as an attempt to compromise the judiciary's independence, Pohl added.

Rose's injury latest blow to NBA class of '08

The Associated Press

MIAMI — The collective reaction from the NBA to Derrick Rose's latest injury news was simple: "Not again."

And not just for the Chicago Bulls, but also for Rose's 2008 NBA Draft class.

Forget the obvious disappointment that the Bulls have by their best player and former MVP being sidelined yet again by a knee injury.

Players and coaches around the league weren't shy about sharing in Chicago's pain, especially with the Bulls looking like a team that could contend for an NBA title.

It all raises a question: What happened to the class of 2008, which came in with such fanfare after three college freshmen were the first picks for the first time in league history?

Rose was the No. 1 pick that year and has perhaps been the most snake-bitten

player in the league over the past four years. Michael Beasley, the No. 2 pick, was an All-Star this season — in China. Joe Alexander was picked No. 8 and his last NBA minutes were nearly five years ago.

Only time will tell, but this much is certain — the class has more than paid its dues on the bad-luck front.

Here's some things about the 2008 class ... the good, the bad, and the ugly:

SUPER MARIO: Mario Chalmers stands alone among the Class of 2008. He's the only one of the 60 players selected that night to have helped a team win an NBA title. The Heat guard has a pair of championship rings, from Miami's triumphs in 2012 and 2013. Chalmers has played in 29 games in June; everyone else in that 2008 class, combined, has 28 June appearances.

FINALS FLOPS: Only four first-

rounders from that class have even played in the NBA Finals — and combined, their records in those games are 3-13. Courtney Lee was with Orlando when the Magic lost in five games to the Los Angeles Lakers in 2009. Russell Westbrook and Serge Ibaka were part of Oklahoma City's five-game loss to Miami in 2012. Michael Beasley played in the finale of Miami's five-game loss to San Antonio last year.

THE INJURIES: It's not just Rose who has dealt with more than his share of injuries. Brook Lopez has missed the better part of two full years with foot issues. Eric Gordon missed more than 100 games in a two-season span because of knee problems. Kevin Love's 2012-13 season was basically nonexistent because of hand injuries. With Rose, that's four top-10 picks that year who have dealt with some fairly serious matters.

BENCHED (OR WORSE): Of

the 30 first-round picks that season, only 10 have logged at least 30 starts in the 2014-15 campaign. There's 15 who are averaging 10 points or more per game, and six of them haven't appeared anywhere in the NBA this season. In fairness, having 24 first-rounders still in the league is a far better rate of attrition for the 2008'ers than some other relatively recent classes. There's been 13 first-rounders from 2006 in games this season, 18 from 2007 and 22 from 2009.

BETTER DAYS? It's easy to think the best days are yet to come for the 2008'ers. Westbrook might end up as an MVP candidate, one year after his Oklahoma City teammate Kevin Durant took home that award. Love is now with the Cavaliers, and will be heading to the playoffs for the first time and it's still a pretty good bet that Cleveland will be in the mix for the Eastern Conference title — or more.

Garnett a winner in return to T'wolves

The Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — All the years he'd been gone and all the thunderous standing ovations he received when he returned to Target Center with the Celtics and Nets, and Kevin Garnett still never fully realized just how much the Minnesota fans loved the franchise's biggest star.

Wearing that old No. 21 on his back for the first time in nearly eight years, Garnett's ears were finally open. And these Timberwolves fans who have suffered for so long since he was traded to Boston in 2007 unleashed a welcome home celebration so loud and so heartfelt that it finally hit home.

Garnett made an ear-splitting return to Minnesota and his Timberwolves overcame a jittery start to beat the Washington Wizards 97-77 on Wednesday night.

Garnett, reacquired in a trade from Brooklyn last week, had five points on 2-for-7 shooting with eight rebounds and two blocks in 19 minutes in his first game for Minnesota since 2007. But this night was never about his numbers or the result of the game. It was about welcoming a family member back home after a hiatus that had stretched for far too long.

"I've been back before and I never paid attention to how much love is here still for me because I'm too busy being focused on the game," Garnett said about his previous games at Target Center with Boston and Brooklyn. "And tonight it was just over the top."

"I did not know the city missed me like this. I don't think that you can ever wish or ever think the city loves you like this. But to see it is reality and I'm very appreciative."

Garnett spent his first 12 seasons in Minnesota, getting drafted as a skinny high-schooler in 1995 and growing into a 10-time All-Star, an MVP, and the man most responsible for putting the woe-begone Timberwolves franchise on the

map.

He was traded to Boston in 2007, and the hard feelings threatened to spoil the relationship between the Wolves and the face of their franchise.

In one night, any of those lingering resentments were buried under an avalanche of standing ovations, serenades of "KG! KG! KG!" and nostalgic videos that highlighted all the memories Garnett formed with the team, and the fans, in his first tour here.

Heat 93, Magic 90 (OT): Luol Deng had 21 points, Dwyane Wade added 18 and Miami rallied to beat host Orlando.

Hassan Whiteside added 15 points and 13 rebounds. The Heat have won three of four since losing Chris Bosh for the season with a blood clot in his lung.

Rockets 110, Clippers 105: James Harden had 21 points, Corey Brewer scored 13 of his 20 points in the fourth quarter and host Houston snapped a six-game skid to Los Angeles.

It's Houston's first victory over Los Angeles since March 30, 2013, and just the second win in the past 13 meetings with the Clippers.

Hawks 104, Mavericks 87: Led by Dennis Schroder's 17 points, host Atlanta took the lead with a 13-0 run in the third quarter and went on to a victory over Dallas, who was without suspended guard Rajon Rondo.

Hornets 98, Bulls 86: Michael Kidd-Gilchrist had 18 points and 12 rebounds, Mo Williams scored 17 points and Charlotte beat host Chicago after the Bulls learned Derrick Rose will have yet another knee surgery.

Al Jefferson added 16 points to help the Hornets snap a five-game losing streak.

Kings 102, Grizzlies 90: Rudy Gay scored 28 points, DeMarcus Cousins added 16 points and nine rebounds and Sacramento beat visiting Memphis.

Suns 110, Nuggets 96:

Brandon Knight hit two key late three-pointers and had 19 points to help Phoenix snap a five-game losing streak with a win over host Phoenix.

Eric Bledsoe added 18 points for the Suns, who had six players score in double figures as they ended a seven-game road skid. The Suns grabbed 65 rebounds, most in the NBA this season.

Pelicans 102, Nets 96: Quincy Pondexter scored a career-high 25 points and host New Orleans beat Brooklyn for its third straight victory.

Celtics 115, Knicks 94: Evan Turner had his first career triple-double with 10 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists and host Boston pulled away with 20 straight points in the second half.

Isaiah Thomas scored 19 in his home debut for the Celtics. Thomas, acquired by Boston on Feb. 19 in a deal with Phoenix, hit all 11 of his free throws and added seven assists and six rebounds.

Bucks 104, 76ers 88: John Henson scored 21 points, Michael Carter-Williams had seven points and eight assists in his Milwaukee debut, and the host Bucks built a big early lead against the point guard's former Philadelphia teammates.

Lakers 100, Jazz 97: Jordan Clarkson scored a career-high 22 points and visiting Los Angeles erased a double-digit deficit in a comeback victory over Utah.

Trail Blazers 111, Spurs 95: Wesley Matthews scored 31 points, LaMarcus Aldridge had 11 points and 13 rebounds, and host Portland beat slumping San Antonio for its first victory since the All-Star break.

Mavs suspend Rondo for game after clash

The Associated Press

ATLANTA — The Dallas Mavericks suspended Rajon Rondo for their game Wednesday night in Atlanta for conduct detrimental to the team, a day after the point guard had a heated exchange on the court with coach Rick Carlisle and was benched.

Carlisle said he must communicate better with Rondo.

"The incident last night was born in large part from poor communication between him and I," Carlisle said before Dallas' 104-87 loss. "That's on both of us. We had a long talk about the situation today and we both agreed we need to communicate more frequently and we need to work on the solution of making his stint as a Dallas Maverick the most successful one possible."

Rondo came out with 8:10 left in the third quarter of Dallas' 99-92 home victory over Toronto. He was bringing the ball up the court when Carlisle angrily shouted for a timeout and exchanged words with Rondo from several feet away as the player headed to the bench.

Carlisle said Rondo will return as a starter for the Mavericks' next game against Brooklyn on Saturday.

"It's one game. He'll serve it tonight," Carlisle said. "We'll be off tomorrow. He'll practice Friday and he'll be back in the starting lineup on Saturday. The events of last night are now in the past and we've got to move forward."

"I need to say this very clearly: He's an extremely important part of our team. Our efforts to get to the highest possible level largely hinge on ... playing well with him. He needs to play well with us and we need to play well with him. It's a two-way street."



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Lyles helps Kentucky reach 28-0

The Associated Press

STARKVILLE, Miss. — On a roster full of superstars, top-ranked Kentucky's Trey Lyles often is an afterthought.

At least for one night, the 6-foot-10 freshman gave a glimpse of how important he could be for the Wildcats in their quest for an undefeated season and national championship. Lyles scored a career-high 18 points in Kentucky's 74-56 victory over Mississippi State on Wednesday night, sending the Wildcats to a 28-0 record.

Coach John Calipari said Lyles — who added six rebounds, two assists and a blocked shot — hasn't even come close to his full potential.

"He should have had 25 points today, but I thought he played well," Calipari said. "I still think at the end of the day he'll be the X-factor for us."

Aaron Harrison added 16 for Kentucky (15-0 Southeastern Conference), the only remaining undefeated team in the country.

Kentucky's 28-game winning streak is the second longest in school history, trailing only a 32-game run that stretched from 1953 to 1955. It's the longest in a single season for the program, topping a 27-game streak during the 1995-96 season.

The Wildcats had to work a little for this one, leading just 41-37 with 15:10 remaining. But they responded with an avalanche of points down the stretch — punctuated by a thunderous dunk by Karl-Anthony Towns — to turn the contest into another convincing blowout.

Calipari said the game was more evidence of how good his team can be with the proper mindset.

"I just told the guys, 'Look, I can fight you for the next 40 days if that's what you want. And I will fight you,'" Calipari said. "Or you can just play like you're capable of playing. They know what we want them to do."

Mississippi State (12-16, 5-10) has lost eight in a row to the Wildcats. Fred Thomas led the Bulldogs with 14 points. Craig Sword added 10.

No. 2 Virginia 70, Wake Forest 34: Anthony Gill scored 11 points and visiting Virginia routed Wake Forest for its seventh straight win.

Darion Atkins added 10 points to help the short-handed Cavaliers (26-1, 14-1 Atlantic Coast Conference) score their most points since they beat Miami 89-80

in double overtime on Jan. 3.

The ACC leaders shot 50 percent, led by 38 and held Wake Forest to 15 points in the first half and a season-worst 22 percent shooting.

Dinos Mitoglou had 10 points for the Demon Deacons (12-16, 4-11), who took their most lopsided loss of the year.

Virginia played without two injured starters — Justin Anderson and London Perrantes — but had no trouble with rebuilding Wake Forest, which became the fifth Virginia opponent in six games to fail to reach 50 points.

No. 4 Duke 91, Virginia Tech 86: Jahliel Okafor scored a career-best 30 points, including four in overtime, and visiting Duke beat Virginia Tech for the Blue Devils' eighth straight victory.

Okafor also grabbed nine rebounds and showed no ill effects of the sprained left ankle that caused him to miss the Blue Devils' last game. Quinn Cook added 26 points and Justise Winslow had 15 for Duke (25-3, 12-3 Atlantic Coast Conference).

Jalen Hudson scored a career-high 23 points for Virginia Tech (10-18, 2-13), but missed a layup in the final seconds of regulation that could have given the Hokies their first victory against a ranked team in more than two years.

Adam Smith added 15 points for the Hokies and Devin Wilson had 10 points and 11 assists.

Both teams shot well all night, with Duke at 59.3 percent (35 for 59) and the Hokies at 53.4 percent (31 for 58).

No. 10 Northern Iowa 78, Evansville 57: Deon Mitchell scored 17 points and host Northern Iowa beat Evansville, setting up a showdown with Wichita State for the Missouri Valley title.

Paul Jespersion added 11 points for the Panthers (27-2, 16-1 MVC), who are tied with the Shockers atop the conference. The two teams will meet Saturday in Wichita for the regular season championship and the top spot in the league tournament.

After Evansville went on a 13-1 run early in the second half to cut the Panthers lead to 45-40 with 12:02 left, the Panthers scored eight straight over the next 2:54 to put the game away.

No. 11 Wichita State 63,

Indiana State 53: Darius Carter had 20 points and 11 rebounds to lead the visiting Shockers.

Fred VanVleet added 15 points while Tekele Cotton scored 12 in a win that saw Wichita State (26-3, 16-1 MVC) score 30 points in the paint.

The Shockers host Northern Iowa on Saturday for the conference title.

No. 19 Baylor 79, No. 12 Iowa State 70: Baylor was down eight and seemingly destined for its 13th straight loss at Iowa State.

Then the Bears started making shots — seven straight threes, to be precise — for a stunning late run that sunk the Cyclones.

Taurean Prince scored 20 points and Baylor upset Iowa State on the road for its third straight win.

Richmond 67, No. 22 VCU 63 (2 OT): At Richmond, Va., Terry Allen had a key block and two free throws in the closing seconds of the second overtime to help the Spiders pull off the upset.

ShawnDre' Jones scored 22 points and Allen had 16 points and 10 rebounds to lead Richmond (16-12, 9-6 Atlantic 10). Kendall Anthony added 13 points and T.J. Cline had 11, including a tying layup with 2 seconds left in the first overtime.

Treveen Graham had 25 points and 10 rebounds to lead VCU (21-7, 11-4), and JeQuan Lewis added 15 points.

Graham made a long three-pointer from in front of the Rams' bench to tie the score at 52 at the end of regulation. With VCU trailing 65-63, Graham had a chance to send it to a third overtime but had his layup blocked from behind by Allen.

No. 23 Butler 73, Marquette 52: Kellen Dunham scored 22 points and Kameron Woods added 14 to lead host Butler to a win over Marquette.

The Bulldogs (20-8, 10-5 Big East) rebounded from their worst loss of the season by winning their 20th game of the season for the 20th time in school history. Butler also avoided losing back-to-back games for the first time since mid-December.

Marquette (11-16, 4-12) was led by Luke Fisher with 17 points. It has lost four straight.

Penguins nix sweep by Caps

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — After losing their first three matchups with the Washington Capitals this season, the Pittsburgh Penguins regained some balance against their division rival.

Sidney Crosby scored his 20th goal of the season, Evgeni Malkin added three assists, and the Penguins held on to beat the Capitals 4-3 on Wednesday night, averting a sweep of the season series.

Patric Hornqvist, Brandon Sutter and Chris Kunitz also had goals for Pittsburgh, which has won three straight and leads Washington by three points for third place in the Metropolitan Division.

"Psychologically, heading into the playoffs, Washington would have had an edge, and then you have to battle that as you enter the playoffs," Penguins coach Mike Johnston said. "Now you can almost say that maybe we have the edge."

Crosby and Malkin both earned their first points of the season against Washington, which won the first three meetings by a combined score of 10-1.

Marc-Andre Fleury stopped 21 shots, including Joel Ward's breakaway attempt in the second period.

Flames 3, Devils 1: Sean Monahan scored a power-play goal 35 seconds into the third period and visiting Calgary moved into a Western Conference wild-card spot.

Curtis Glencross scored late in the second period to tie it, T.J. Brodie added a short-handed, empty-net goal in the final minute, and Karri Ramo made 26 saves as the Flames snapped a three-game losing streak.

Senators 3, Ducks 0: Andrew Hammond made 25 saves to earn his first NHL shutout in his third career start, and Erik Condra, Mika Zibanejad and Kyle Turris scored to lift Ottawa over host Anaheim.

Hammond, who got the chance to play because of injuries to Craig Anderson and Robin Lehner, has backstopped the Senators to three straight victories. He has stopped 88 of 91 shots.

Source: Manning, Broncos talk about revising contract

The Associated Press

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. — It looks as if it's going to come down to money.

A person with knowledge of the negotiations confirms the Denver Broncos and Peyton Manning's representatives are discussing ways to revise his contract and give the team more flexibility in free agency.

The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because of the sensitive nature of the talks.

Manning, who has made more money than any player in pro football history, is due to make another \$19 million in both 2015 and '16, and his salary cap number for next season is \$21.2 million.

John Elway has traditionally been one of the more aggressive general managers in the NFL when it comes to free agency, and he has plenty of problems to fix again this offseason.

Last year he lured DeMarcus Ware, T.J. Ward, Aqib Talib and Emmanuel Sanders, Pro Bowlers all, and he wants to make

another run at a Super Bowl title with Manning, who turns 39 next month.

Redoing Manning's deal would give Elway more maneuverability as he addresses Denver's offseason needs, including retooling the offensive line that figures to have up to three new members next season.

Following Denver's playoff loss to his former team, the Indianapolis Colts, last month, Manning was non-committal about playing next season, which would be his 18th in the NFL.

Manning flew to Denver on Feb. 12 to meet with Elway and new coach Gary Kubiak, both of whom said at the NFL scouting combine last week that they expected Manning to be their quarterback next season.

Manning must also pass a physical by March 5 where doctors check to see if there's any degeneration in his surgically repaired neck, but both the five-time MVP and Elway have said they consider that a mere formality.

In other NFL news:

■ A person familiar with talks has told The Associated Press that the Buffalo Bills are in negotiations to sign veteran free agent quarterback Josh McCown.

The person spoke on the condition of anonymity on Thursday because the Bills do not discuss contract discussions.

The talks began after the 35-year-old spent the previous two days visiting with the Cleveland Browns. Two weeks ago, McCown spent two days meeting with Bills officials and touring Buffalo. He has also visited Chicago and the New York Jets.

■ Tennessee left tackle Michael Roos is retiring from the NFL after playing 10 seasons and 148 games with the Titans.

Roos announced his decision Thursday on social media after informing the Titans.

■ The San Francisco 49ers will bid to host the college football playoff championship game at Levi's Stadium.

A person with knowledge of the plans told The Associated Press on Wednesday that the team will seek to host either the 2018, '19 or '20 title game when they

come up for bid later this year. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because there has been no announcement about the plans.

Cities interested in hosting one of those three title games have until May to bid. A decision on the winners is expected in the fall.

Kyle Busch has surgery on broken left foot

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Kyle Busch has undergone surgery on his left foot, broken in a hard crash at Daytona International Speedway.

Dr. Robert Anderson of Ortho-Carolina performed the surgery Wednesday.

Busch broke his right leg and left foot Saturday in the Xfinity Series race when he crashed into a concrete wall at Daytona. He missed the season-opening Daytona 500 and is out indefinitely.