

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## USAREUR: More helos needed to back tanks

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

STUTT GART, Germany — A Pentagon plan to deliver an additional brigade's worth of tanks and rotational troops to Europe will provide crucial firepower along NATO's eastern flank, but a gaping hole remains for the general leading the Army's efforts on the Continent.

"Army aviation is the most significant capability we need, so I am counting on the department and the Army to figure out how to get us the aviation capability we need on a rotational basis," Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, commander of U.S. Army Europe, said in an interview Wednesday. "Aviation is such a force multiplier."

The Defense Department is seeking \$3.4 billion for its European Reassurance Initiative in Fiscal 2017 — quadruple the amount of the previous year and a cash windfall that will further boost military operations across the Baltics and throughout eastern Europe.

The U.S. has markedly increased its presence in eastern Europe in the two years since Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimea Peninsula.

Full details of the plan are to be unveiled next week, when the budget is formally presented. But Pentagon officials have said part of the funds will support an additional brigade's worth of rotational troops along with the forward positioning of a brigade-size fleet of heavy vehicles and weaponry.

For the Army, that will ensure the continuous year-round presence of a heavy armor brigade in Europe, Hodges said. "Deterrence is all about having capability and demonstrating that capability. And this is a huge boost to our ability to do that," he said.

But budget cutbacks in recent years have reduced Army aviation assets in Europe, such as attack and transport helicopters.

More aircraft, maintenance support and mission command elements are needed and have been formally requested, Hodges said. "I feel confident the Joint Staff is going to validate that request."

For Hodges — who on Wednesday concluded a three-day visit to Ukraine, where he met with local forces — the past year in command has been one of transformation for USAREUR.

Since Russia's 2014 intervention in Ukraine, the Army has increased the flow of forces into Europe, rotating them in from the States, and moved hundreds of heavy-armor fighting vehicles to strategic hubs in the Baltics and eastern Europe. Having an additional brigade's worth of armor and artillery, the Army will be better positioned if called upon in a crisis, Hodges said.

"This is about speed," he said. "If you can quickly assemble troops and equipment in the right place, you can prevent a crisis from escalating."

For NATO, the three small Baltic states are a region of strategic concern. Formerly part of the Soviet Union, they all

border Russia proper or its enclave on the Baltic Sea, Kaliningrad, with large numbers of Russian forces stationed across their borders.

A recent report by the Rand Corp. highlights those issues, arguing that NATO cannot successfully defend the territory of its "most exposed members." A series of tabletop war games conducted by Rand between summer of 2014 and spring of 2015 showed the alliance is undermanned to immediately counter a Russian assault.

"Fortunately, it will not require Herculean effort to avoid such a failure," the Rand report said.

War games indicated a force of about seven brigades, including three heavy armored brigades supported by airpower, land-based fires, and various enabling forces on the ground, could hold the line and prevent "the rapid overrun of the Baltic states," the report concluded.

Given such concerns, officials in the Baltic states welcomed the Pentagon's plans to increase presence in the region.

"U.S. presence in Europe is crucial for (the) security of our continent and I can only commend this decision of the U.S. government, reaffirming strong and enduring U.S. commitment to European security," Juozas Olekas, Lithuania's defense minister, said in a statement.

However, Olekas said he hopes for more commitments from other allies.

"We are ready to host greater allied formations, would it be men and women, Army pre-positioning stocks or both," he said. The "Alliance also could count on our share of the burden in terms of host nation support, existing infrastructure and welfare packages for the troops."

Estonian Defense Minister Hannes Hanso also lauded the Pentagon's announcement, but indicated a desire for a more permanent troop presence.

"Allied presence in Estonia is a key factor in ensuring the security of our region; we have worked hard for several years to achieve more Allied presence here, and we have a strong public and political support to hosting our allies in Estonia," Hanso said in a statement.

Estonia will invest more than \$40 million over the next five years on military base infrastructure to support a larger presence, Hanso said.

It remains unclear whether other NATO members will add military assets to the Baltics and other countries on Russia's periphery, such as Poland. At a summit in Warsaw in July, NATO leaders are expected to examine plans for boosting the alliance's posture.

On the U.S. side, the increased investment in reassurance measures "is very encouraging because it is a manifestation of the support by the administration and Congress and a recognition that our strategic interests are tied to the security and stability of Europe," Hodges said.

But he cautioned that the U.S. cannot guarantee that security alone.

"Another message that should be clear to our allies is the expectation they live up to their obligations," he said.

## Hostage rescue earns SEAL Medal of Honor

By COREY DICKSTEIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — When gunfire erupted, Edward Byers did not hesitate.

He was the second Navy SEAL through a makeshift door of the small, one-room Taliban hideout where an American doctor was being held captive. It was just after midnight on Dec. 8, 2012, in a remote mountain area of the Laghman province of eastern Afghanistan.

The first SEAL through the door was shot and laid mortally wounded as Byers entered and engaged one enemy holding an AK-47, then bounded across the room and tackled a second, according to the official medal citation. Moments later, Byers heard the sound of the doctor's voice and leaped on top of the hostage to protect him while simultaneously grabbing a third Taliban fighter by the throat and pinning him to a wall long enough for another SEAL to shoot and kill him.

For Byers' bravery in the bloody hostage rescue that day, the senior chief petty officer will receive the nation's highest honor for military valor. He will become the 11th living servicemember to receive the Medal of Honor for actions in Afghanistan.

Byers will be only the third sailor presented the medal since the 9/11 terror attacks. Lt. Michael Murphy, also a Navy SEAL, was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously for his actions in Afghanistan in 2005.

SEAL Petty Officer 2nd Class Michael Monsoor, a master-at-arms, was posthumously awarded the medal for actions in Iraq in 2006.

President Barack Obama will present Byers, 36, with his medal on Feb. 29, the White House said in a brief statement released Tuesday that cited only "courageous actions" during a hostage rescue. The summary of action obtained later by Stars and Stripes detailed the mission to rescue Dr. Dilip Joseph.

Joseph, in Afghanistan to help establish medical facilities through the nonprofit group Morning Star Development, had been captured with two Afghans outside Kabul on Dec. 5.

Acting on intelligence that Joseph might be moved to another location the next day, a SEAL team launched an "exhaustive patrol across unimproved trails and mountainous terrain," under the cover of night, according to summary of Byers' actions.

"Success of the rescue operation relied upon surprise, speed, and aggressive action," the summary stated. "Trading personal security for speed of action was inherent to the success of this rescue mission. Each

assaulter in the rescue force volunteered for this operation with full appreciation for the risks they were to undertake."

That risk heightened when an AK-47-wielding guard spotted the force as it moved within about 25 meters of the building that held Dr. Joseph. Shots were fired as the lead SEAL moved forward and entered the shelter where he was wounded. Byers "fully aware of the hostile threat inside the room, boldly entered," eventually rescuing the captive and helping kill more than a handful of Taliban fighters.

"Once Dr. Joseph was moved to the helicopter-landing zone, Chief Byers, a certified paramedic and ... medic, assisted with the rendering of medical aid to the (wounded) assaulter," the summary stated. "Chief Byers and others performed CPR during the 40-minute flight to Bagram Airfield where his teammate was declared deceased."

The summary of Byers' actions did not name the Navy SEAL who was killed in the raid. However, 28-year-old Petty Officer 1st Class Nicolas Checque was killed during a raid Dec. 8, the Pentagon said at the time. It said he had been assigned to an East Coast-based naval special warfare unit.

Neither the Navy nor the White House have identified Byers' unit, but various media reports said the Navy's elite and highly secretive Seal Team 6 carried out the raid to free Joseph.

Byers, a native of Toledo, Ohio, is no stranger to valorous acts. He has been awarded at least seven medals for combat valor, including five Bronze Stars with "V" device. He's also been awarded two Purple Hearts and two Combat Action Ribbons.

He enlisted in the Navy as a hospital corpsman in 1998, about a year after graduating from Otesgo High School in Tontogany, Ohio, according to the White House. Byers became a SEAL in 2003 and has served with several East Coast-based teams.

Medals of Honor have been rare for Navy SEALs, who some people in the defense community say are held to higher standards than other troops. Only five SEALs have received the medal, the first three for actions during the Vietnam War.

Byers' actions, a defense official said, left no doubt he deserved the nation's highest honor for valor.

"Chief Petty Officer Byers displayed superior gallantry, extraordinary heroism at grave personal risk, dedication to his teammates, and calm tactical leadership while liberating Dr. Dilip Joseph from captivity," the defense official said, speaking anonymously because he was not authorized to publicly discuss Byers' actions. "He is unquestionably deserving of the Medal of Honor."

# Marines may permit women to bulk up

*The Washington Post*

As the Pentagon grapples with how to integrate women into all jobs in combat, the Marine Corps is considering something new: boosting how heavy it allows women to be so that they are able to bulk up in the gym to carry heavy loads more easily.

Commandant Gen. Robert Neller, the service's top officer, told the Senate Armed Services Committee on Tuesday that female Marines have told him recently that they are lifting weights to boost their strength. Doing so, however, has pushed

some of them outside the service's limits for how much they are allowed to weigh, he said.

In a brief interview afterward, Neller told reporters that he called for a review of male and female standards that will be completed by July 1 and assess a variety of related criteria, including the service's height-and-weight standards and how it scores Marines on its two fitness tests. It's important, Neller said, to make sure that fit Marines are not penalized.

"I think people are just bigger" than they used to be, he said. "And I think part of it

is the exercise, whether it be CrossFit or weight-lifting or just general fitness. I think people in this country are just bigger, and I think fortunately we've got big, strong Marines."

The comments came following Defense Secretary Ash Carter's decision in December to open all jobs to women. He did so despite the Marine Corps lobbying to keep closed some physically demanding jobs, like machine gunner and reconnaissance man.

According to height-and-weight standards published by the Marine Corps in 2008, the

maximum weight for women who are 5-foot-3 is 141 pounds. Taller women are allowed to weigh more, with the weight limit set at 164 pounds for a woman who is 5-foot-8 and 184 for a woman who is 6 feet tall.

By comparison, male Marines are allowed to weigh more but must maintain a lower body fat composition.

A man in the service is allowed to weigh up to 180 pounds at 5 foot 8, and up to 202 pounds at 6 feet tall. Waivers can be granted to men and women who are over those limits if their commander approves.

## Tornadoes hit South as snow pelts Plains

*Associated Press*

JACKSON, Miss. — Heavy rain prompted an apartment evacuation in northwest Georgia one day after storms spawned tornadoes in Mississippi and Alabama and dumped snow on places farther west.

The National Weather Service, citing a report from an emergency manager in Catoosa County, Ga., said the apartments being evacuated before dawn Wednesday were near the town of Fort Oglethorpe, just south of Chattanooga, Tenn., and about 110 miles northwest of Atlanta. No serious injuries were reported in the flooding.

On Tuesday, tornadoes touched down in Mississippi and Alabama as thunderstorms swept through the region, while a powerful snowstorm buried parts of Colorado and Nebraska in more than a foot of snow before crawling into the Upper Midwest. The combination of snow in one part of the country and severe thunderstorms in another isn't unusual when a powerful system moves across the country, said Greg Carbin with the National Weather Service's Storm Prediction Center.

## Chipotle criminal probe widens

*Associated Press*

NEW YORK — The E. coli outbreak that was linked to Chipotle restaurants may be over, but the burrito chain's indigestion continues.

As Chipotle reported continuing sales declines on Tuesday, the embattled chain also said the scope of a previously disclosed federal criminal investigation has widened beyond a single restaurant in California.

The Denver company says sales sank 36 percent at established locations in January. That follows a previously reported drop of 14.6 percent for the October-to-December

period, which marked the first quarterly decline since Chipotle went public a decade ago.

Chipotle Mexican Grill Inc. also said it has been served with another subpoena requiring it produce documents related to companywide food safety dating back to the start of 2013. Previously, it had said it was served a subpoena in relation to a California restaurant, where there was a norovirus outbreak over the summer.

Montgomery Moran, co-CEO of Chipotle, said he believed investigators wanted to make sure "everything we did was on the up and up." He also said he thinks that will be the ultimate

conclusion at the end of the case.

Chipotle has been reeling since an E. coli outbreak linked to its restaurants came to light at the end of October. The outbreak sickened people in 11 states. Then in December, a norovirus outbreak at a Boston location heightened customer fears about the safety of the chain's food. Sales at established locations dropped 30 percent that month.

Now, Chipotle is pushing to move past its troubles and win back customers. The company has announced a series of new food safety measures.

## Zika transmitted via sex in Dallas case

*Associated Press*

DALLAS — Health officials on Tuesday reported that a person in Texas has become infected with the Zika virus through sex in the first case of the illness being transmitted within the United States amid the current outbreak in Latin America.

The unidentified person had not traveled but had sex with a person who had returned from Venezuela and fallen ill with Zika, Dallas County health officials said. The U.S. Centers for Dis-

ease Control and Prevention issued a statement saying lab tests confirmed the non-traveler was infected with Zika.

The virus, which has been linked to birth defects in the Americas, is primarily spread through mosquito bites, but investigators had been exploring the possibility it could be sexually transmitted. There was a report of a Colorado researcher who picked up the virus in Africa and apparently spread it to his wife back home in 2008, and it was found in one man's semen in Tahiti.

# Longer kicks add drama to Super Bowl

Associated Press

All of a sudden, an extra point can provide some extra drama.

The kick that comes after a touchdown — turning six points into seven — is not quite as much of a sure thing now, because the distance was pushed back from 20 yards to 33 this season.

Imagine a Super Bowl decided by a flubbed kick following a TD. Seem far-fetched? Certainly used to be: No one has missed a PAT in the Super Bowl in a quarter-century.

Things have changed. After all, the Denver Broncos got to their Super Sunday matchup against the Carolina Panthers on Feb. 7 in Santa Clara, Calif., thanks in part to a botched extra point by New England Patriots kicker Stephen Gostkowski in the AFC championship game on Jan. 24.

"Do you want a game to end on a missed extra point rather than going to overtime? I think that would be very anticlimactic. I don't think most fans would want to see a game end that way," said Jay Feely, a kicker for a half-dozen NFL teams over 14 seasons from 2001-14.

"I would never want to see a game end that way, especially one of this magnitude. I hope it doesn't," he said, before adding with a chuckle: "But it certainly could."

NFL kickers had never made worse than 99.3 percent of their extra-point attempts across any season from 2010-14, but the league-wide rate dropped to 94.2 percent this season — the lowest mark in 35 years, according to STATS.

Here's another way to look at it: There were a total of eight misses in all of 2014; that total was exceeded by Week 2 of 2015.

"I wouldn't say I view it as an extra point anymore," Panthers kicker Graham Gano said. "Extra points are gone. Now it's just another field goal."

Gano practices more from the new spot, the right hash mark at the 23-yard line.

"I think the better you are at being a placekicker, the more valuable you are going to be. I feel like I did a good job of hitting them this year, and in the years to come, it will make me a valuable asset to the team."

He is 65 of 68 on PATs this season, in-

cluding the playoffs.

The other Super Bowl kicker, Denver's Brandon McManus, is 37 of 38.

McManus notes that the greater length of the kick means players need to warm up, which they didn't need to do before. And that can be an issue right after a defensive TD, because unlike when his offense has the ball and is driving toward the end zone, a score happens unexpectedly.

"You have to run 50 yards this way to get your helmet, then you've got to run 80 yards back the other way," McManus explained. "The biggest issue is just refocusing, knowing you didn't get to warm up at all. You might have been on the sideline for 30 minutes."

Gostkowski sent an extra-point attempt wide right early in New England's 20-18 loss to Denver, forcing the Patriots to try to go for a 2-point conversion in a failed attempt to send the game to overtime in the closing seconds. It was his first missed PAT in nine years, ending a league-record run of making 523 in a row.

For any NFL kicker's leg, a 33-yard field goal is no big deal. But the mental pres-

sure of a 33-yard extra point changes everything.

"Everyone in the stands and at home thinks you have to make it or else you're not worth anything," McManus said. "That's kind of how it is."

Here's the way Feely described it: "Because of the expectation of perfection, there's an added layer of pressure ... and it has tangible impacts."

He was against the distance switch when it was approved in a vote of club owners in May. Now he's OK with it.

"It was a good change," Feely said. "It did take a play that was a given and was a boring play, and it created more interest throughout this season."

Count Panthers coach Ron Rivera among the converts, too.

"I will be honest with you about it: I was against it. I didn't like it. I thought it was going to change the game. I wasn't sure it was necessary," Rivera said. "Now that I see how effective it has been, how it has made the game entertaining, how it did impact the playoffs this year — it is exactly what the league wanted."

## Three crucial kicks in Super Bowl history

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — When the Super Bowl comes down to the kicker, all eyes are on the smallest, least athletic guy on the field.

There's only been one win-or-lose field-goal attempt in the first 49 years. Three other tie games were decided by a kicker who had the protection of overtime in case he missed.

Many NFL fans and players hate to see games determined by a kicker's foot, and that sentiment is amplified when the Vince Lombardi Trophy is on the line.

People prefer to see Montana or Taylor or Manning or Burress at the end rather than Scott Norwood or Adam Vinatieri lining up for a kick.

Three of the most crucial kicks in Super Bowl history:

**Wide right:** It was 25 years ago when Scott Norwood became perhaps the most well-known kicker in NFL history for all the wrong reasons. The Bills trailed the Giants 20-19 and Jim Kelly drove the offense from its 10 to New York's 29 using a combination of scrambles, runs by Thurman Thomas and a couple of passes.

With no timeouts remaining, Norwood lined up on second down to try a 47-yard field goal that would've given Buffalo its first Super Bowl title. The ball sailed wide right and the Giants celebrated the victory.

Buffalo went on to lose the next three Super Bowls.

**Mr. Clutch Part 1:** The New England Patriots were 14-point underdogs against the St. Louis Rams, who were going for

their second Super Bowl title in three years in 2002.

But Tom Brady and Co. wanted to shock the world. After Kurt Warner threw a 26-yard TD pass to Ricky Proehl to tie the game with 1:37 left, the Patriots started the final drive at their 17.

Brady tossed three short passes to J.R. Redmond to move to the 41. A 23-yard pass to Troy Brown and 6-yard toss to Jermaine Wiggins set up Adam Vinatieri's 48-yard attempt with 7 seconds left.

Vinatieri nailed it, sending the Patriots to the first of their four Super Bowl wins.

**Mr. Clutch Part 2:** Two years later, the Patriots were at it again. A wild, back-and-forth fourth quarter with the Carolina Panthers featured 37 points combined.

Ricky Proehl caught another tying TD pass, a 12-yard toss from Jake Delhomme to make it 29-29 with 1:08 left. But John Kasay's kickoff went out of bounds and the Patriots started at their 40.

Brady connected with Brown for a pair of 13-yard passes sandwiched around an offensive pass interference penalty on Brown. A 17-yard pass to Deion Branch set up Vinatieri for a 41-yard try with 9 seconds left. Vinatieri hit it straight to give New England a 32-29 win.

**Honorable mention:**

**Super Bowl V:** Colts rookie kicker Jim O'Brien kicked a 32-yard field goal with 5 seconds left to beat Dallas 16-13.

**Super Bowl XXIII:** Cincinnati's Jim Breech hit a 40-yarder to give the Bengals a 16-13 lead with 3:44 left only to watch Joe Montana lead the 49ers to a comeback win.

## Tight ends Olsen, Daniels could be decisive in game

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — In a tight spot, Cam Newton and Peyton Manning just might look for their tight ends.

It works. Newton's target is Greg Olsen. Manning's is Owen Daniels.

Some observers believe Olsen is as valuable to his team as All-Pro TE Rob Gronkowski is to the Patriots.

If you think that's a stretch, look at Olsen's numbers: 77 receptions, 1,104 yards and seven touchdowns during the season, when the next leader in catches for Carolina was Ted Ginn Jr., with 44.

In two playoff games, Olsen has 12 catches for 190 yards and one sensational TD. Next best is Philly Brown with six receptions.

"He's a guy I can always turn to, always count on," Newton said of the nine-year veteran acquired from Chicago for a mere third-round draft choice in 2011.

And he's done so week after week. Olsen is averaging just under eight targets a game through Carolina's 17-1 record.

Unlike Newton, Manning has two top-level wide receivers in Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders. But throughout his superb career, Manning always has had a symbiotic relationship with his tight ends, from Dallas Clark to Julius Thomas and now Owen Daniels.

Daniels was signed as a free agent in 2015 after one year in Baltimore. That followed a highly productive eight seasons with the Texans, where current Broncos coach Gary Kubiak was in charge from 2006, when Daniels was a fourth-round pick, until 2013.

Daniels has made two Pro Bowls and had 46 catches and three touchdowns

this season. He caught both of Manning's TD passes in the AFC championship game win against New England.

No one knows this offense better than Daniels, who has spent his entire career on the same team as Kubiak.

"Having Owen Daniels in the huddle was very helpful," Manning said of Denver's 14-4 record. "Owen, to have in the huddle, a play call would come in and I would recite the play just basically repeating it, trying to process it at the same time."

"And Owen would sort of remind you at the very end what route he had, who's hot on this play, or Demaryius had a post route. So he was doing a lot of coaching out there, still does."

On Sunday, each team is faced with a tricky situation in covering the tight ends. Olsen could require the attention of one of Denver's outstanding cornerbacks, Chris Harris Jr., or Aqib Talib. He poses more of a threat overall than any of Carolina's wideouts.

And while Daniels won't get the attention of All-Pro cornerback Josh Norman, who will be busy with Thomas and Sanders, he could draw ball-hawking safety Kurt Coleman's attention. Maybe even one of the Panthers' two All-Pro cornerbacks, Luke Kuechly or Thomas Davis, will draw some of those assignments.

The good news for Carolina is that Olsen is having as good a season as any tight end this side of Gronk. He's even more of a weapon than Daniels because Olsen can get deep.

So can Ginn and Brown, who scored touchdowns against Arizona in the NFC title game. But neither of them can run routes with anything close to the precision Olsen displays.



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# Lakers halt 10-game slide

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Kobe Bryant has lifted the Los Angeles Lakers onto his shoulders countless times over the past two decades, and he rarely flinches under the weight.

Even during a demoralizing losing streak in his farewell season, the 37-year-old superstar summoned his skills to carry the team one more time.

"You've seen it for 20 damn years," Bryant said with a shrug. "What do you expect?"

Bryant hit seven three-pointers while scoring a season-high 38 points, and the Lakers snapped their 10-game skid with a 119-115 victory over the Minnesota Timberwolves on Tuesday night.

With Bryant scoring 14 of their 18 points in the final 5:02, the Lakers avoided the longest losing streak in the 16-time champion franchise's history despite blowing a 16-point lead in the second half. Los Angeles had lost 10 straight for the first time since 1994, and Bryant's vintage performance made sure the record stayed shared.

"You lose 10 straight, that's enough [embarrassment] as it is," Bryant said. "You still don't want to be the team that's one away [from the record]."

Bryant hit repeatedly from the perimeter in the Lakers' first win since Jan. 12, evoking memories of the best years for the third-leading scorer in NBA history.

After Minnesota took the lead in the waning minutes, Bryant put the Lakers back ahead with dramatic, back-to-back threes. He also drained a 19-footer with 26 seconds left to put them up 113-110 before making six free throws in the last 16.7 seconds.

"I appreciate the fact that he's out there competing like he has for 20 years," Lakers coach Byron Scott said. "His body can't do it like he used to, but his mind is

still as sharp as a tack. He still has that will, and I marvel at that."

Andrew Wiggins scored 30 points and led an impressive second-half surge by the Timberwolves, who have lost five straight and 16 of 18. Gorgui Dieng scored 19 points, and Karl-Anthony Towns had 14 points and nine rebounds.

"Kobe just started making shots," said Minnesota coach Sam Mitchell, a still-frustrated participant in Bryant's 81-point game against Toronto in 2006. "I hate him. If I don't ever see him again, it won't be too soon. He doesn't score too many points now, so everybody thinks he's done and all that. He's not the same Kobe, and he'll tell you that. But there are nights when he's feeling good."

**Rockets 115, Heat 102:** James Harden scored 26 points and tied a career-high with 14 assists as host Houston snapped a three-game skid.

The Rockets had a double-digit lead for most of the second half and were up by 10 when Josh Smith scored all of the team's points in a 7-2 run that pushed the advantage to 104-89 with about five minutes remaining.

Houston started Smith, a 6-foot-9 forward, at center with Dwight Howard serving a one-game suspension for making contact with an official this weekend and Clint Capela out with a thigh injury.

Smith scored a season-high 19 points in his second start this season and first since returning to Houston in a trade from the Clippers on Jan. 22.

Luol Deng had 17 points for the Heat, whose season-high four game winning streak ended.

**Raptors 102, Suns 97:** Kyle Lowry scored 26 points, including five three-pointers. DeMar DeRozan added 22 points and visiting Toronto spoiled the debut of Phoenix interim coach Earl Watson.

The Raptors, whose franchise-record 11-game losing streak ended Monday

night in Denver, led the entire second half but had to hold on at the finish.

Markieff Morris had 30 points and 11 rebounds, both season highs, for the Suns, who fired coach Jeff Hornacek on Monday and promoted the 36-year-old Watson to the interim job. Phoenix rookie Devin Booker added 27 points, matching his career best with six 3s. Archie Goodwin had 18 points and a career-best 12 assists for the Suns, who have lost five in a row and 20 of their last 22.

**Celtics 97, Knicks 89:** Isaiah Thomas had 20 points and eight assists, and visiting Boston wore down New York.

Jae Crowder and Tyler Zeller each added 16 points, while reserves Evan Turner and Kelly Olynyk were also in double figures as the Celtics were fresher and sharper in dominating the final 15 minutes.

Turner had 14 points and 10 rebounds, and Olynyk scored 13 points in the Celtics' fifth victory in six games.

Carmelo Anthony had 16 points and 14 rebounds but shot just 4 for 16 in the Knicks' sixth loss in seven games. Robin Lopez added 17 points and 13 rebounds, while Arron Afflalo ended a shooting slump with 18 points but had some careless turnovers.

**Trail Blazers 107, Bucks 95:** CJ McCollum had 30 points and host Portland got its season-high fifth straight win.

Damian Lillard had 14 points and 12 assists for his 11th double-double of the season. Al-Farouq Aminu added 16 points for the Blazers, who have won nine of their last 11.

Khris Middleton had 21 points and eight rebounds for the Bucks, who have lost four straight and six of their last seven. Milwaukee was coming off a 111-104 loss at Sacramento the night before.

Giannis Antetokounmpo added 19 points and Greg Monroe had 17 for the Bucks, both also with eight rebounds apiece.

# No. 1 OU cruises past TCU

Associated Press

NORMAN, Okla. — Buddy Hield was just the second-best scorer in the building Tuesday night.

With Oklahoma City Thunder star Kevin Durant on hand, Hield scored 17 points to help No. 1 Oklahoma defeat TCU 95-72.

Hield, the nation's No. 2 scorer, was held well below his 26.2 average, but he shot an efficient 7-for-13 from the field and made 3 of 8 three-point attempts as the 2014 NBA MVP and four-time scoring champion watched.

"It's cool for him coming in here and showing support and supporting the city, especially with us ranked No. 1," Hield said. "KD's one of the guys I really look up to when I watch the NBA, so it's kind of cool him being out here."

Hield was coming off consecutive games with at least 30 points, but even with Durant watching, he was fine with drawing attention to free up his teammates for a night.

Jordan Woodard scored 14 points, Isaiah Cousins had 13 points, 10 rebounds and seven assists and Ryan Spangler had 11 points and 11 rebounds for the Sooners (19-2, 7-2 Big 12).

Vladimir Brodziansky scored 17 points, Chris Washburn had 15 and Malique Trent added 12 for TCU (10-12, 1-8), which lost its sixth straight conference game.

**DePaul 77, No. 11 Providence 70:** Myke Henry had 27 points and 11 rebounds as host DePaul got the surprising win.

**No. 14 West Virginia 81, No. 13 Iowa State 76:** Jaysean Paige scored 23 points, including a crucial three with 1:05 left, and visiting West Virginia got its league-leading fourth Big 12 road win.

**Tennessee 84, No. 20 Kentucky 77:** Kevin Punter Jr. scored 27 points and Armani Moore added 18 points and 13 rebounds for host Tennessee, which erased a 21-point deficit.

**No. 22 Indiana 80, Michigan 67:** Yogi Ferrell had 17 points and nine assists, and Indiana finished the first half with 25 straight points.

**Georgia 69, No. 25 South Carolina 56:** Yante Maten scored 18 points, Kenny Gaines had 17, and Georgia handed visiting South Carolina its third loss.

**San Diego St. 69, Colorado St. 67:** Jeremy Hemsley banked in a go-ahead jumper with 1:07 left and San Diego State's defense came up with some big plays in the final minutes as the Aztecs beat visiting Colorado State for their 10th straight win to open Mountain West Conference play.

**Duke 80, Georgia Tech 71:** Having lost four of five and out of the Top 25 for the first time since 2007, Duke received another jolt before facing Georgia Tech.

Coach K wouldn't be making the trip. The Blue Devils did just fine without their Hall of Fame leader.

**Butler 87, Georgetown 76:** Kelan Martin scored a career-high 35 points with eight rebounds and four blocked shots to lead host Butler past Georgetown.

Martin made 10 of 18 field goals, including three three-pointers, and 12 of 13 free throws.

**Air Force 70, Wyoming 62:** Hayden Graham scored 23 points and passed around five assists as Air Force came from behind in the second half to beat visiting Wyoming to earn a season split with the Cowboys.

# Panthers win battle of division leaders

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Beating the defending Stanley Cup and Eastern Conference champions, along with the top team in the NHL this season, says something about the upstart Florida Panthers. The way they've done it says even more.

Jonathan Huberdeau had two goals and an assist as the Panthers blew out the Washington Capitals 5-2 Tuesday night for their fourth straight victory. They've outscored the Chicago Blackhawks, Tampa Bay Lightning, Toronto Maple Leafs and Capitals 19-5 to extend their lead in the Atlantic Division.

This wasn't domination in the traditional sense. Even without captain Alex Ovechkin, suspended after missing the All-Star Game, Washington had 38 shots to Florida's 19 and a similar advantage at even strength.

But in a matchup of the East's top two teams, the Panthers got stellar goaltending early from backup Al Montoya and added the opportunistic offense necessary to knock off the Caps, who fell to 13-13-2 all-time without Ovechkin.

Montoya stopped 36 of the 38 shots he faced, and Florida killed off all eight Caps power plays.

**Oilers 5, Blue Jackets 1:** Connor McDavid had a goal and two assists in his return from a nearly three-month absence and host Edmonton beat Columbus to end a three-game skid.

Eric Gryba, Benoit Pouliot, Leon Draisaitl and Jordan Eberle also scored for the Oilers, and Cam Talbot made 36 saves.

**Penguins 6, Senators 5:** Sidney Crosby scored three straight goals for his first natural hat trick in more than five years, and host Pittsburgh opened the second half of the season by beating Ottawa.

**Blackhawks 2, Avalanche 1:** Corey Crawford stopped 22 shots, Richard Panik and Artemi Panarin scored and visiting Chicago beat Colorado without captain Jonathan Toews.

NHL-scoring leader Patrick Kane added an assist with Toews suspended a game by the league for pulling out of All-Star weekend. Toews cited an illness.

**Ducks 3, Sharks 2:** Ryan Garbutt, Hampus Lindholm and Rickard Rakell scored to send host Anaheim past San Jose for its fourth consecutive victory.

Frederik Andersen stopped 30 shots for Anaheim, which has climbed back into playoff contention with an 11-3-1 record since Christmas.

**Kings 6, Coyotes 2:** Dustin Brown scored twice and Jake Muzzin and Alec Martinez each added a goal and an assist to lead visiting Los Angeles over Arizona.

**Blues 1, Predators 0:** Troy Brouwer scored with 1:05 remaining in the third period and Brian Elliott made 16 saves to give visiting St. Louis a victory over Nashville.

St. Louis has won all four matchups between the teams this season.

**Stars 5, Jets 3:** Tyler Seguin scored twice, John Klingberg had a goal and an assist and visiting Dallas held on to beat Winnipeg.

Vernon Fiddler and Antoine Roussel also scored for Dallas.

**Devils 3, Rangers 2:** David Schlemko scored on a power play with 8:46 left and host New Jersey rallied twice to beat New York.

Lee Stempniak and Joseph Blandisi also scored. Cory Schneider made 31 saves and the surprising Devils beat the Rangers for the second straight time this season.

**Islanders 5, Wild 3:** Brock Nelson's team-leading 20th goal broke a tie late in the second period, Jean-Francois Berube made 40 saves for his first NHL win and host New York beat Minnesota.

Mikhail Grabovski and John Tavares each had a goal and an assist, and Anders Lee and Frans Nielsen also scored for the Islanders.

**Maple Leafs 4, Bruins 3 (OT):** Pierre-Alexandre Parenteau scored a power-play goal with 1:54 left in overtime and visiting Toronto rallied to beat Boston and end a four-game skid.

**Flyers 4, Canadiens 2:** Wayne Simmonds scored two goals and led host Philadelphia to a win over Montreal.

Simmonds snapped a tie in the third period with his 16th of the season, sparking the Flyers to the second-half start they needed as they make a playoff push.