

STARS AND STRIPES®

Tuesday, February 16, 2016

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Senate GOP girds for battle over court

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Senate Republicans have united behind Majority Leader Mitch McConnell in insisting that President Barack Obama's successor fill the Supreme Court vacancy created by Justice Antonin Scalia's death. Democrats looking to reclaim the Senate majority immediately accused them of putting politics ahead of their constitutional responsibility.

Vulnerable GOP incumbents in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, New Hampshire and Ohio — all states that Obama won twice — echoed McConnell's contention that the winner of the presidency in November's election should choose the next jurist.

Democrats counter that Obama is president until Jan. 20, 2017, and has every constitutional right to nominate Scalia's replacement.

Obama has said he will fulfill his constitutional duty and nominate a replacement in due time.

His Democratic allies made it clear that denying the president that right would be an unprecedented step and argued it would enshrine the GOP as "the most nakedly partisan, obstructionist and irresponsible majority in history."

"By ignoring its constitutional mandate, the Senate would sabotage the highest court in the United States and aim a procedural missile at the foundation of our system of checks and balances," Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., said in an op-ed in Tuesday's Washington Post.

The No. 3 Democrat in the Senate, Chuck Schumer, of New York, said Tuesday that

'Senate Republicans continue to think that governing is as simple as being against President [Barack] Obama at every turn. It's not, and the American people deserve better leadership than they're getting with this Congress.'

Sen. Dick Durbin
D-Ill.

he expects Obama to select a consensus candidate who could get bipartisan support.

Republican Sens. Rob Portman of Ohio; Ron Johnson, of Wisconsin; and New Hampshire's Kelly Ayotte said the American people should have a say on who should make the lifetime appointment to the court, especially since it will decide the tilt of the court for generations.

Sen. Ted Cruz, the Texan who has practiced before the high court and is seeking the Republican presidential nomination, has vowed to filibuster any nominee.

Republican Sen. Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania said Obama has the authority to nominate, "but let's be clear — his nominee will be rejected by the Senate."

Senate Republicans have the numbers in this consequential "advice and consent" fight.

Republicans outnumber Democrats 11-9 on the Judiciary Committee, which would hold confirmation hearings and vote on whether to send the nominee to the full Senate. The GOP holds the majority, 54-46, and Democrats face an almost insurmountable task in trying to get 14 Republicans to

join them in breaking a certain filibuster.

Beyond math is the political calculus.

Control of the Senate is at stake this election and Democrats looking to unseat Portman and Toomey — along with Ayotte and Johnson — have seized on their call to wait until next year.

In a fundraising appeal, Ohio Democrat Ted Strickland said Portman "has a clear choice to make: He can look out for his party and D.C. special interests by holding back President Obama's nominee, or he can do his job for the people of Ohio."

In New Hampshire, Democratic Gov. Maggie Hassan criticized Ayotte and argued that Obama's constitutional right to nominate isn't suspended in his last year in office.

In Pennsylvania, three Democrats looking to take on Toomey railed against the partisanship over senatorial responsibility.

Democrats are counting on the pressure on Republican senators to force McConnell to allow a nominee to move forward, though the majority leader has shown no signs of relenting since his statement within hours of Scalia's death

on Saturday that the vacancy should not be filled until a new president is sworn in.

Various conservative groups which claimed victory when moderate Republican Speaker John Boehner, of Ohio, stepped down last year, and have questioned McConnell's fealty, made it clear the GOP must stand firm.

"Senator McConnell is right: Under no circumstance should the Republican Senate majority confirm a Supreme Court nominee as Americans are in the midst of picking the next president," said Michael Needham of Heritage Action. "Republican rhetoric condemning President Obama's willful disregard for the rule of law will ring hollow if they do confirm a nominee."

Republicans and Democrats have battled this year over Senate production — or lack of it — as possible action on trade and criminal justice reform look increasingly unlikely.

Obama's allies made clear that if a nominee is ignored or delayed, they will accuse the GOP majority of obstruction, and use that argument in their bid to win back the Senate.

"Senate Republicans continue to think that governing is as simple as being against President Obama at every turn," said Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois, the No. 2 Democrat in the Senate. "It's not, and the American people deserve better leadership than they're getting with this Congress."

Navy moves admirals on base in Naples

BY STEVEN BEARDSLEY
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — Three years after it was singled out for the high cost of housing its admirals, the Navy command in Naples has cut expenses by moving most of its flag officers on base.

The service has budgeted just over \$700,000 in leasing costs to house six admirals and a senior civilian employee in the coming fiscal year, about half of the \$1.3 million it reported three years ago. The actual amount of new spending is even lower, as several units are already paid for in the base lease.

A congressional report in 2013 criticized several overseas

military commands for the high cost of housing some general and flag officers. It singled out Naples, where admirals lived in large off-base villas with steep annual costs.

The largest, 12,000-square-foot Villa Nike, was reserved for the four-star commander of U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa. Provided free of lease by Italy since 1952, the villa had become increasingly expensive for the Navy to maintain — the service requested more than \$400,000 in maintenance fees for fiscal 2013.

Five other off-base villas were reserved for the three-star commander of U.S. 6th Fleet and several one- and two-star admirals. Each cost the Navy

more than annually \$200,000 to lease.

The Navy has since dumped those leases, and it abandoned Villa Nike in 2015. Today, only the two highest-ranking admirals live off-base. The four-star commander of U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa will reside in the 8,000-square foot Villa La Colombaia at an annual cost of \$235,000. The three-star commander of the U.S. 6th Fleet, Vice Adm. James Foggo III, lives in Villa Marilu, which will cost the Navy \$208,600.

The current commander of U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa, Adm. Mark Ferguson, who is soon to leave Naples, lives in Villa Sara, a former three-star quarters transferred to the

four-star after Villa Nike's decline. The Navy's 15-year lease of Villa Sara runs out this year.

The other admirals now live in on-base housing that had been reserved for senior officers — tenant commanders at the O-6 grade, said Lt. Cmdr. Robert Johnson, a spokesman for Navy Region Europe, Africa and Southwest Asia. Each costs around \$60,000 annually and is already included in the base lease. The civilian lives in a base unit that costs about \$33,000.

In each case, admirals were rotated into the on-base quarters as senior officers ended their tours, meaning no one was displaced, Johnson said.

Key cases may change with Scalia's death

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court abhors even numbers. But that's just what the court will have to deal with, perhaps for many months, after the death of Justice Antonin Scalia. Eight justices will decide what to do, creating the prospect of 4-4 ties.

Here are some questions and answers about the prospects of filling the vacancy left by the death of its conservative icon and longest-serving justice and its effect on the court:

■ **What happens to cases in which Scalia cast a vote or drafted an opinion, but no decision has been publicly announced?** It may sound harsh, but Scalia's votes and draft opinions in pending cases no longer matter. Veteran Supreme Court lawyer Roy Englert said that "the vote of a deceased justice does not count." Nothing is final at the court until it is released publicly, and while it is rare, justices have flipped their votes and the outcomes in some cases.

■ **What happens if there is a**

tie? The justices have two options. They can vote to hear the case a second time when a new colleague joins them or they can hand down a one-sentence opinion that upholds the result reached in the lower court without setting a nationwide rule.

■ **How does Scalia's death affect specific cases?** It deprives conservatives of a key vote and probably will derail some anticipated conservative victories in major cases, including one in which labor unions appeared headed for a big defeat.

AF: Tanker crew saved F-16 pilot

Belleville (Ill.) News-Democrat

A fuel malfunction almost caused an F-16 pilot to eject over Islamic State group-held territory last year — but a savvy KC-135 tanker crew saved him, the Air Force is reporting.

The Air Force said a Stratotanker deployed from McConnell Air Force Base, Kan., was refueling some A-10s in the area when the F-16 flew up in need of a helping hand.

Because of a technical problem the jet couldn't sustain more than 500 pounds of fuel at a time, even though the KC-135 was "expecting to offload about 2,500 pounds," Capt. Nathaniel Beer, 384th Air Refueling Squadron pilot, said in a news release.

Instead of calling it quits on the aircraft, the pilot alerted the tanker of his malfunction, and the crew escorted the jet to its base "while refueling every 15 minutes to avoid an emergency."

3 killed in Va. as wintry mix affects roads

Associated Press

CENTURY, Fla. — A treacherous mix of snow, sleet and freezing rain turned morning commutes to icy misery Tuesday for many returning from a long holiday weekend in the Northeast, a day after suspected twisters tore through parts of the South.

At least three deaths were reported on slick roads, all in Virginia, and motorists battled

hazardous road conditions over a wide area from the Mid-Atlantic states through Pennsylvania to northern New England.

In the West, California and Arizona braced for more record-warm temperatures after basking in the high 80s and low 90s on Monday. Millions along the East Coast, meanwhile, were still shivering from a deep freeze.

In Washington, the federal

government was opening three hours late after freezing rain coated the capital city in ice — atop the several inches of snow that fell Monday.

Messy snow, sleet and freezing rain made driving hazardous around the Northeast. Separate tractor-trailer crashes within miles of each other shut the thruway in upstate New York near Albany for a while Tuesday morning.

Gators focus on baseball title

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Florida's baseball team has done everything except win a national championship in eight seasons under Kevin O'Sullivan, and here the Gators are again with a roster overflowing with talent and the consensus No. 1 ranking in the preseason polls.

Is this the year?

"Do we want to win it? Absolutely," O'Sullivan said. "Do we understand that there are a lot of things that have to happen between now and then? I hope so. Unfortunately — and we've talked about this, too — the best team on paper normally does not win the national championship."

That last comment was O'Sullivan's way of making sure his players don't let their heads outgrow their caps. Few teams have been so celebrated before playing their first game.

Florida's 52 wins last year were one off the school record, and it was a top-eight national seed in the NCAA Tournament for the sixth time in seven years. The Gators went unbeaten through regionals and super regionals before a pair of one-run losses to eventual national champion Virginia denied them a spot in the College World Series finals.

"Any time you get that close to something, especially winning the national championship, which we haven't done here yet, it gets you going a little bit and gets you motivated, especially us juniors,"

star pitcher Logan Shore said. "We have sophomores coming off good years and freshmen coming in, and we're all ready to go. This group of guys is a championship group of guys."

Shore, A.J. Puk and Alex Faedo are an imposing weekend rotation that combined for a 26-11 record last season. Brady Singer, a second-round draft pick last year, and Jackson Kowar are among the pitchers in the highly rated recruiting class.

The Gators brought back six everyday players. Center fielder Buddy Reed is a projected first-round draft pick after batting .305 with 14 doubles and 47 RBIs and stealing 18 bases. Catcher JJ Schwarz is coming off a freshman season in which he tied for fourth nationally with 18 home runs. First baseman Peter Alonso's 429-foot homer in the CWS was the longest in the five years the event has been played at TD Ameritrade Park.

Vanderbilt, which edged out Florida to win the SEC East last year and was the national runner-up, still represents the Gators' biggest obstacle even though it lost No. 1 overall draft pick Dansby Swanson and its entire weekend rotation. Center fielder Bryan Reynolds has had back-to-back 90-hit seasons and is one of the nation's top offensive players, and coach Tim Corbin has a bunch of talented pitchers who have been waiting for their turn to take the spotlight. LSU and Texas A&M appear to be the best in the SEC West.

Among other teams to watch are Louisville, Oregon State, Miami, Oklahoma State and California.

Louisville, beaten in super regionals in 2015 after going to the CWS the previous two years, has a veteran lineup and an offense that applies pressure at every opportunity. Oregon State was devastated by the draft in 2014 but came on strong at the end of last season to make the NCAA Tournament.

Miami brought back most of its pitching staff from the team that went to the CWS for the first time since 2008. Big 12 favorite Oklahoma State has a versatile offense and a good supply of arms. California tied a school record with 18 Pac-12 wins last season, and the entire weekend rotation and seven everyday players are back.

As good as those teams and others in the Top 25 should be, Florida is considered a cut above the rest.

Shore, the Gators' ace, pointed out that he and his junior teammates already have won an SEC championship, SEC tournament title and have played in the CWS.

"The one thing we haven't done is win a national championship," he said. "Though that may seem stressful having that hanging over your head, we're not looking at it that way. We're looking at it more from the perspective of coming in every day, working hard, doing things right on and off the field and becoming a close-knit group of guys. If we bring our 'A' game every day, things will take care of themselves."

US women's team rolls in Olympic qualifier

Associated Press

FRISCO, Texas — The U.S. women's soccer team's younger reserves not only didn't disappoint in their Group A finale in CONCACAF qualifying for the Rio Olympics, they delivered a record performance.

Crystal Dunn, one of only three regulars to start, tied a national team record with five goals and the U.S. routed Puerto Rico 10-0 Monday night to win the group.

"I'd like to think this is a special moment," said Dunn, who couldn't recall another five-goal game during her entire soccer career, "but I'd love to think there's more to come."

"Crystal worked real hard tonight," U.S. coach Jill Ellis said. "She was in a good position in central; I think that's probably her most comfortable position. Obviously, got a lot of service from her teammates. It's tremendous for her and for her confidence."

The top-ranked Americans scored three times within 1:56 during the second half and outshot Puerto Rico 32-1.

The U.S. can clinch one of the 12 slots in Brazil with a win in its CONCACAF semifinal game Friday in Houston. It will face the runner-up of Group B, which will finish play Tuesday. Canada is expected to win that group with Guyana or Trinidad & Tobago finishing second.

The U.S. remained unbeaten in all-time CONCACAF qualifying play at 16-0-1, having scored 91 goals and allowing four.

The tournament is the Americans' first competitive play since winning last summer's World Cup in Canada. They have won three straight Olympic titles and four of the five that have been staged in women's soccer.

Group A's other semifinalist is Costa Rica, which edged Mexico 2-1 in Monday's first game at Toyota Stadium.

Dunn's scores came in the sixth, 21st, 62nd, 85th and 87th minutes. She had five career goals going into the game and became the seventh U.S. woman to score five in a match.

The other five goals came from Carli Lloyd (on a penalty kick), Kelley O'Hara, Christen Press, Samantha Mewis (her first career score) and on an own goal.

Ellis' opening lineup included eight players who didn't start either of the two previous group games and only five players who appeared in last summer's World Cup. The lineup was drastically changed since the team had already clinched a semifinal spot, was playing for the third time in five days and faced an opponent ranked No. 108. Alex Morgan played only the second half, substituting for Lloyd. Goalkeeper Hope Solo was among the regular starters rested.

The newcomers including Mallory Pugh, 17, the youngest American woman to start a qualifying match. Pugh assisted on Dunn's first goal and was tripped in the 18th minute, leading to Lloyd's penalty kick.

Defending champ Virginia not taking CWS trips for granted

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Virginia has reached the College World Series four of the last seven years, finished as the runner-up in 2014 and as national champion in 2015.

Unlike Texas coach Augie Garrido, who famously says any year that doesn't end at the CWS is a disappointment, Cavaliers coach Brian O'Connor refuses to judge his program by appearances in Omaha.

"I don't want that, because I know how hard it is to get there," O'Connor said. "There are so many great college baseball programs that can't get there. If you use that as a measuring stick, that's pretty dangerous. Is that a goal of ours? Do we talk about it? Do we work to try to make that happen? Sure. ... We're certainly proud of the fact that we've been there quite a bit lately, and that will be our goal. It's not going to be our measuring stick."

The Cavaliers maxed out last year, overcoming injuries and a midseason funk to qualify for the Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament. They lost three straight there and were a No. 3 regional seed for the NCAA Tournament. The Cavaliers won a three-game CWS finals over 2014 champion Vanderbilt and finished 44-24, the fewest wins by any champion since Southern California won the 1968 title with 43.

"Certainly there's a confidence that comes from winning a national championship, and all the accolades can be a little bit overwhelming," O'Connor said. "That was six months ago, and we talked a lot in the fall that we're proud of what we accomplished and nobody can take that away from us but we need to move on. They understand it's a different group. There are 17 new players who weren't on the team last year. Certainly they've got a lot to prove."

Matt Thaiss, who hit 10 homers and drove in 64 runs, is among seven returning everyday players. Pavin Smith also is back after hitting seven homers as a freshman, including one in the title-clinching win.

No. 1 pitcher Connor Jones is the only returning weekend starter, and the Cavaliers lost the CWS Most Outstanding Player in closer Josh Sborz.

Some things to know entering the season, which starts next Friday:

Three-time finalists? Virginia and Vanderbilt will be trying to reach the CWS finals for the third straight year. Since Southern California's dominant era of the early 1970s, only two teams have gone to the finals three years in a row — Texas in 1983-85 and South Carolina in 2010-12.

Talkin' baseball: College baseball saw a significant increase in offense with the

introduction of the raised-seam ball last season. There were 32 teams that hit 50 homers in 2015 compared with 10 teams that hit that many in 2014. The per-team average of 0.55 homers a game was up from 0.39. The national batting average went from .270 to .274 and per-team scoring from 5.1 runs a game to 5.4.

Best early series: Florida plays a three-game series at Miami on Feb. 26-28 in what probably will be a meeting of top-10 teams. The Gators won two of three regular-season games over the Hurricanes and outscored them 25-5 in two CWS games last year.

New coaches: There are 17 new head coaches in Division I, including Monte Lee at Clemson, Steve Rodriguez at Baylor, Jay Johnson at Arizona, Marty Lees at Washington State, Rick Hirtensteiner at Pepperdine and Matt Heath at the College of Charleston.

Old-timer: Tony Rossi is starting his 47th season at Siena. He's the longest-tenured active head coach at one school in any Division I sport. The 72-year-old ranks second all-time in longevity at one school. This season he passes Joe Paterno, who was Penn State's head football coach for 46 years. The record is 55 years by the late Grambling football coach Eddie Robinson.



Ship's Store official new car program

Exclusive Navy at-sea offers:

www.navyauto.com or nasinfo@navyauto.com

Islanders pummel Red Wings

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Brock Nelson had a goal and an assist to key a three-goal second period and the New York Islanders beat the Detroit Red Wings 4-1 on Monday.

Josh Bailey, Marek Zidlicky and Ryan Strome also scored to help New York win for the fourth time in five games overall and fourth straight at home. Thomas Greiss stopped 28 shots to win his fifth straight start and seventh of his last eight, improving to 16-6-2 on the season. Pavel Datsyuk scored and Jimmy Howard also finished with 28 saves while falling to 0-5-3 in his last nine starts for the Red Wings, who were coming off a 4-0-1 homestand.

Nelson got the Islanders on the scoreboard near the midpoint of the second period with his career-high 21st goal and 100th career point. Strome lifted the puck forward toward a streaking Nelson, who tipped it in the air toward the net. Howard stopped the shot but the puck deflected to Nelson, who knocked the rebound past the goalie from the right side.

Ducks 6, Flames 4: Corey Perry had a goal and two assists, and visiting Anaheim went a perfect 3-for-3 on the power play.

The Flames led 3-2 after an action-packed first period, but with Johnny Gaudreau in the penalty box, Perry banged Cam Fowler's rebound past Jonas Hiller to tie it early in the second.

The Ducks went right back to the man advantage and needed only 11 seconds to convert, with a rebound deflecting off several players and going in off the skate of Sami Vatanen to put Anaheim into the lead for good.

Mike Santorelli, with a pair of goals, Hampus Lindholm and Rickard Rakell also scored for Anaheim. The Ducks, 9-1-1 in their last 11 games, leapfrogged

San Jose into second place in the Pacific Division.

Jiri Hudler had two goals and an assist to lead Calgary.

Panthers 2, Penguins 1 (SO): Jussi Jokinen scored the winning goal in a shootout to lead host Florida over Pittsburgh.

Nick Bjugstad also scored in the shootout and in regulation for the Panthers. Al Montoya made 31 saves.

The Panthers won for the first time in three games, and beat Pittsburgh for the first time in three games this season.

After Jokinen scored, Montoya stopped Matt Cullen in the fifth round of the shootout to seal the win. Sidney Crosby scored in the shootout for the Penguins.

Chris Kunitz scored in regulation for the Penguins and Marc-Andre Fleury stopped 27 shots.

Stars 3, Predators 2 (OT): Mattias Janmark scored at 3:49 of overtime to give visiting Dallas a win over Nashville.

Cody Eakin and Ales Hemsky also scored for Dallas, which has won four straight.

In overtime, Tyler Seguin's shot from the left side was stopped by Nashville goaltender Carter Hutton. Seguin then poked the rebound over to the right side, where Janmark had an easy tap-in for the winner.

Craig Smith and Filip Forsberg scored for Nashville. The Predators have lost three of four.

Blackhawks 7, Maple Leafs 2: Patrick Kane had a goal and three assists, helping host Chicago stop a three-game slide with a victory over Toronto.

Andrew Shaw, Brent Seabrook, Artemi Panarin and Teuvo Teravainen each had a power-play goal, helping Chicago salvage the finale of a disappointing four-game homestand.

It was the Blackhawks' first game since

they lost Marian Hossa to a left leg injury, likely sidelining the veteran forward for a couple of weeks.

Scott Darling got the start in place of a resting Corey Crawford and made 35 saves, including an outstanding sprawling stop on Nick Spaling in the second period. Two of Darling's six wins this season have come against lowly Toronto.

Coyotes 6, Canadiens 2: Oliver Ekman-Larsson had a goal and two assists, and host Arizona completed a season sweep of the Canadiens for the first time in 36 seasons as a franchise.

Arizona broke out of a scoring slump with an onslaught of goals against Montreal goalie Mike Condon, matching the three previous games combined with a season high in goals.

Martin Hanzal scored his third goal in four games and Anthony Duclair had a goal in the first period. Brad Richardson, Kevin Connauton and Ekman-Larsson scored in the second, with Antoine Vermette capping the scoring burst with a goal in the third.

Wild 5, Canucks 2: Jared Spurgeon had a goal and an assist as visiting Minnesota beat Vancouver to end an eight-game losing streak and make interim head coach John Torchetti a winner in his debut.

Zach Parise, Justin Fontaine, Charlie Coyle and Nino Niederreiter also scored for the Wild, who fired Mike Yeo on Saturday following a 4-2 home loss to Boston that left Minnesota with just one victory in its past 14 games.

Erik Haula and Ryan Suter each added two assists, and Devan Dubnyk finished with 24 saves to snap an 0-6-2 slide.

Henrik Sedin, with a goal and an assist, and Christopher Tanev scored for the Canucks, who have lost two in a row after back-to-back road wins that gave them life in the playoff hunt. Jacob Markstrom stopped 29 shots in the loss.

Jayhawks blow out Cowboys

Associated Press

LAWRENCE, Kan. — Kansas was sluggish at the start of each half against Oklahoma State on Monday night.

The real story, though, was how they finished them.

The second-ranked Jayhawks seized control of the game with a 30-9 run into halftime, then used a 32-11 run to finish the game for a 94-67 victory over a Cowboys team that beat them by 19 just last month.

"I think we play better when we're nervous about it," Kansas coach Bill Self said. "Tonight they kind of had an inner confidence, which is good, and thought that we'd be OK the whole game, which it ended up being. But I don't think we had the intensity level that we need."

Wayne Selden Jr. led the Jayhawks (22-4, 10-3 Big 12) with 18 points. Landen Lucas had 14 points and 10 rebounds, Perry Ellis shrugged off a slow start to score 15, and Frank Mason III finished with 14 points.

"Offensively, our perimeter was pretty good," Self said. "Interior-wise, Landen played good and I think everyone else kind of pieced it together."

Oklahoma State (12-14, 3-10) led much of the first half, fell behind by 18 early in the second, then trimmed their deficit to 62-56 with about 11 minutes to go. But that's when the Jayhawks caught fire down the stretch, pulling away for a lopsided victory over Self's alma mater.

"We came out sluggish — some games you're not going to come out like you're supposed to," Selden said, "but it's all about changing it. We were able to change it."

Jeff Newberry scored 19 points and Jeffrey Carroll had 13 for the Cowboys, who again played without leading scorer Jawun Evans. The freshman has been sidelined since hurting his right shoulder Feb. 3.

"We didn't end the first half very well, didn't end the second half very well, and that doesn't spell success for any team coming in here," Oklahoma State coach Travis Ford said.

The Jayhawks looked as if they were still reveling in Saturday's road win over No. 3 Oklahoma in the early minutes Monday, struggling through turnovers and a jumble of poor shots to dig a deep hole.

Oklahoma State made it seem even bigger by sticking to Ford's game plan of slowing the game. Whenever the Cowboys pulled down a rebound, he would stomp on the floor and remind his team to maintain the kind of plodding pace that equals the playing field against a more talented opponent.

No. 7 Virginia 73, N.C. State 53: Malcolm Brogdon scored 22 points and the Cavaliers took command with a 13-2 run to begin the second half and beat the Wolfpack for their 18th straight win at home.

Brogdon had five points in the key burst, which broke a 31-all halftime tie. London Perrantes added 19 points for Virginia (21-5, 10-4 Atlantic Coast Conference), which was coming off a controversial last-second loss at Duke. Brogdon and Perrantes each also had five assists, and Isaiah Wilkins grabbed 13 rebounds. The Cavaliers built their lead to as many as 24 points before emptying their bench.

ACC scoring leader Cat Barber led the Wolfpack (13-13, 3-10) with 14 points, but was blanketed for most of the game by Brogdon and never got into any rhythm. He finished 4-for-11 from the field.

Playoff races heat up in NBA's second half

Associated Press

TORONTO — The All-Star Game is over, a few more days off await before play resumes and what's commonly called the second half of the NBA season is about to begin.

In actuality, the second half has been under way for a while.

Most teams have about 30 games left on the 82-game schedule — so it's crunch time, and given the way the races are shaping up it's not too soon to start scoreboard watching.

Here's a breakdown of how the race to the playoffs might look:

Eastern Conference

In: Cleveland, Toronto, Boston, Atlanta. The Cavaliers have been atop the East for most of the season, and even though the Raptors are playing well the race to the No. 1 seed still goes through Cleveland. The Celtics went into the break with 10 wins in their last 12 games, so the long layoff might not have helped them from a momentum standpoint. And the Hawks seem a bit vulnerable, but it's almost inconceivable to see them outside the play-off mix.

Out: New York, Milwaukee, Brooklyn, Philadelphia. The Knicks are five games back of the No. 8 spot, fired their coach and Carmelo Anthony's knee is problematic. Milwaukee is tough at home (15-8) but horrid on the road (7-24). Brooklyn and Philadelphia are lottery bound.

So that leaves: Miami, Indiana,

Chicago, Charlotte, Detroit, Washington and Orlando, in a seven-team race for four spots. Charlotte won seven of 10 going into the break. Miami is waiting to see how badly hurt Chris Bosh's calf is, and either way the Heat seem as though they're in trade-for-someone mode. Indiana and Chicago would figure to be probable play-off teams, depending on health.

The picks: Miami, Indiana, Chicago and Detroit get into the field.

Western Conference

In: Golden State, San Antonio, Oklahoma City, Los Angeles Clippers. With the first three teams, no explanation is necessary. The Clippers have gotten better without Blake Griffin, somehow.

Out: Denver, New Orleans, Minnesota, Phoenix, Los Angeles Lakers. The Nuggets are only five games out, but it's just so hard to envision them making that strong a run. The Pelicans' season was snake-bitten from the beginning, and the others know continued rebuilding modes await.

So that leaves: Memphis, Dallas, Portland, Utah, Houston and Sacramento, in a six-team race for four spots. Marc Gasol's injury leaves the Grizzlies in some trouble, obviously. The job coach Quin Snyder has done with the Jazz has been fantastic, and the league seems to be taking notice. And Portland is hanging on in its first season without LaMarcus Aldridge.

The picks: Memphis, Dallas, Utah and Houston round out the West bracket.

What to watch

College games on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday will have to suffice for those who need a nightly hoops fix on television. The NBA returns on Thursday, and here are some of the games to note this coming week:

■ **Chicago at Cleveland, Thursday:** The Bulls will come out of the break holding only seventh place in the East, and Jimmy Butler's absence won't help.

■ **San Antonio at L.A. Clippers, Thursday:** The Spurs won their first meeting this season, but visit the Clippers for the first time since last year's Game 7 loss.

■ **Miami at Atlanta, Friday:** The Heat will be without suspended center Hassan Whiteside, and Bosh's availability is unknown because of a calf issue.

■ **New York at Minnesota, Saturday:** The Timberwolves get to welcome home All-Star Skills Challenge winner Karl-Anthony Towns and dunk champ Zach LaVine.

■ **Memphis at Toronto, Sunday:** Notable because the Raptors get their "normal" arena back, after Air Canada Centre was transformed for All-Star weekend.

Stat line of the week: Given there were so few games, we'll go a different route this week and offer just one number instead: 6.

In Toronto, the city now often referred to as "The 6" — a nod to a lyric in a hit song from native son Drake — it took six dunks over the course of the evening for LaVine to defend his slam-dunk title. He beat Orlando's Aaron Gordon in that won't-be-forgotten-soon final round.