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Breedlove: Russia is a long-term threat

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

The U.S. military must rebuild in Europe to face a more aggressive Russia, whose advanced submarines, weapons systems and geographic advantage have the U.S. “playing zone defense,” the top U.S. commander in Europe said Thursday.

“We have about 20 years of a different paradigm to correct,” Gen. Philip Breedlove, commander of U.S. European Command, said during testimony before the House Armed Services Committee.

Breedlove, who has led EUCOM during the command’s biggest transformation in a generation, said he did not foresee a need to return to a Cold War-style military posture. But the era of trying to make a partner of Russia is over, and key U.S. capability gaps need to be addressed, he said.

“Russia has chosen to be an adversary and poses a long-

term, existential threat to the United States,” Breedlove said.

“This is not the Cold War, but I do believe we are not where we need to be now in a mixture of permanently forward-stationed forces and prepositioned stocks so that we can rapidly fall in on it,” Breedlove said.

A Pentagon plan to spend \$3.4 billion on the European Reassurance Initiative to boost the number of rotational troops from the U.S. and military equipment positioned in Europe must continue in the years ahead, he said.

Rep. Mac Thornberry, R-Texas, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, questioned whether the Pentagon’s European Reassurance Initiative, which is paid for through contingency funds rather than the main Pentagon budget, sends a sufficient signal of U.S. military commitment to Moscow.

“That can hardly leave the

Russians quaking in their boots,” Thornberry said.

Since Russia’s 2014 intervention in Ukraine, EUCOM has focused on bolstering its forces along NATO’s eastern flank to reassure eastern European allies wary about Russia’s future intentions. Still, EUCOM has struggled to anticipate Russia’s moves in the region, where large-scale Russian war games have caught allies off guard.

With the Cold War’s end and the rise of challenges in the Middle East, key intelligence and surveillance capabilities have shifted to other regions. But in an area where Russia has the advantage of geography and force numbers, EUCOM will need better intelligence to head off a crisis, Breedlove said.

“It is really important we reestablish our ability to see and interpret so that we can deploy early,” said the general, who will retire in the coming months after nearly 40 years of military service.

Some allies are particularly concerned about NATO’s ability to defend countries in the Baltics, where Russian forces far outnumber those of the allies. A recent war game conducted by the Rand Corp. said Russia could overrun most of the Baltic states in about 60 hours.

Moscow has denied any intent to invade any part of NATO territory, but Russia’s aggressive moves in Ukraine and Syria have fueled anxiety in a region long fearful of Russian domination.

NATO is now reviewing a plan to increase its presence along the eastern flank with a new multinational unit. But to deal with Russia in a military confrontation, allies would need to be able to break through Kaliningrad, a Russian enclave nestled between Poland and Lithuania on the Baltic Sea — what Breedlove described as a “fortress” filled with weapons systems that can target allies from land, sea and air.

China accuses Harris of ‘smear’ in remarks

Associated Press

BEIJING — China’s Defense Ministry says the commander of U.S. forces in the Pacific smeared China while seeking additional defense funding from Congress, in the latest accusation in a war of words accompanying rising tensions in the South China Sea.

Ministry spokesman Col. Wu Qian on Thursday strongly criticized Adm. Harry Harris Jr.’s testimony before Congress, in which Harris said China was militarizing the economically and strategically vital waterway and seeking “hegemony” in East Asia. China adamantly denies such accusations and says

Washington and its allies are responsible for raising tensions.

“I have noted that, according to media reports, Adm. Harris made his remarks while seeking additional defense budget funds from Congress,” Wu told reporters at a monthly news briefing.

“We don’t interfere in your seeking defense budget funds, but you can’t carelessly smear China while asking for more money,” Wu said.

In his testimony before the House of Representatives on Wednesday, Harris commented on the Chinese armed forces’ construction and extension of islands in the highly disputed South China Sea. China is also adding airstrips, harbors, radar

stations and other infrastructure and deploying surface-to-air missiles on some.

Harris described Chinese militarization as being “as certain as a traffic jam” in Washington. On Tuesday, he told senators that to believe otherwise, “you have to believe in a flat Earth.”

He has also dismissed as “tone deaf” a Chinese government official who compared China’s deployment of defense facilities on land features in the South China Sea to what the U.S. does in undisputed Hawaii.

In all, China has reclaimed more than 3,000 acres of land in the South China Sea as it looks to assert what it contends is its

historical right to sovereignty over most of those waters.

Five other Asian governments have territorial claims there.

Harris’ use of the term “hegemony” in his testimony is especially grating to Beijing, which has long made its self-avowed aversion to that goal a centerpiece of its foreign policy message.

Despite raising fears of a confrontation at sea, the recent frictions don’t appear to be having a lasting effect on U.S.-China military exchanges. Wu said China remained fully committed to taking part in June’s Rim of the Pacific naval drills that the U.S. Pacific Fleet hosts every two years.

Dunford: Engagement rules are not a threat to troops

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff denied to the House on Thursday that President Barack Obama's rules on the use of force in Afghanistan are endangering troops.

Amid concerns from lawmakers, Gen. Joseph Dunford testified before an appropriations subcommittee that combat units have no restrictions when it comes to protecting themselves. The chairman said self-protection, however, is distinct from deliberate, strategic U.S. military strikes that are orchestrated and approved by higher commanders.

"When it comes to them doing what needs to be done to take care of themselves or their unit, it is completely decentralized," he said.

Critics on Capitol Hill have complained the White House has hobbled the war effort in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan by limiting the forms of combat and fighting. On Thursday, Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen, R-N.J., chairman of the subcommittee hearing, said many lawmakers worry servicemembers are being put in danger in Afghanistan because they are not provided air support and other backup.

"There is a feeling out there and I think this is shared by a lot of mem-

bers of Congress that there is somehow forces of higher up, and I understand the chain of command, that people have to check with a variety of different people before they look after the mission that they are involved in," Frelinghuysen said.

He said wounded servicemembers have personally recounted to him — away from military commanders — incidents that put them in "compromising positions" in Afghanistan through a lack of U.S. backup support while depending on Afghan forces that often do not fight at night.

"It bothers me when I hear that they didn't get the air support that they needed," Frelinghuysen said.

Dunford said he has been told similar stories by wounded troops while touring Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., and the accounts sometimes hinge on confusion or unanswered questions.

"Everyone looks through a soda straw in combat and everybody's soda straw is slightly different, and frankly, when you sit there as a commander, your soda straw is a little wider than (those of) a squad leader or a platoon commander," he said.

Units can provide for their own safety under the rules of engagement. However, Dunford said junior officers might disagree or not understand why higher commanders make certain decisions regarding military actions.

House intel chair: Military files, emails deleted in investigation

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The chairman of the House Intelligence Committee said Thursday that personnel at U.S. Central Command have deleted files and emails amid allegations that intelligence assessments were altered to exaggerate progress against Islamic State militants.

"We have been made aware that both files and emails have been deleted by personnel at CENTCOM and we expect that the Department of Defense will provide these and all other relevant documents to the committee," Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Calif., said at a

hearing on worldwide threats facing the United States.

Nunes also said the Office of the Director of National Intelligence briefed the committee on a survey indicating that more than 40 percent of CENTCOM analysts believe there are problems with the integrity of the intelligence analyses and process.

With turmoil across the Mideast, Nunes wondered aloud if it was appropriate to wait months for the Defense Department's inspector general to complete an investigation into the allegations before efforts are made to rectify the alleged problems.

N. Korea vows to turn US, South into 'sea of fire'

BY PAUL ALEXANDER

Stars and Stripes

North Korea renewed its threat to turn South Korea, the United States and U.S. bases in the Pacific into a "sea of fire" while railing against next month's joint military exercises and engaging in some revisionist history.

The threat, which appeared Thursday in Rodong Sinmun, North Korea's main newspaper, came as the top U.S. military officer in Korea told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that he believes Kim Jong Un would use nuclear weapons if he felt threatened.

The North carried out its fourth underground nuclear test on Jan. 6 and followed with a multistage rocket launch a month later. While Pyongyang has claimed it developed nuclear weapons only for self-defense against a possible U.S.-led invasion and that its space program is peaceful, it also says it is developing a nuclear bomb small enough to fit into a warhead on a missile capable of reaching the U.S. mainland.

"I think that his stated purpose is to protect his regime and if he thought his regime were challenged, he states that he would use WMD (weapons of mass destruction)," U.S. Forces Korea commander Gen. Curtis Scaparrotti said of Kim, who also is believed to have stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons.

"I think they have posed a very distinct and real threat, not only to peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula but globally," added Adm. Harry Harris, commander U.S. Pacific Command. "They pose a real threat to Hawaii and to the West Coast of the mainland United States and soon to the entire U.S."

The North's recent provocations have set off a tit-for-tat series of escalations that led to the closing of a factory complex, seen as the last symbol of cooperation between the two Koreas.

Storms batter East Coast, Midwest

WAVERLY, Va. — Storm systems brought tornadoes to the East Coast — killing four in Virginia — heavy snow that canceled hundreds of flights in the Midwest and power outages that left hundreds of thousands across several states in the dark.

Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe declared a state of emergency Wednesday after tornadoes damaged homes and left thousands without power across the state.

Elsewhere, officials in South Carolina said a man was killed Wednesday when a tree fell on him.

From The Associated Press

Trout working on baserunning

Associated Press

TEMPE, Ariz. — Mike Trout wants to take a swipe at something else this season — stealing bases, the way he once did.

The Los Angeles Angels' do-everything star got off to a fast start in his 2012 AL Rookie of the Year season with 49 steals. His totals have gone down every year since, from 33 in 40 tries in 2013, to 16 and then just 11 last year while being caught seven times.

"It's definitely one of the personal goals I want to get back to," Trout said Wednesday. "Just getting my confidence back. The last couple years my confidence has been down, not getting good jumps, not getting good reads, just getting back to the way I used to be. I'm just trying to get on second base so Albert can drive me in."

He gets feedback about what Pujols wants from Trout as a runner when the slugger is in the batter's box and said, "We're on the same page, for sure."

Before taking the field for Los Angeles' first full-squad workout at Tempe Diablo Stadium, the 24-year-old Trout said he plans to work before and after practice with the coaches on stealing. Former Brewers manager Ron Roenicke will be involved with the effort given his expertise in the running game.

"A lot of it comes down really on Mike's evolution and getting that confidence back," manager Mike Scioscia said.

"Mike has a lot on his plate, he does so many things well. He does have the ability to steal bases. He's shown that," Scioscia continued. "Hopefully he's going to be more comfortable with getting his jumps. We feel he will be. It's part of what he can bring. We're not going to put a number on it, but I think he has more potential in that one area."

Scioscia said there's "no doubt" Trout can be a 30-30 performer with 30 home runs and 30 stolen bases — and perhaps even a 40-40 guy.

"It doesn't matter what my numbers are as long as we're winning," Trout said.

Trout was the runner-up to Toronto's Josh Donaldson last year in the AL MVP voting. And the Angels don't want Trout trying so hard to make things happen on the basepaths that it backfires.

As of now, there isn't concern about Trout facing more wear and tear on his body.

"Last year there was no doubt he tried to force a couple things and then had to readjust," Scioscia said. "He absolutely has the ability to be 40-40 possibly. We're going to let those numbers just fall into place. Wherever they are, they are. It's not like we woke up today and said, 'Hey, you better start running more.' It's a process. Last year we talked about it."

Trout batted .299 with a career-best 41 homers and 90 RBIs last year. He spent the offseason with an interesting routine of working out mostly in the evenings from

8:30-10:30 p.m. after dinner, then heading to bed. The 2014 AL MVP weighed in Tuesday at 239, his same playing weight from 2015.

"I just like to work out at night," he said. "I've always done that. It's just I do a lot of things during the day and my nights are free so I started to work out at night."

Trout also took some time to hunt, fish, play a little golf and work on his passion as an amateur meteorologist. He would stay up all night monitoring weather patterns, causing his girlfriend to question his sanity.

"I like this stuff, man," he said. "I like thunderstorms. Obviously, tornadoes are bad because they wipe out towns and cities. I enjoy watching them. My dad got me into it when I was a kid."

Whatever Trout accomplishes with his running along with everything else he does on the diamond, his top priority is leading the Angels back to the playoffs.

The Angels finished third in the AL West at 85-77 and missed the playoffs for the fifth time in six seasons.

"Clean slate. Obviously we didn't reach our goals last year and our goal this year is obviously to get to the playoffs. Day One starts today," Trout said. "We can't take off a few weeks after opening day starts and slack off a little bit and get ourselves in a hole. ... We've got one thing on our minds, to win and get to the playoffs. If we don't make the playoffs, it's a failure."

Span set to man CF for Giants

Associated Press

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — On one of the many days over the second half of last season that Denard Span didn't play, he struck up a conversation with Emmanuel Burriss.

With both players out of the Washington Nationals lineup that day against the San Francisco Giants, Burriss had plenty to say about his days with the Giants. Burriss was drafted by the Giants and played in their organization through the 2012 season.

Span, out for all but two games after July 6 with back and hip problems that led to surgery, remembered the conversation when he agreed to a three-year, \$31 million contract this offseason to play for San Francisco.

"He was telling me the type of organization and ball club they are and how they run things over here," Span said after the Giants' spring training workout Wednesday. "It definitely was a big factor in me making the decision to come here. There was a lot of similarities with how I came up with Minnesota. It definitely caught my attention, and this offseason when they reached out, I felt like it was a perfect fit for me."

Span, slated to play center field, has noticed the atmosphere around the Giants with their three World Series championships in the past six seasons.

"They expect excellence. That's the way we work. Just the culture around here, it's a quiet, confident group. Guys that let their play speak for itself on the field," Span said.

Span has also gotten to know Hall of Famer Willie Mays, who has been around camp lately.

"He's a joker, man. He's not afraid to let you know how he's feeling, and I'm just amazed at how sharp he is," Span said. "It's been a joy just to be able to sit down at the table with him and shoot the breeze."

The addition of Span didn't come without some questions. Span takes over for Angel Pagan in center field, with Pagan's move to left field an issue large enough that the two had to discuss it when they arrived for spring training.

"I think him and I are on the same page," Span said of Pagan. "We have a common goal, and that's to help this team win a championship."

Also, Span played in only 61 games last season, the back problems a precursor to hip pain. He still hit .301 in 246 at-bats for the Nationals.

"He's full go, but with that said, I think I'll slow-play him a little bit," manager Bruce Bochy said. "We have plenty of time. We'll keep an eye on him. Really, the surgery that he had is an eight-month (recovery) deal to be 100 percent, and that'll be about when the season starts. I think he's a little ahead of the schedule."

Span said he's feeling good but has some work to do to strengthen his legs and get the explosiveness he wants. He looks forward to playing in the spacious outfield of AT&T Park.

"Offensively, a lot of gaps so it's a lot of base hits."

Offensive linemen's value skyrocketing

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Tony Romo. Andrew Luck. Joe Flacco. Andy Dalton. Ben Roethlisberger.

They're all quarterbacks who have either won a championship or been picked for multiple Pro Bowls. They're also guys who missed four games or more in 2015.

The importance of keeping the quarterback from serious injury has long been obvious, and that was never more apparent than last season. So guess which position group will be as scrutinized as much as ever this spring?

"All the way through the National Football League, everyone is concerned about their offensive line," Seattle general manager John Schneider said. "If you talk to college coaches recruiting high-school kids, they are concerned as well."

Thus, this promising collection of prospects could hold some of the keys to improvement for several teams. Mississippi tackle Laremy Tunsil has been widely projected as the first overall pick in the early, endless waves of mock drafts. Tackles such as Ronnie Stanley (Notre Dame), Taylor Decker (Ohio State) and Jack Conklin (Michigan State) are also legitimate first-round candidates, as is guard Cody Whitehair (Kansas State).

"Being the No. 1 pick would be great," Tunsil said, before expanding on his goal: "I'd love to play for any team."

As the least-glamorous position on the field, excluding special teams, offensive linemen won't make many of the headlines at the NFL scouting combine this week. They'll play a critical part in the evaluation of this rookie class, though. With the proliferation of elite pass rushers, the right tackles have become as coveted as the left tackles. Guards and centers are critical components, too.

"The quarterback is the most important position on the team. It's imperative you keep him upright and keep him able to throw the football," said Tennessee general manager Jon Robinson, whose team has the first selection in the draft.

If the Titans stay in their spot and take Tunsil, he'll be the second tackle in four years to go first overall. Eric Fisher (Central Michigan) was drafted by Kansas City, followed by Luke Joeckel (Texas A&M) to Jacksonville in 2013. Nine offensive linemen were first-rounders that year. There were five of them in 2014, when tackle Greg Robinson (Auburn) was taken by St. Louis at No. 2. Seven offensive linemen were selected in the first round in 2015.

"I've always been told that an offense and a team is not any better than its offensive line," UCLA center Jake Brendel said. "I feel like that's something that's even been exemplified even more at the pro level, for sure."

Depth is crucial.

"Every year when it comes down to the 53-man cut down, that's maybe the most active position people are looking for," Minnesota general manager Rick Spielman said, adding: "If a team thinks an offensive lineman has a chance he's probably going to get claimed, so you're very guarded on a guy who may not be ready but has upside, but he's going to take time to develop. You want to try and keep those guys, because if you get rid of those guys and you get injuries up front, I think it really hurts your football team."

The evaluation process has been complicated by the trend toward spread offenses in college.

The majority of blockers have been zone blocking out of two-point stances, rather than powering ahead out of three-point alignments.

"You really have to dig through those plays where you can really see him unroll his hips and dig his cleats in and really get moving," Arizona general manager Steve Keim said, adding: "offensive linemen as a whole are hard to find. You look across the National Football League and you see some talented players. Yet at the same time, there's some parity, some over-achievers, some tough guys with intangibles, whether their smarts, their passion for the game, their toughness."

"Supply and demand at that position is extremely tough, because so many qualities at the position come into play."



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Xavier tops No. 1 Villanova

Associated Press

CINCINNATI — It took three seasons and seven tries for Xavier to finally get the one victory that had eluded it. And maybe tip the balance of power in the Big East, too.

J.P. Macura got Xavier rolling with 19 points off the bench, and freshman point guard Edmond Sumner had 19 points and nine assists as the fifth-ranked Musketeers knocked off top-ranked Villanova 90-83 on Wednesday night.

The Musketeers (25-3, 13-3) led most of the way in the first matchup of Top 5 teams since the Big East was reconfigured, pulling away at the end against the only team they'd never beaten in league play.

Villanova (24-4, 13-2) was the first No. 1 team to play in the Cintas Center, which opened for the 2000-01 season. The Wildcats couldn't overcome foul trouble or Xavier's balance, losing for only the second time in their last 18 games.

Kris Jenkins scored 22 for Villanova but fouled out with 8:47 left. Daniel Ochefu also sat most of the second half with four fouls.

It was one of those measuring-up games for Xavier, which aspired to be one of the Big East's best when it left the Atlantic 10. The Musketeers had beaten every team except Villanova — going 0-6 — in the reconfigured league and knew this was the last obstacle to challenging the Wildcats' hold on the top of the league.

No. 3 Oklahoma 71, Oklahoma State 49: Ryan Spangler scored a career-high 26 points to help the host Sooners moved into a tie with West Virginia for second place in the Big 12.

Spangler, who had scored in single digits his previous three games, made 10 of 13 shots, including four three-pointers, and grabbed 14 rebounds.

Buddy Hield scored 17 points for Oklahoma (22-5, 10-5 Big 12).

No. 7 North Carolina 80, North Carolina State 68: Brice Johnson had 22 points and 11 rebounds to help UNC beat North Carolina State, keeping the Tar

Heels atop the Atlantic Coast Conference with yet another win against their nearby rival.

Justin Jackson added 17 points for the Tar Heels (23-5, 12-3 ACC), who shook off a slow start and an early 13-point hole.

League-leading scorer Anthony "Cat" Barber scored 32 points for the Wolfpack (14-14, 4-11). N.C. State shot just 37 percent and couldn't keep up once UNC's offense found a rhythm on the way to 42 points in the paint.

Wisconsin 67, No. 8 Iowa 59: Bronson Koenig scored 15 points and Wisconsin upset host Iowa, handing the Hawkeyes their third loss in four games.

Nigel Hayes had 10 points for the Badgers (18-10, 10-5 Big Ten), whose streak of nine wins in 10 now includes a victory in Iowa City that should help their NCAA Tournament hopes immensely.

Peter Jok scored 21 points and Adam Woodbury had 18 rebounds for Iowa (20-7, 11-4), which fell a full game behind league-leading Indiana.

Colorado 75, No. 9 Arizona 72: Josh Scott scored a season-high 26 points and the host Buffaloes overcame his two late turnovers to upset the Wildcats.

George King added 14 points and Josh Fortune had 13 for Colorado (20-9, 9-7 Pac-12), which snapped a six-game losing streak to Arizona (22-6, 10-5) while securing its ninth 20-win season and fifth in six years.

No. 11 Louisville 67, Pittsburgh 60: Quentin Snider scored 14 points, Damion Lee added 13 and the visiting Cardinals pulled away in the final minutes.

The Cardinals' season will end on March 5 at Virginia after Louisville (22-6, 11-4 ACC) banned itself from the NCAA Tournament.

Ryan Luther finished with a career-high 17 points and Jamel Artis had 13 points and nine rebounds for Pitt (19-8, 8-7).

No. 13 Oregon 76, Washington State 62: Elgin Cook scored 16 of his 24 points in the second half to lead the Ducks, who set a school record with their 24th consecutive home win.

Along with No. 9 Arizona's 75-72 loss at Colorado, the Ducks (22-6, 11-4 Pac-12) also regained sole possession of the Pac-12 lead with three games remaining.

No. 21 Texas A&M 68, Mississippi State 66: Danuel House had 16 points, including two free throws with 2.1 seconds remaining, to lift the host Aggies.

Freshman Tyler Davis had 15 points for Texas A&M (21-7, 10-5 Southeastern Conference), which won its third straight.

No. 23 Notre Dame 69, Wake Forest 58: Zach Auguste had 18 points and 12 rebounds, and visiting Notre Dame beat Wake Forest.

Steve Vasturia added 16 points and Demetrius Jackson had all 15 of his in the second half for the Fighting Irish (19-8, 10-5 Atlantic Coast Conference).

Harris free throw puts Fresno State over Air Force 64-63.

Fresno State 64, Air Force 63: Marvelle Harris scored 20 points including a pair of free throws in the final four seconds that made the difference as host Fresno State rallied late to beat Air Force.

With Air Force leading 63-60, Harris hit two free throws to close it to 63-62 with 40 seconds to go. With four seconds left, Harris was back at the line again where he drained two more for the win.

American University 72, Navy 65: Jesse Reed scored 21 points as American University rallied in the second half to upend visiting Navy.

Navy took a 60-52 lead with 7:12 left in the game but Marko Vasic responded with a jumper which sparked a 15-0 run that gave American a 69-60 advantage with 1:22 remaining. The Eagles led the rest of the way.

Navy led through most of the first half and had a 32-29 edge at the break. The Midshipmen (18-12, 9-8) stretched it to 47-33 with 14:49 to play in the second half.

Will Kelly scored 22 points for the Midshipmen.

Curry's three lifts Warriors

Associated Press

MIAMI — The league's leading shot blocker was coming at him, and even that wasn't enough to bother Stephen Curry.

It was the biggest moment of the night, and the MVP delivered.

Curry connected on the go-ahead three-pointer over the outstretched arm of Miami center Hassan Whiteside with 38 seconds left, and the Golden State Warriors beat the Miami Heat 118-112 on Wednesday night in a game that featured 13 lead changes in the fourth quarter alone. Curry tied an NBA record by making a 3-pointer in his 127th consecutive regular-season game.

Curry finished with 42 points, and Klay Thompson scored 15 consecutive points for Golden State in the fourth on his way to a 33-point night.

The reigning NBA MVP and three-point leader made a three-pointer just 78 seconds into the Warriors' game at Miami, on his first shot of the evening. He shares the mark with Atlanta's Kyle Korver and had a chance to take the record outright when Golden State played at Orlando on Thursday.

Curry made a pair of free throws with 18.5 seconds left to get to the 40-point mark for the ninth time this season, and soon the Warriors walked off a winner for the 51st time in 56 games this season.

Cavaliers 114, Hornets 103: LeBron James and Kyrie Irving each scored 23 points and host Cleveland beat Charlotte.

The Cavaliers bounced back from a home loss Monday to Detroit in which James tied a season low with 12 points.

Bulls 109, Wizards 104: Taj Gibson and E'Twaun Moore each scored 17 points, Tony Snell added 16 and a throw-together roster of Chicago backups beat visiting Washington.

Three of the Bulls' top four scorers missed the game and the fourth was sick. Derrick Rose was a last-minute scratch with right hamstring tendinitis.

Spurs 108, Kings 92: Tony Parker scored 23 points and San Antonio beat host Sacramento for its third straight victory.

The Spurs took the lead for good with just over 4 minutes left in the third quarter, then pulled away in the fourth in winning for the ninth time in 10 games.

Thunder 116, Mavericks 103: Kevin Durant and Russell Westbrook scored 24 points apiece and Oklahoma City completed a season sweep of host Dallas.

Pacers 108, Knicks 105: Paul George scored 25 of his 27 points in the second half to lead host Indiana over New York.

Raptors 114, Timberwolves 105: DeMar DeRozan scored 31 points and Kyle Lowry added 21 as Toronto beat Minnesota for a franchise record-tying ninth straight home victory.

Grizzlies 128, Lakers 119: Matt Barnes scored a season-high 25 points as the Grizzlies led from start to finish, beating Los Angeles in Kobe Bryant's final game in Memphis.

Nuggets 87, Clippers 81: Kenneth Faried had 21 points and 11 rebounds, and visiting Denver beat the Clippers for its first victory since the All-Star break.

Pistons 111, 76ers 91: Tobias Harris led a balanced offense with 22 points and Andre Drummond had 18 rebounds as host Detroit beat Philadelphia.

Caps rally, but Canadiens hold on

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Washington Capitals have been dominant for most of the season. Lately, though, the Eastern Conference leaders have been playing from behind. And, against the Montreal Canadiens, they couldn't pull off another comeback.

Alex Galchenyuk scored two goals, Mike Condon made 33 saves and the Canadiens topped the Eastern Conference-leading Capitals 4-3 on Wednesday night.

The Canadiens built a 3-0 lead and chased Capitals goalie Braden Holtby in the second period before holding on as Washington tallied two late goals.

"We played the best team in the league in their building," Canadiens coach Michel Therrien said. "They're really tough to play against, and the way that we came out gave us the confidence."

Brendan Gallagher and Tomas Fleischmann added goals for the Canadiens, who had lost four of five, and two previous meetings with Washington this season.

Trailing 4-1, the Capitals scored twice inside the final minutes, including Andre Burakovsky's goal with 2:53 remaining. Jason Chimera and Dmitri Orlov also

scored for the President's Trophy front-runners, who entered 17-1-1 over their previous 19 home games.

Alex Ovechkin, the NHL leader with 39 goals, had one assist, but did not score for the first time in four games for Washington.

The Capitals were 9-1-0 in their previous 10 games, while the Canadiens were 3-14-1 in their last 18 on the road.

Holtby, who finished with 15 saves on 18 shots, couldn't add to his league-leading 38 wins. Washington's defense didn't help the cause.

Montreal turned a poor clear from Orlov into a 1-0 lead. Galchenyuk intercepted the pass and then rammed home a rebound off Dale Weise's shot.

Seeking a spark, Capitals coach Barry Trotz sat Holtby for Philipp Grubauer following the third goal. Grubauer finished with 15 saves, including turning away Gallagher's penalty shot, but surrendered Galchenyuk's goal in the second period.

Bruins 5, Penguins 1: David Pastrnak had two goals, including his first career made penalty shot, and host Boston blew past Pittsburgh.

Boston entered the night in a 1-3-1 skid at home, in which it had given up 26 goals. The Bruins avoided their first three-game

home losing streak since they went 0-3-1 to open the season.

Pastrnak, a 19-year-old Czech, was all over the ice in the first two periods, and said he thinks he is starting to find his game in his second year after scoring 10 goals in 46 games last season. The Bruins' 2014 first-round pick now has eight goals in 29 appearances.

Tuukka Rask made 41 saves for the Bruins. Jimmy Hayes, Landon Ferraro and Brad Marchand also scored.

Ducks 1, Sabres 0: Frederik Andersen made 26 saves in his fourth career shut-out, Sami Vatanen scored on a power play in the second period and host Anaheim beat Buffalo for its season-best sixth straight victory.

The resurgent Ducks climbed within two points of the Pacific Division-leading Los Angeles Kings.

Avalanche 4, Sharks 3 (SO): Nathan MacKinnon and Matt Duchene scored in the shootout, Shawn Matthias had a goal in his debut with his new team and Colorado beat visiting San Jose.

Calvin Pickard came up big in the shoot-out by stopping two shots. He made 30 saves filling in for starter Semyon Varlamov, who was out with the flu.