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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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US might have to face off with China

BY TARA COPP

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Navy and Marine Corps leaders warned Friday that China's rapid military buildup in the Pacific Ocean could force the United States to move ships and forces in response.

Friday's comments from Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson, Navy Secretary Ray Mabus and Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Robert Neller followed a week of warnings by Adm. Harry Harris to Congress that the pace of China's militarization on a string of man-made islands in the South China Sea is changing operations in the Pacific.

During his testimony this week on Capitol Hill, Harris, Pacific Command's commander, cautioned that China has swiftly moved jets, missiles, bombers and radars onto many of the man-made islands that it built during the last year. China developed the islands by building on top of submerged coral reefs and other underwater land features in the South China Sea. "These are actions that are changing, in my opinion, the operational landscape in the South China Sea," Harris told lawmakers.

The weapons that China is placing on those islands could require the United States to reconsider its own presence in the region, Richardson and Neller said Friday at an event hosted by the Brookings Institution, a public policy research group in Washington.

The Navy already wants to have 60 percent of its planned fleet of 308 U.S. warships committed to the Pacific by 2020.

For example, Richardson said, China's advances might require the United States to reassess its attack submarine fleet. The Navy has said for years that

Philippines chastised

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — China has accused the U.S.-allied Philippines of "political provocation" in seeking international arbitration over territorial claims in the South China Sea.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said Thursday the decision by Philippine leaders to lodge a case with a tribunal in The Hague was "irresponsible to the Filipino people and the future of the Philippines."

China has refused to participate in the proceedings. A ruling is expected later this year after the tribunal decided last October that it could hear the case.

White House Asia policy Director Daniel Kritenbrink said Friday that the ruling will be binding on both nations as parties to the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea. He said that a recent summit, President Barack Obama and Southeast Asian leaders agreed on the need to respect such legal processes for resolving disputes.

However, China contends it won't be bound by the decision because it didn't consent to arbitration.

The Philippines initiated arbitration in early 2013 after Beijing refused to withdraw its ships from a disputed shoal under a U.S.-brokered deal. It contends that China's massive territorial claims in the strategic waters do not conform with the 1982 U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea and should be declared invalid. The Philippines also

asserts that some Chinese-occupied reefs and shoals do not generate, or create a claim to, territorial waters.

Wang blamed the Philippines for shutting the door to negotiations with China over their dispute and seeking arbitration without China's consent.

He said China was prepared to negotiate "tomorrow."

"We are neighbors just separated by a narrow body of water," Wang told the Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank. "We want to contribute to the Philippines' economic development."

In Manila, presidential spokesman Herminio Coloma Jr. said the Philippines would not comment on Wang's remarks.

"The Philippine government respects the independence of the processes of the tribunal; hence, we deem it inappropriate to engage other parties in argumentative discussion while we await the outcome of our petition before the tribunal," he said.

Wang was in Washington this week for talks with his counterpart, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry. Differences over the South China Sea have strained U.S.-China relations. The U.S. accuses China of militarizing a key conduit for world trade. China says Washington and its allies are responsible for raising tensions.

48 attack submarines is what it needs to carry out its mission. But Richardson said Friday that might not be enough.

"That number is really based on analysis from 2006," he said. With China's recent developments, "that's becoming a more urgent situation."

China has completed three 10,000-foot runways and dispatched advanced attack aircraft and bomber aircraft to the islands. In recent weeks, it has also installed advanced surface-to-surface missiles and radar systems that could make U.S. aircraft carriers more vulnerable.

"The DF-21 (anti-ship ballistic missile) which they have developed and the DF-26 (intermediate-range ballistic missile) which they're developing could pose a threat to our carriers," Harris told the Senate Armed Services Committee this week. "I think, though, that our carriers are resilient, and we have the capability to do what has to be done if it comes to that."

Neller said China's movements have the Marines also rethinking its posture in the Pacific.

"The survivability ... because of the missiles, when we did the laydown and the plan, the capabilities that our potential adversaries had didn't exist," he said. "So do we need to take a look at how we are going to harden ourselves or where we are going to position ourselves?"

On Thursday, Harris said the recent developments on the man-made islands would not stop the Navy from deploying an aircraft carrier to the South China Sea.

"Short of war, I'm aware of the threat. I'll pay attention to the threat," he said. "But that is not going to prevent us from flying, sailing or operating wherever international law allows."

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SOCOM wants to send advisers to Nigeria

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — U.S. Special Operations Command Africa wants to send dozens of troops near the front lines in Nigeria's fight against the West African militant group Boko Haram, where they would function as noncombat advisers to government forces, *The New York Times* reported Friday.

The deployment would send U.S. troops "hundreds of miles closer" to the fight being waged by the Nigerian military, which has struggled to contain Islamic militants in the country's north.

"If it is approved, as expected, by the Defense and State Departments, the Americans would serve only in noncombat advisory roles," the *Times* wrote. The pending deployment is based on a recommendation from U.S. Special Operations Commander for Africa, Brig. Gen. Donald C. Bolduc, the *Times* reported.

The mission also would amount to a re-launch of a training effort that was suspended in early 2015 amid tensions between Washington and the Nigerian leadership.

A year ago, efforts at collaboration were hindered by disagreements between the two governments — and led Nigeria to pull out of a small counterterrorism training

program in January 2015.

That program focused on developing small-unit maneuvers, night operations and ambush tactics.

Now, with newly elected Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari in office, there are signs those tensions have eased.

Earlier this month, America's top diplomat for Africa indicated that Washington was prepared to do more in Nigeria, alluding to a new advisory role for U.S. troops.

Already, the U.S. has been providing support to Nigerian and other regional forces in the fight against Boko Haram, carrying out drone surveillance operations from neighboring Cameroon.

Activists in Syria tell of Russian airstrikes

Associated Press

BEIRUT — Warplanes unleashed airstrikes on the suburbs of the Syrian capital and near the northern, rebel-held city of Aleppo on Friday, hours before a cease-fire brokered by the United States and Russia was to go into effect at midnight local time across the war-ravaged country.

The barrage came as the main Syrian opposition and rebel umbrella group said dozens of factions have agreed to abide by the cease-fire.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the warplanes in Friday's strikes were believed to be Russian. The Kremlin did not comment on the latest developments but denied allegations that the Russian air force bombed civilian positions east of Damascus the previous day.

The rebel-held Damascus suburb of Douma was hit 40 times on Friday, the Observatory said, along with other areas east of the capital, killing at least eight people, including three women and four children.

DOD making missile the message

Associated Press

VANDENBERG AIR FORCE BASE, Calif. — Like a giant pen stroke in the sky, an unarmed Minuteman 3 nuclear missile roared out of its underground bunker on the California coastline Thursday and soared over the Pacific, inscribing the signature of American power amid growing worry about North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons capable of reaching U.S. soil.

When it comes to deterring an attack by North Korea or other potential adversaries, the missile is the message.

At 11:01 p.m. PST on Thursday, the Minuteman missile, totting a payload of test instruments rather than a nuclear warhead,

leaped into the darkness in an explosion of flame. It arced toward its test range in the waters of the Kwajalein Atoll, an island chain about 2,500 miles southwest of Honolulu.

About 30 minutes later, the re-entry vehicle that carries the missile's payload reached its target, Col. Craig Ramsey, commander of the 576th Flight Test Squadron, told an assembled group of observers including Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Work and Adm. Cecil Haney, the top nuclear war-fighting commander.

The missile test, dubbed "Glory Trip 218," was the second this month and the latest in a series designed to confirm the reliability of the Cold War-era

missile and all its components. The Minuteman 3, first deployed in 1970, has long exceeded its original 10-year lifespan. It is so old that vital parts are no longer in production.

The Air Force operates 450 Minuteman missiles — 150 at each of three missile fields in Wyoming, Montana and North Dakota.

Aside from confirming technical soundness, Minuteman test launches are the U.S. military's way of sharpening the message that forms the foundation of U.S. nuclear deterrence theory — that if potential attackers believe U.S. nuclear missiles and bombs are ready for war at all times, then no adversary would dare start a nuclear fight.

Militant group threatens US tech titans

Tribune Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — An Islamic State cyberspace team has threatened two Silicon Valley tech titans, posting a 25-minute video online that shows bullet holes over the faces of Twitter's Jack Dorsey and Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg.

Both companies recently stepped up efforts to block postings and accounts that

promote violence and Islamic State propaganda after White House officials complained social media companies weren't doing enough to smother extremist recruiting.

Though the video probably does not signify an ongoing plot, it could prompt an Islamic State supporter to target employees of the social media giants, according to Rick "Ozzie" Nelson, a former U.S. counter-

terrorism official now at the nonpartisan Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

In addition to organizing or sponsoring deadly terrorist attacks in Europe, Canada, the Middle East and North Africa, the Islamic State group and its affiliates have used social media to recruit followers and encourage "lone wolf" attacks on the United States and its allies.

LSU, star freshman Simmons in danger of missing tourney

Associated Press

Ben Simmons has made plenty of history at LSU this season, whether it's his routine double-doubles or the monster offensive nights that have made the freshman the likely No. 1 pick in the NBA Draft.

He may also make some not-so-pleasant history.

Unless the Tigers win their final three games and make some noise in the SEC Tournament — or win the league tournament outright — Simmons will miss out on the NCAA Tournament. Since the modern draft era began in 1966, only four No. 1 picks have missed out on the Big Dance.

"I like our team," LSU coach Johnny Jones said this week, before a 20-point loss at Arkansas made it four losses in five games. "We're hopeful we can take some ownership down the stretch and some good things will happen for us here."

The stretch isn't exactly easy for the Tigers (16-11, 9-5). It begins with visits from bubble buddy Florida and cellar-dweller Missouri, and ends with a trip to Rupp Arena to face No. 16 Kentucky.

The late-season swoon isn't entirely the fault of Simmons, who is still putting up big numbers. But rather a rash of injuries, including a sports hernia that could keep Keith Hornsby out the rest of the year, has coincided with an overall slump that has left the Tigers with plenty of work to do.

"We always talk about bouncing back," Jones said. "That's the main thing."

LSU is hardly the only SEC team bouncing around on the NCAA Tournament bubble.

The Gators (17-11, 8-7) have dropped

back-to-back games to South Carolina and Vanderbilt, while the Commodores (16-11, 9-6) have won four of their last five. And Alabama (16-11, 7-8) could need to win out against Auburn, Arkansas and Georgia to feel better about its chances.

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"This team's been giving me all that they have all year, so we're not going to get into a situation where we undervalue how good of a season this team is having," Crimson Tide coach Avery Johnson said.

Beyond the SEC, the NCAA Tournament picture continues to evolve. Here are some teams on the move:

ON THE RISE

■ Wisconsin. The Badgers (18-10, 10-5 Big Ten) may have risen so high the past few weeks that they're looking down on the bubble. After their seven-game win streak was stopped by Michigan State, they bounced back to beat Illinois and deal eighth-ranked Iowa its first home defeat.

■ St. Bonaventure. Who would have thought the Bonnies (19-7, 11-4) would be here when they started 5-3 in the Atlantic 10? But they've won six of their last seven games, knocking off Dayton, and can earn a marquee win over Saint Joseph's (23-5, 12-3) during their three-game finishing stretch.

■ San Diego State. The Aztecs (21-7, 14-1) are the closest thing to a lock in the Mountain West, even though their best win came against Cal in November. But they can't afford to lose games against Boise State, New Mexico and UNLV and still think an at-large bid is possible.

■ BYU, St. Mary's and Gonzaga. Might as well package the Cougars (22-8, 13-4),

Gaels (23-4, 14-3) and the Bulldogs (22-7, 14-3), because one will probably win the West Coast Conference tournament and earn an automatic bid. The other two teams could be left playing musical chairs for one spot.

FADING HOPES

■ Washington. Lorenzo Romar knows the Huskies (16-2, 8-8) are clinging to hope. That's why the coach was quick to log a protest of Oregon State's game-winning shot Wednesday night, claiming that replays show the clock didn't start on time. The Beavers, also on the NCAA Tournament bubble, won 82-81.

■ Butler. The Bulldogs (18-9) started the season 11-1, but they're just 7-8 in the Big East. They play another bubble team, Seton Hall, among their final three games but could need to make a deep run in the conference tournament to feel good about Selection Sunday.

■ Creighton. The Big East has as many bubble teams as any other league, and the Blue Jays (17-11, 8-7) are among them. Losses to Butler and Marquette have taken off some of their shine, but a win over No. 5 Xavier in their regular-season finale would go a long way.

■ Temple. The Owls (17-10, 11-4) could win the American Athletic regular-season title and still not feel safe on Selection Sunday. Getting blown out at Tulsa this week didn't help their cause, and regular-season games against Central Florida, Memphis and Tulane won't help the resume.

AUTOMATIC BIDS

Yale (18-6, 9-1), Princeton (18-5, 8-1) and Columbia (19-8, 8-2) entered Friday night in the mix for the Ivy League regular-season title and the first guaranteed spot to the NCAA Tournament.

Infantino new FIFA president

Associated Press

ZURICH — Gianni Infantino pulled off a stunning victory Friday to take over as FIFA president.

The Swiss official received 115 of the 207 eligible votes in the second round to earn a decisive majority over Sheikh Salman of Bahrain, who had been the strong favorite entering the election.

The 45-year-old former lawyer saluted voters by patting his right hand over his heart, and had to compose himself before starting his acceptance speech.

"We will restore the image of FIFA and the respect of FIFA. And everyone in the world will applaud us," Infantino said, referring to bribery and corruption investigations that have rocked soccer's governing body and forced Sepp Blatter out of office after more than 17 years as president.

Sheikh Salman received 88 votes after being the front-runner during much of the four-month campaign. Prince Ali of Jordan had four votes, and Jerome Champagne of France got zero.

In the first round, Infantino surprisingly led with 88 votes. Sheikh Salman had 85 votes, Prince Ali 27, and Champagne seven.

Infantino, the general secretary of European governing body UEFA, is the second straight FIFA president from the Valais region in the Swiss Alps. Infantino is from Brig and replaces the 79-year-old Blatter, who was born in neighboring Visp.

Infantino will be president through May 2019, completing the remainder of Blatter's term.

Blatter was forced out by the pressure of American and Swiss investigations of corruption that hit FIFA two days before the previous election in May.

"I congratulate Gianni Infantino sincerely and warmly on his election as the new president," Blatter said in a statement. "

Infantino takes over a wealthy but vulnerable soccer body whose image and confidence has been shattered by escalating scandals.

Blatter was re-elected for a fifth term in May but bowed to pressure four days later and announced he would resign. Blatter was subsequently banned for six years for financial mismanagement and was absent Friday after 40 years as a fixture at FIFA meetings.

Before electing FIFA's first new president since 1998, 87 percent of the 207 voting federations passed wide-ranging reforms to protect against corruption and curb the powers of its new president.

Those include preventing presidents from serving more than three four-year terms, reducing their powers and guaranteeing more independent oversight for FIFA's decision-making and spending. The executive committee will be renamed the FIFA Council with more female members while there will be stricter integrity checks will also control top officials.

FIFA and its lawyers hope the reform will help show U.S. prosecutors the soccer body is serious about changing its culture, and protect its status as a victim in the American investigation.

Navy's Reynolds driven by combine snub

Associated Press

Keenan Reynolds will bring keen focus to the upcoming NFL scouting combine's on-field drills.

Unfortunately for Navy's record-breaking quarterback, he'll have to immerse himself as a spectator rather than a participant.

Despite amassing a Division-I record 88 touchdowns (including seven in one game) during his college career and rushing for 4,559 yards — a record for FBS quarterbacks — he was not among the 332 prospects invited to Indianapolis.

"I just consider it fuel to the fire," Reynolds told USA TODAY Sports on Thursday before he was honored as the Eastern College Athletic Conference player of the year.

After starring in Navy's triple-option scheme, Reynolds realizes his football future will require a successful conver-

sion to running back or receiver. He'll be monitoring his competition on television Friday and Saturday as players go through the combine gauntlet.

"Absolutely, I'll watch everybody," said Reynolds. "I'll be looking for the best times, and then I'll try to outdo them."

Though snubbed by the combine, Reynolds was invited to the East-West Shrine Game, an experience that buoyed his belief that he'll swim rather than sink as a pro.

"I've always been a person of self-confidence in my abilities," said the only Navy quarterback to go 4-0 against Army. "I was definitely playing against top competition in the nation at the East-West Shrine Game. And being able to practice and play definitely kind of assured I can play at the next level."

Reynolds also gleaned valuable insights from two former Pro Bowlers, fullback Mike Alstott and receiver Troy Brown, in

his bid to play whatever position an NFL team might ask.

"Your footwork has to be a little more precise in contrast to Navy, where I was right behind the line and it was one cut and go," said Reynolds, who is 5-11 and plans to maintain his weight at 205 pounds. "You have to be a little bit more patient being 7 yards deep. But the biggest thing I have to improve on and work on is pass blocking. I feel comfortable catching the ball, but really pass blocking is something I took away from the Shrine Game — obviously something I've never had to do."

Yet unlike many of his football peers, the NFL is really a backup plan for Reynolds, who will graduate in May before eventually reporting to Fort Gordon, Ga.

"Service is my priority," said Reynolds. "Service is why I came to the Naval Academy."



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Predators edge Blackhawks

Associated Press

CHICAGO — With Pekka Rinne in goal, the Nashville Predators travel quite well.

Rinne made 38 saves and Calle Jarnkrok scored with 1:51 remaining, sending the surging Predators to a 3-1 victory over the Chicago Blackhawks on Thursday night.

"We're playing some good hockey, we're competing, we're getting contributions from a lot of guys," said Mike Fisher, who had two assists. "We're definitely playing a better game all around. It's obviously showing."

Viktor Arvidsson scored in the first and Miikka Salomaki added an empty-net goal as Nashville won for the fourth time in its last five games and extended its point streak to eight in a row. The Predators also extended their franchise-record road point streak to 10 games.

"We're gaining some confidence all the time," Rinne said.

It was a lousy ending to a big night for Chicago, which bolstered its shot for a second straight Stanley Cup title by reacquiring forward Andrew Ladd in a trade with Winnipeg announced right before the game.

"It's a great acquisition," Blackhawks coach Joel Quenneville said. "There's a lot of familiarity. I'm sure his old teammates are pretty excited in a lot of ways. He brings the intangibles that you look for. He knows his way around our team. I'm sure he's excited to come to Chicago as well."

Brent Seabrook scored for the Blackhawks, who have lost two in a row and five of seven. Corey Crawford had 29 saves.

The game was tied at 1 before Jarnkrok one-timed a slick pass from Fisher over Crawford's right shoulder for his 12th goal. It was Jarnkrok's first point since he scored two goals in a 5-0 win at Florida at Feb. 13, stopping a five-game drought for the third-year center.

Salomaki tacked on his fourth goal 48 seconds later, prompting some of the fans to begin heading for the exits.

"The third period was our smartest period and our best period, just defensively and methodically taking care of the minutes and eventually we were able to chip one in," Nashville coach Peter Laviolette said.

The Predators played without All-Star defenseman Shea Weber for the second straight game. Weber, who has 15 goals and 21 assists, is day to day with a lower-body injury.

But Nashville still managed its second win in five games this season against Chicago. The Predators were eliminated by the Blackhawks in the first round of the playoffs last year.

Ladd could be in uniform for Chicago as soon as Sunday against Washington. The Blackhawks sent prospect Marko Danon and two draft picks to Winnipeg for Ladd, forward Matt Fraser and defenseman Jay Harrison.

Ladd previously played for Chicago for two-plus seasons, helping the Blackhawks win the Stanley Cup in 2010. He had 17 goals and 17 assists in 59 games with the Jets this season.

"I'm excited to have another chance to go back there and have another chance to win," Ladd said on a conference call.

Rinne made 13 saves in the first period, including three great stops on Jonathan Toews alone. He also denied Andrew Shaw on a breakaway in the final minute of the second.

"The save at the end of the second period was probably the biggest, it might have been the turning point of the game," Laviolette said. "That save was huge."

Rangers 2, Blues 1: Chris Kreider and Tanner Glass scored, and Henrik Lundqvist made 35 saves as visiting New York beat St. Louis.

Lundqvist got his 30th victory of the season, joining Martin Brodeur and Patrick Roy as the only goalies in NHL history to have at least 30 wins in 10 different seasons.

Blue Jackets 6, Devils 1: Nick Foligno had his second career hat trick and added an assist to lead host Columbus over New Jersey.

Brandon Saad, Brandon Dubinsky — playing his 600th career game — and Rene Bourque also scored, and Matt Calvert and William Karlsson each had three assists as the Blue Jackets improved to 8-2-3 in their last 13 games.

Panthers 3, Coyotes 2: Aleksander Barkov scored two goals in his first game back from an injury, lifting host Florida over Arizona.

Vincent Trocheck also scored for the

Panthers, and Roberto Luongo made 22 saves. Barkov returned to the lineup after missing the last six games with an upper-body injury.

Flyers 3, Wild 2: Pierre-Edouard Bellemare scored the go-ahead goal early in the third period and Michal Neuvirth made two stellar saves late, helping host Philadelphia open a six-game homestand with a victory over Minnesota.

Mark Streit and Sam Gagner also had goals for Philadelphia, which won for just the fourth time in 11 games.

Hurricanes 3, Maple Leafs 1: Pierre-Alexandre Parenteau had a goal and an assist and host Toronto earned its first victory in nearly two weeks, topping Carolina.

Brad Boyes and Josh Leivo also scored for Toronto, and Jonathan Bernier made 28 saves for the Leafs, who won for the first time since Feb. 13.

Jets 6, Stars 3: Joel Armia scored twice to double his season total, and Winnipeg beat host Dallas.

Blake Wheeler and Toby Enstrom scored during Winnipeg's three-goal first period, and Mark Scheifele and Jacob Trouba scored in the three-goal third.

Islanders 2, Flames 1 (OT): Josh Bailey scored with 18 seconds left in overtime, Jaroslav Halak made 31 saves, and visiting New York rallied past Calgary.

Thomas Hickey also scored as the Islanders improved to 3-0-0 on their season-high seven-game stretch of road games and remained three points behind the second-place New York Rangers in the Metropolitan Division.

Canucks 5, Senators 3: Matt Bartkowski and Emerson Etem each scored two goals, and Jake Virtanen had the go-ahead score in the third period, leading host Vancouver over Ottawa.

Bartkowski added an assist for the first three-point game of his career, Linden Vey had two assists, and Ryan Miller made 27 saves for the Canucks.

Kings 2, Oilers 1: Jeff Carter and Dwight King scored in the third period and Jonathan Quick made 26 saves, leading host Los Angeles over Edmonton.

Zack Kassian scored late in the second for the Oilers, who have lost six straight games and eight in a row at Staples Center dating to a 3-0 victory on Nov. 3, 2011.

Blue Devils roll over Seminoles

Associated Press

DURHAM, N.C. — Grayson Allen scored 18 points, Brandon Ingram added 16 and No. 15 Duke beat Florida State 80-65 on Thursday night.

Marshall Plumlee had 13 points and 10 rebounds for the Blue Devils (21-7, 10-5 Atlantic Coast Conference). Facing an unranked opponent for the first time since Feb. 6, they placed five players in double figures for the first time in league play and forced 14 turnovers while matching a season low with five themselves.

Luke Kennard finished with 12 points and Matt Jones added 11 in his first game back from injury for Duke, which has won six of seven.

Freshman guard Dwayne Bacon had 12 points and 10 rebounds for the Seminoles (16-12, 6-10). They have lost a season-worst five straight.

No. 18 Indiana 74, Illinois 47: Yogi Ferrell scored 27 points and the visiting Hoosiers used a huge second half to rout the Illini.

The Big Ten leaders trailed 28-27 at halftime, but Ferrell scored 19 second-half points and Indiana (23-6, 13-3) pulled away. Ferrell's three-pointer with 7:58 left put the Hoosiers up 56-37.

Nick Zeisloft scored 14 for Indiana, and Thomas Bryant had 14 points and eight rebounds.

Jalen Coleman-Lands led Illinois (12-16, 4-11) with 21 points. The Hoosiers held Illinois' top two scorers, Malcolm Hill and Kendrick Nunn, to a combined 13 points.

Ferrell's 19 second-half points equaled the output of the entire Illini team.

No. 22 Utah 81, Arizona State 46: Brekkott Chapman had 15 points and the host Utes blitzed the Sun Devils, scoring the first 15 points of the game and opening a 30-2 lead on the way to their fifth straight victory.

Jordan Loveridge added 14 points and Brandon Taylor had 12 for Utah, which plays its final two regular-season games at home, against No. 9 Arizona and Colorado.

The Utes (22-7, 11-5 Pac-12), just a half-game back of first-place Oregon, made their first five three-point attempts, including three by Loveridge, to jump out to a 15-0 lead.

The Sun Devils (14-14, 4-11) started 1-for-16 from the field with four shots blocked and 10 turnovers. Utah led 44-10 at halftime and had more rejections (six) than ASU had field goals (four).

Nearly a year ago, 13th-ranked Utah held a 41-9 halftime lead on its way to an 83-41 win over Arizona State. The Sun Devils haven't won in their last 10 games at Utah, a skid that stretches to 1975. The Utes are 14-1 at home this season.

No. 24 SMU 69, Memphis 62: Sterling Brown scored 14 points to help the visiting Mustangs shake off the pesky Tigers.

SMU leading scorer Nic Moore was held without a point in the first half, but his floater with less than a minute to play gave the Mustangs (23-4, 11-4 American Athletic Conference) a 65-62 lead. Moore finished with 12 points on 4-for-9 shooting.

Memphis led 57-56 until Shake Milton hit a three-pointer and Brown a pair of free throws for a four-point SMU advantage.

Marcus Kennedy had 12 points and eight rebounds for SMU.

Dedric Lawson scored 18 for Memphis (15-13, 6-9), and Ricky Tarrant Jr. added 15 points and seven assists.

Curry scores 51 as Warriors top Magic

Associated Press

ORLANDO, Florida — Stephen Curry scored 51 points and set an NBA record with a three-pointer in his 128th consecutive game as the Golden State Warriors beat the Orlando Magic 130-114 on Thursday night.

A night after scoring 42 in a six-point victory at Miami, Curry made 20 of 27 shots from the field, going 10-for-15 on three-pointers. The Warriors pulled away in the closing minutes of the third quarter, with Curry banking in a 44-foot shot at the buzzer for a 99-91 lead.

The reigning MVP topped 50 points for the third time this season, the first player to do it that many times since LeBron James and Dwyane Wade in 2008-09.

Curry surpassed Kyle Korver's mark of 127 straight games with a three, which he tied while making six threes at Miami on Wednesday night.

The Warriors improved to 52-5, the best 57-game start in league history. The 1995-96 Chicago Bulls won 51 of their first 57 on the

way to finishing 72-10.

Evan Fournier led Orlando with 20 points. Nikola Vucevic had 17 points and nine rebounds.

Rockets 119, Trail Blazers 105: James Harden scored 46 points and visiting Houston overcame a 21-point, third-quarter deficit to snap Portland's six-game winning streak.

Dwight Howard added 19 points and 13 rebounds for Houston, which had lost four of five. But the Rockets proved resilient against the Blazers, rallying to tie it at 95 on Harden's layup with 7:40 left, then taking the lead on Howard's dunk.

The Rockets pushed the lead to 106-98 with 2:59 left and Portland couldn't catch up.

Pelicans 123, Thunder 119: Anthony Davis scored 30 points and blocked four shots, three of his reserve teammates combined for 60 points, and New Orleans beat visiting Oklahoma City.

Russell Westbrook scored 44 points and Kevin Durant 32 for Oklahoma City, which trailed by 12 with a little more than

3 minutes left but got as close as two on Durant's three with 13 seconds left.

Spurs 96, Jazz 78: Kawhi Leonard scored 29 points and San Antonio shut down host Utah for its fourth straight road victory.

The Jazz played well early and led by seven in the first quarter, but the No. 1-ranked scoring defense in the NBA cranked it up in the second quarter and held Utah to its lowest point total of the season.

Celtics 112, Bucks 107: Isaiah Thomas scored 27 points, including eight in the fourth quarter, and Boston beat Milwaukee for its ninth straight home victory.

Jae Crowder added 20 points and eight rebounds. Avery Bradley finished with 18 points. All five Boston starters were in double figures.

Nets 116, Suns 106: Bojan Bogdanovic scored a season-high 24 points to lead Brooklyn over host Phoenix in a game between two of the NBA's worst teams.