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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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US-backed Iraqi forces advance in Mosul

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Iraqi forces backed by the U.S.-led international coalition fought their way Thursday into a sprawling military base outside of Mosul and onto the grounds of the city's airport, taking control of the runway amid fierce exchanges of fire with Islamic State group militants.

The two-pronged advance is part of a major assault that started earlier this week to drive the Islamic State group from the western half of Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city.

Iraqi federal police units, backed by regular army forces, entered the airport Thursday morning, according to two police officials who said heavy clashes were underway hours later with Islamic State group militants hunkered down inside several airport buildings.

The officials said coalition troops were with the advancing forces, though they didn't specify the nationalities of the foreign forces. They spoke to The Associated Press on condi-

tion of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to reporters.

Private broadcaster Lebanon-based Al-Mayadeen aired live footage from the Mosul airport perimeter, showing a military helicopter buzzing overhead and firing at Islamic State positions as gunfire rattled.

By early afternoon, federal police commander Maj. Gen. Raid Shakir Jawdat told Iraqi state TV that his troops have control of "more than half" of the airport complex. Jawdat added that about 200 families were evacuated to safe areas in government-controlled areas.

Separately, Iraqi special forces entered the Ghazlani military base next to the airport on the southern edge of the city, the spokesman of the Joint Military Operation Command, Brig. Gen. Yahya Rasool, told the AP.

Rasool said heavy clashes were underway inside the base but gave no more details.

On Sunday, after weeks of preparations, Iraqi forces officially launched the operation

to take Mosul's western half, with the Iraqi regular army and federal police forces taking part in the initial push. Since then, the military says it has retaken some 120 square kilometers — nearly 50 square miles — south of the city.

Thursday marked the first time the Iraqi special forces, which played a key role in securing the eastern half of the city, joined the fight for western Mosul. "The counterterrorism forces will be an additional force, which will expedite the liberation of Mosul's western side," Rasool said.

Also on Thursday, another counterterrorism unit captured a key village southwest of Mosul from where Islamic State group snipers and shelling had been slowing the government offensive, Rasool said. The Islamic State had used Tell al-Rayan to position snipers and fire off rockets and mortar rounds to derail the advance of the Iraqi troops, he said.

Another special forces officer said the Islamic State targeted

the advancing troops with a suicide car bomb and dozens of bombs dropped from a drone. The officer, who also condition of anonymity as he was not authorized to brief the media, said his troops sustained at least a dozen casualties, but many were light injuries.

Making up for a lack of fighters, Islamic State militants are increasingly relying on modified commercial drones to guide suicide car bombers to their targets and to launch small-scale airstrikes on Iraqi forces.

Among those who fled the fighting was Hamad Khalaf, who walked out of Maamoun neighborhood south of Mosul along with his wife and four children as convoys of Iraqi vehicles passed by.

"There are many injured still inside," Khalaf said of his neighborhood south of Mosul.

"We've been walking since the morning," his wife, Badriya, said as she held her 1½-year-old daughter. A few meters behind them a mortar fired from inside Mosul hit a nearby hill.

Trump lifts Obama-era trans bathroom policy

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Transgender students on Wednesday lost federal protections that allowed them to use school bathrooms and locker rooms matching their gender identities as the Trump administration stepped into a long-simmering national debate.

The administration came down on the side of states' rights, lifting Obama-era federal guidelines that had been characterized by Republicans as an example of overreach.

Without the Obama directive, it will be up to states and school

districts to interpret federal anti-discrimination law and determine whether students should have access to restrooms in accordance with their expressed gender identity and not just their biological sex.

"This is an issue best solved at the state and local level," Education Secretary Betsy DeVos said. "Schools, communities and families can find — and in many cases have found — solutions that protect all students."

In a letter to the nation's schools, the Justice and Education departments said the earlier guidance "has given rise to significant litigation regarding

school restrooms and locker rooms."

The agencies withdrew the guidance "in order to further and more completely consider the legal issues involved."

Anti-bullying safeguards would not be affected by the change, according to the letter. "All schools must ensure that all students, including LGBT students, are able to learn and thrive in a safe environment," it said.

It was not clear what immediate impact the change would have on schools, as a federal judge in Texas put a temporary hold on the Obama guidance

soon after it was issued when 13 states sued.

Even without that hold, the guidance carried no force of law.

But transgender rights advocates say it was useful and necessary to protect students from discrimination. Opponents argued it was federal overreach and violated the safety and privacy of other students.

The White House said "returning power to the states paves the way for an open and inclusive process to take place at the local level with input from parents, students, teachers and administrators."

2 Army bases OK to hire child care workers

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — Two Army installations facing a shortage of child care workers due to the federal civilian hiring freeze ordered by President Donald Trump have received approval to hire for 75 open positions, Army officials said Thursday.

U.S. Army Garrison-Fort Knox, Ky., was given approval to hire 56 employees, and U.S. Army Garrison Wiesbaden can hire for 19 positions, said Bill Costlow, spokesman for the Army's Installation Management Command.

Officials said they did not know when child care services

might be restored to former levels because the hiring process can take some time.

Most of the positions at both installations are child and youth program assistants, according to the exemption request approved and signed Wednesday by Acting Secretary of the Army Robert M. Speer.

Other positions include cooks, custodial workers, youth program instructors and administrative support assistants. All positions fall under the Army's Child and Youth Services program, or CYS.

The hasty exemption approval comes two days after reports that the two bases planned to indefinitely suspend some

child care programs because of constraints on filling vacant positions imposed by the hiring freeze. The Pentagon said Tuesday that those service cuts may have been a mistake, according to The Associated Press. A Feb. 1 Defense Department memo spelled out which positions were exempt and included military child care and youth care workers.

Army officials said Thursday that those exemptions were not granted quickly enough to avoid tough decisions to reduce some base child care services.

"Just because there's an exemption doesn't mean we have the authority to hire without validating," Costlow said. "This

is new, so the first time through the hoop is always a little bit slower."

Pentagon spokesman Johnny Michael on Thursday attributed the problem to how the Army sought exemptions at the two installations and suggested that too many layers were involved in getting that approval.

"The process prevented them from hiring in a timely manner," he said. "It seems that since the Army has installed new procedures for how to carry out the exemption process, that has alleviated the problem."

Michael said the Pentagon did not pressure the Army to quickly approve the exemptions.

Dunford: US to stand by its commitments to NATO allies

BY TARA COPP
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The United States will stand by its commitments to defend its NATO allies against any threats, including those generated by Russia, Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Thursday.

Dunford's pledge was the fourth from high-ranking members of President Donald Trump's administration to reassure its alliance partners in the last week that the U.S. would defend Europe against threats generated by Russia or other countries. The U.S. commitment to NATO had come under question during Trump's presidential campaign.

"I think it's pretty clear the administration — Vice President [Mike] Pence, Secretary [of State Rex] Tillerson, Secretary [of Defense Jim] Mattis have all reconfirmed our commitment to NATO over the past week," Dunford said, referring to two separate security conferences that Mattis and Tillerson attended last week in Germany.

Russia's rapid modernization of its nuclear and conventional forces and other nonmilitary activities, such as hacking, has made it a top security concern for the U.S., Dunford said, describing Russia's actions as just "below the threshold of conflict" and clearly aim to destabilize NATO alliance.

"They [Russia] employ every unconventional operation — information operations, cyber, certainly a military posture aspect of it, economic coercion, political influence to advance their objectives. At the end of the day what they seek to do is undermine our ability to meet our alliance commitment with NATO and the cohesion of the NATO alliance," the Marine general said.

Along with Russia, Dunford cited China, Iran and North Korea as the top security concerns for the U.S.

Dunford was speaking at the Brookings Institution, a Washington think tank, just days before he and Mattis are expected to provide options on how to defeat the Islamic State group as part of a review requested by Trump on Jan. 28.

Army Lt. Gen. Hodges: US troop vow in Europe 'solid'

BY NANCY MONTGOMERY
Stars and Stripes

VICENZA, Italy — Commitments made to increase the U.S. military presence in eastern Europe and the Baltics remain "rock solid" despite statements by President Donald Trump that NATO is "obsolete" and that allies must boost defense spending, the head of U.S. Army Europe said Thursday.

"Every bit of it is happening in 2017," Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges said in remarks to the 173rd Airborne Brigade here, referring to nine-month rotations of armored and aviation brigades, pre-positioned equipment and continuous exercises with NATO allies. "The commitments made in 2016 — it's all happening, and the new president didn't turn it off."

Hodges said it was clear from last week's security conference in Munich that Europeans are worried about the future of NATO in light of administration comments that the alliance was obsolete and that allies were not paying their share.

"And so people in Europe

started getting very nervous, and they should be doing their share, no doubt about it," Hodges said.

But he said that Vice President Mike Pence and the U.S.' new Defense Department and Homeland Security chiefs all confirmed at the conference that "our commitment to our allies is rock solid."

"That was the word they used, rock solid," Hodges said.

Hodges, who has worked closely with allies in his current post and his previous position as commander of the Allied Land Command, a NATO headquarters, disagreed with the idea that underspending on NATO defense by member states harmed the country's interest.

"Prosperity and security in the United States is directly connected to security and stability in Europe," he said. "Even if not a single one of our allies was paying a penny, our economic prosperity is still tied to stability and security in Europe."

The 173rd Brigade itself was a strategic investment by the U.S., Hodges said.

Task Force 76 official dies in off-duty accident

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The chief of staff for the Navy's forward-deployed amphibious force — based in Okinawa, Japan — died Tuesday in an off-duty recreational accident, Navy officials said.

Few details were available Thursday when Capt. Stephen "Cole" Hayes' death was announced by Task Force 76, where he served under commander Rear Adm. Marc Dalton.

His death is under investigation.

The Henderson, Colo., native was remembered fondly for his personable character, "can-do" attitude and engaged leadership, a Navy statement said.

Hayes was a Bronze Star recipient who served 24 years on active duty, the statement said.

"We are deeply saddened by the death of a shipmate and friend," Dalton said in the statement. "Our sincere condolences are with Capt. Hayes' wife, children, and entire family. Our staff and the Navy have lost an amazing officer and leader. His time here will leave an indelible imprint."

Hayes enlisted in 1992 after graduating from the University of Colorado, Boulder, the statement said. He served as a fire controlman aboard the USS Chandler before attending Officer Candidate School in Pensacola, Fla.

He came to Task Force 76 in September after serving as deputy director of OPNAV N173, the Equal Opportunity branch under the Navy's 21st Century Sailor office, the statement said.

A memorial service is planned for 5 p.m. Friday at the Camp Courtney Chapel.

Japanese court awards \$265M over jet noise at Kadena base

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND CHIYOMI SUMIDA
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — A Japanese court has awarded more than \$265 million to people living around Kadena Air Base in the largest monetary settlement over U.S. military aircraft noise in the nation's history.

The verdict was rendered Thursday by a three-judge panel from the Okinawa City branch of the Naha District Court. The judges awarded \$265.9 million to 22,005 residents — about \$12,000 per plaintiff — for noise beyond permissible levels.

The judges admonished the Japanese government for ignoring the situation and not taking concrete steps to curb the noise. However, they rejected demands to limit U.S. military flight operations, which the court said contribute to peace and security in the region.

The plaintiffs plan to appeal that part of the ruling.

"The court found that the noise was harmful but it cannot stop it," said plaintiff Yoshinori Yamada, 76, outside the courthouse after the verdict. "I am outraged."

The Japanese government can appeal the monetary award to a higher court. The Japan Supreme Court lowered the award in a similar suit over noise at Naval Air Facility Atsugi in December.

This is the third successful suit for monetary compensation over Kadena's

noise pollution. The first was filed in 1982 by 906 people. The second was filed in 2000 by 5,544 residents.

The suit ruled on Thursday was filed in 2011 by 22,054 people living in communities surrounding the air base. Some left the case because they died while pursuing litigation or were blocked because they were from the Philippines.

Some of the residents had a similar suit against the U.S. government dismissed Feb. 9, when the court determined it did not have jurisdiction. They have appealed that verdict to the Fukuoka High Court.

"While the benefits are enjoyed equally by the entire nation, the operations of the military cause various damages, inflicting a heavy toll on local residents," Chief Judge Tetsuya Fujikura said in Thursday's ruling. "It is a grave unfairness that cannot be overlooked."

In all three Kadena cases, plaintiffs said monetary compensation was not their main goal. Both previous groups appealed seeking to limit flight operations, but were unsuccessful.

Aircraft noise has been a major issue on Okinawa since the end of World War II when the island fell under U.S. administration. In the past year alone, there have been multimillion dollar settlements that must be paid by the government of Japan, including one in November that saw 3,417 residents around Marine Corps Air Station Futenma receive \$22.6 million.

Air Force: Presidential plane's full cost not yet known

BY TARA COPP
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Despite President Donald Trump's claim that the cost of Air Force One has been cut by \$1 billion, the Air Force said Wednesday that the price tag for the program has yet to be determined.

Trump made the claim during a rally in Florida on Saturday, telling the gathered crowd, "We got that price down by over \$1 billion. And I probably haven't spoken, to be honest with you, for more than an hour on the project."

The Air Force wants to replace two Air Force One aircraft by 2024. Reuters has reported the initial cost estimates are about \$2.87 billion, based on Air Force documents it has reviewed.

Trump has suggested the U.S. could cut costs by developing only one replacement aircraft.

The Air Force flies two VC-25 presidential aircraft, which are modified Boeing 747s. One entered service in 1990 and the second in 1991. The Air Force is planning to replace the two planes with Boeing 747-8s,

which are 18 feet longer, have an additional 29 feet of wingspan, fly slightly faster and have a range that is 1,000 miles farther than the current 747s before refueling is required.

Col. Pat Ryder, an Air Force spokesman, emphasized the White House would drive the requirements on how many presidential aircraft it needs.

"I don't want to speak for the White House. But philosophically speaking, having two aircraft gives you the flexibility you need to ensure you are able to meet the mission requirements," he said. "Having

another aircraft gives you the ability to put one into phased maintenance, for example, or if there are issues with that aircraft you have other options."

More so, the Air Force is still estimating the full costs of the program, Ryder said. To date, the service has spent \$172 million on risk reduction such as making certain the planned systems for the future aircraft are interoperable.

The service should have a clearer idea of the full costs by the fall after it awards initial contracts for the plane, he said.

Trump: Roundup a 'military operation'

The Washington Post

President Donald Trump on Thursday celebrated what he called "a military operation" to round up and deport undocumented immigrants who have committed crimes or caused violence in the United States.

"We're getting gang members out, we're getting drug lords out, we're getting really bad dudes out of this country — and at a rate that nobody's ever seen before," Trump told a group of several dozen manufacturing executives during a policy discussion session at the White House.

Trump talked about the trip Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly are mak-

ing to Mexico this week. Trump said he told Tillerson, "That's going to be a tough trip because we have to be treated fairly by Mexico."

Trump congratulated Kelly for the work his department is doing to secure the border with Mexico and deport illegal immigrants.

"It's a military operation," Trump said, attributing gang violence and illegal drug trade to illegal immigrants.

Trump's reference to a military operation could raise eyebrows among immigrant rights advocates and even within the Department of Homeland Security. Federal immigration policy is enforced by several divisions inside DHS, including Customs and Border Patrol

and Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the military has no role. A leaked DHS proposal last week to deploy Army National Guard troops to help apprehend undocumented immigrants was quickly denied by DHS leadership and the White House as under consideration. The unions representing border patrol agents and officers have regularly denounced the use of military personnel.

"I do not believe the National Guard to be a good idea," Brandon Judd, president of the National Border Patrol Council, said in an interview. "We're just setting ourselves up for too much liability with people who have not been trained to do the jobs."

Trump was presumably re-

ferring to a series of enforcement actions carried out by ICE two weeks ago that rounded up 683 immigrants purportedly in the country illegally.

Similar raids were carried out during the Obama administration, and the department downplayed the significance of the number in a Feb. 13 news release.

But immigrant rights advocates have said the directives contained in a pair of memos from Kelly this week would dramatically expand the pool of immigrants who would be targeted for deportations, broadening it well beyond the hardened criminals and new arrivals that had been the priorities under the Obama administration.

Some N. Calif. residents return to soaked homes

Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Some residents returned home to sort through waterlogged furniture, toys and clothing after being abruptly evacuated when a surging creek carrying engine fuel and sewage water inundated thousands of homes in San Jose.

With water levels from Coyote Creek receding late Wednesday, officials said some of the 14,000 evacuated residents would be allowed to return home, although an evacuation order remained for parts of the city. Authorities warned residents to be careful about hygiene and handling food that may have come into contact with floodwater.

"The water is not safe," San Jose Mayor Sam Liccardo said. "There is contamination in this water and the contamination runs the gamut."

Residents in knee-high rubber boots waddled through inundated street to get to their homes, passing by cars submerged in muddy water.

Victor Chen, his two children, ages 8 and 10, and his

wife evacuated Tuesday night and returned to their home on 21st Street earlier Wednesday.

"It's really tough to see. A home is all we worked for, and our family is all here," Chen, 42, told the San Francisco Chronicle. "And we had to leave it behind when the water was rising."

Toys, extra mattresses, a TV, bikes and clothing were ruined after the garage, dining room and a bedroom were flooded.

Liccardo acknowledged that the city failed to properly notify residents to evacuate during a flood emergency early Wednesday when some people said they got their first notice by seeing firefighters in boats in the neighborhood.

"If the first time a resident is aware that they need to get out of their home is when they see a firefighter in a boat, that's a failure," Liccardo said at a news conference. "We are assessing what happened in that failure."

Flood warnings were in place until Saturday because waterways were overtaxed, and another storm was forecast Sunday.

Police begin to arrest last group protesting pipeline

Associated Press

CANNON BALL, N.D. — Police in full riot gear began arresting Dakota Access pipeline opponents who remained in a protest camp in North Dakota on Thursday in defiance of orders to leave.

Most protesters left peacefully Wednesday, when authorities closed the camp on Army Corps of Engineers land in advance of spring flooding, but some refused to go.

Eighteen National Guardsmen and dozens of law officers entered the camp from two directions shortly before midday Thursday, along with several law enforcement and military vehicles. A helicopter and airplane flew overhead.

Officers checked structures and began arresting people, putting them in vans to take to jail. About two dozen people were arrested in the first half hour of the operation, according to Levi Bachmeier, an adviser to Gov. Doug Burgum.

The operation began shortly after authorities said Corps officials had met with camp leaders. They didn't divulge the

outcome of those talks.

The camp — known as Oceti Sakowin — near the Standing Rock Indian Reservation has since August been the main site for demonstrators trying to thwart construction of the final section of the \$3.8 billion pipeline. The Standing Rock Sioux and Cheyenne River Sioux, whose reservation is downstream, say Dakota Access threatens their drinking water and cultural sites. Dallas-based pipeline developer Energy Transfer Partners disputes that.

When complete, the pipeline will carry oil through the Dakotas and Iowa to a shipping point in Illinois.

Police also had a SWAT vehicle on hand Thursday in case of what Highway Patrol Lt. Tom Iverson described as a worst-case "SWAT scenario" — an armed person barricading themselves in a structure in the camp.

American Indian elders have told police there are people willing to resort to drastic measures to stay in the camp, Iverson said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Baby giant anteater Bowie debuts at zoo

FL MIAMI — A baby giant anteater has made his public debut at Zoo Miami.

Zoo spokesman Ron Magill said Bowie is the first giant anteater born at the zoo. He was born Dec. 21 and was introduced to the public on Tuesday.

Magill told the Miami Herald the zoo gave the baby and his 3-year-old mother time to bond before Bowie made his first appearance. He said it was a “beautiful moment” when the mother stepped out with no hesitation with Bowie “gripped firmly to her back.”

The giant anteater can grow to 7 feet long and is found in the grasslands of Central and South America.

Police say teens stole cellphone, chocolates

RI PROVIDENCE, — Police in Rhode Island say a group of teens stole a man’s cellphone and box of chocolates, with one suspect saying the chocolates were his “grandma’s favorite.”

Providence police Lt. Luis San Lucas told The Providence Journal the 31-year-old man got out of a vehicle Monday night and was approached by the group.

Police said one teen pulled a gun on the man and took his cellphone. The teen then put the gun to the man’s chest and demanded the chocolates.

No arrests have been made.

Class on fake news planned at university

MI ANN ARBOR — The University of Michigan is starting a class this fall that will help students evaluate

fake news.

University librarians are partnering with the school’s College of Literature, Science and the Arts to create the class aimed at helping students better critically evaluate news stories. The one-credit class is called “Fake News, Lies and Propaganda: How to Sort Fact from Fiction.”

School officials said one of the reasons the class is needed right now is because it’s so easy to share information in much greater volume than in the past.

Laurie Alexander, associate university librarian for learning and teaching, said the goal of the course is to teach students to “approach information with a critical and questioning mind.”

Mom dresses as dad for school breakfast

UT ST. GEORGE — A single mom is generating attention online after she donned a mustache, dressed up like a dad for a school breakfast event and posed for photos with her son.

KSL-TV reported Whitney Kittrell wore the costume after deciding to fulfill her son’s request that she accompany him to a “Dads and Donuts” event.

Kittrell is divorced with full custody of her children and said some days have been better than others for the family.

She said her son was all happiness as he introduced her to his classmates as both parents. Kittrell said Lucas told her he wanted her to go since she’s his dad too.

Lieutenant governor’s husband leaving court

NJ TRENTON — New Jersey’s lieutenant governor has received a let-

ter of resignation — from her husband.

Kim Guadagno’s husband, Michael, is an appeals court judge. To collect his pension, he’s required by law to notify Kim Guadagno in her dual role as secretary of state that he’ll reach the mandatory retirement age of 70 this month.

In the letter, Michael Guadagno wrote that with her term ending in January 2018 and his income “substantially reduced,” it may be an “excellent opportunity for you to consider a career change to a more lucrative position.”

He wrote that they could discuss it “over dinner.”

Kim Guadagno is running in the GOP primary to succeed Republican Gov. Chris Christie.

Police department ends school ‘High Five’ event

MA NORTHAMPTON — A Massachusetts police department’s program that sent officers into elementary schools one day a week to high-five and fist-bump students has been ended because some people complained.

Northampton Chief Jody Kasper said “High Five Friday” was started in December as a way to foster better relationships between police and children. She said officers went to the city’s elementary schools every Friday to greet kids.

But some people questioned the program’s effectiveness and worried that it might upset some children, for example those in the U.S. illegally or those who have previously had negative experiences with law enforcement.

The chief told The Daily Hampshire Gazette that parents were informed about the events beforehand and children were never forced to participate. She called the program’s

demise “frustrating.”

2 deputies injured in gun-cleaning accident

NY HILTON — Authorities in western New York said two county jail deputies are recovering from gunshot injuries suffered in an off-duty gun-cleaning accident.

The Monroe County Sheriff’s Office said Dale Fair and Robert Thorpe had stripped and cleaned Fair’s personal weapon early Sunday morning in a home near Rochester.

The gun was reloaded after the cleaning. Officials said the weapon fell, and when Fair tried to catch it he accidentally discharged the weapon. The bullet hit his hand and leg, and a fragment hit Thorpe in the lower leg.

Both men were taken to Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester for treatment of injuries. No criminal charges have been filed.

Police delivering news of death are fired upon

SC HARTSVILLE — Authorities said an 18-year-old man out on bail on a murder charge fired a shot at police officers coming to his Hartsville home to tell him a relative died in a car crash.

Hartsville Police Lt. Mark Blair told WPDE-TV that Gregorio Brunson was charged with discharging a firearm in city limits Sunday morning.

Blair said Brunson fired one shot from the back of the house as officers approached. No one was hurt.

Court records show Brunson was out of jail on a \$50,000 bond for a 2016 murder charge.

From wire reports

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Reporting
World, National
and Military News

30K watch Syracuse shock No. 10 Duke

Associated Press

SYRACUSE, N.Y. — John Gillon had done it before, just not quite on such a grand stage.

With Syracuse desperate for a signature victory in what has been a so-so season, Gillon hit a three-pointer from the top of the key at the buzzer, and Syracuse upset No. 10 Duke 78-75 on Wednesday night in front of a raucous Carrier Dome crowd of 30,331.

Gillon had hit a clutch three-pointer three weeks ago at the regulation buzzer to force overtime at North Carolina State and the Orange prevailed behind his career-high 43 points. This topped that.

"It's No. 1. We needed this," said Gillon, a graduate transfer from Colorado State. "I've always seen myself as a guard at this level and never had the opportunity until this year. Just being able to play in this game, play against Duke, it was like a dream come true for me. I'm just glad I could play like that on that stage."

With just 7.5 seconds left on the clock after a Duke miss, Gillon drove to the top of the key and banked in a desperation shot to send the huge crowd into a frenzy as they

stormed the court.

"This team fights. They do what they can do to come back. They keep battling," Orange coach Jim Boeheim said. "It's been a fight all year long."

Syracuse (17-12, 9-7 Atlantic Coast Conference) had lost three straight, all by six points or fewer, and that skid had come after three straight wins that were decided by seven points or fewer. The Orange needed another signature victory to go with their two top-10 wins to bolster their résumé for a berth in the NCAA Tournament.

"They've been in so many close games and they've hit big shots," Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski said. "So when it got down at the end, they've been in those situations before and they've performed well. They hit the shot they were supposed to miss and we were supposed to win. They screwed up my game plan."

Duke (22-6, 10-5 ACC) had won seven straight and entered the game tied for second in the ACC with Louisville, a game behind North Carolina, which beat the Cardinals 74-63 later Wednesday night.

Gillon finished with a game-high 26 points and Tyus Battle had 18 for Syracuse

in a game that featured 11 ties.

Luke Kennard led Duke with 23 points and Jayson Tatum had 19 points and 13 rebounds for his second double-double of the season. They combined for 11 of Duke's 16 assists. Grayson Allen finished with eight points.

The crowd began chanting "Let's Go Orange!" as soon as Boeheim greeted Krzyzewski before the opening tip. And when Battle scored eight points in just over 2 minutes to key an Orange rally that tied it at 47, the Carrier Dome was rocking like yesteryear as the Orange hit 9 of their first 11 shots in the second half.

"I figured it out toward the end of the first half where they struggled defensively," said Gillon, who was 7-for-9 after the break, including the layup with 37 seconds left that tied the score for the final time at 75. "I just felt like there wasn't an answer for me in the second half."

The game was tied six times in the final 10:12 and the Blue Devils were keyed by Amile Jefferson. Held scoreless in the first half, he scored nine straight points and finished with 14.

Butler tops 'Nova for 2nd time this season

Associated Press

VILLANOVA, Pa. — Kelan Martin scored 22 points and fueled a stunning second-half rally to lead No. 22 Butler past No. 2 Villanova 74-66 on Wednesday night, ending the Wildcats' on-campus home winning streak at 48 games.

Kamar Baldwin added 15 points for the Bulldogs (22-6, 11-5 Big East), who have handed the defending national champion Wildcats two of their three losses this season.

Jalen Brunson scored 24 points and Josh Hart had 18 for Villanova (26-3, 13-3), which came into the game having already clinched at least a share of its fourth straight Big East regular-season championship.

The game marked the first time Hart and fellow seniors Kris Jenkins and Darryl Reynolds lost a game at the Pavilion in their four-year careers.

No. 3 Kansas 87, TCU 68: Frank Mason III scored 20 points, Carlton Bragg provided a big lift off the bench and the

host Jayhawks pulled away in the second half and clinched a share of their 13th consecutive Big 12 championship.

No. 6 Oregon 68, California 65: Dillon Brooks hit a three-pointer with 0.2 seconds to play to cap a comeback from 16 points down and the visiting Ducks kept their hopes alive for a Pac-12 title.

No. 8 North Carolina 74, No. 7 Louisville 63: Justin Jackson scored 21 points and the host Tar Heels pulled away after halftime.

Providence 68, No. 23 Creighton 66: Kyron Cartwright made a three-pointer with 2.2 seconds left to give the visiting Friars the victory.

Minnesota 89, No. 24 Maryland 75: Dupree McBrayer scored 14 of his 18 points in the second half and the visiting Golden Gophers won their sixth straight game.

Service academies

Army 73, Boston U. 62: Luke Morrison scored 19 points on 7-for-8 shooting, including

making all five of his three-pointers, and Jordan Fox scored 15 points to lead the host Black Knights past the Terriers.

Boston's Tyler Scanlon hit a layup to tie the score at 60 with 4:37 left, but Army (12-17, 6-11 Patriot League) went on a 10-0 run. Fox started it with a jumper, Morrison buried two three-pointers and Matthew Wilson added a layup for a 70-60 lead with just more than two minutes left.

Boston shot 1-for-6 after Scanlon's layup.

The Black Knights led 38-36 at halftime and never trailed after the break.

American 74, Navy 58: Saeed Nelson scored 19 points and added four steals to help lead the visiting Eagles past the Midshipmen.

The win for American avenges a loss earlier in the season to Navy.

Four other players finished in double figures for American (7-21, 4-13 Patriot League), which shot a very efficient 61 percent from the floor and 54.5 percent

from three-point range. Mark Gasperini finished with 13 points, Matt Cimino and Charlie Jones each scored 12, and James Washington chipped in 10.

Shawn Anderson scored 17 points and Tom Lacey added 10 to lead Navy (15-14, 10-7), which shot a dismal 31.3 percent and 5-for-29 from long distance.

Air Force 81, UNLV 58: Hayden Graham had 19 points and 11 rebounds and the host Falcons ended a six-game losing streak by beating the Runnin' Rebels.

Air Force (11-17, 4-11 Mountain West) led 38-28 at the break and had its largest lead at 75-48 with 5:05 left.

Graham reached his 500th career rebound, and with 1,000 points already, become the eighth player in Air Force history to do both.

Zach Kocur had 16 points, Pervis Louder added 13, Lavelle Scottie scored 12 and Jacob Van added 10.

Earnhardt aims to end career with title

Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — Upon further review, hoisting a championship trophy is exactly how Dale Earnhardt Jr. wants to end his career.

NASCAR's most popular driver caused a stir on "The Dan Patrick Show" when he claimed he would immediately retire if he wins the title this year. The statement followed him to media day for the Daytona 500, and there was no question about it.

"Hell, yeah. I would definitely not want to come back and try to race anymore if I won the championship. I would be outta here," he said. "That's the last box I don't have checked, really. There's a few races I'd like to win. The championship would definitely be the icing on the cake for my career."

Earnhardt is the son of Hall of Famer Dale Earnhardt, who won a record-tying seven championships over his career. As Earnhardt enters the 18th season of his Cup career, he's still seeking his first title.

He's said repeatedly that re-

tirement is not on his radar, and at just 42 years old, he should have many years ahead in his career. But Earnhardt has had concussion issues and missed the second half of last season recovering from one. He is also newly married and says he is looking at life differently.

Knowing how hard he worked to get healthy and back in the race car, he really just wants to dictate his final racing years himself and not have a doctor be the one to end his career.

"To come back this year, win a championship, it would be hard not to hang it up," he said. "This is the last year of my [contract]. I would like to race more. But if I win the championship, I'd have to consider going out on top."

Earnhardt qualified second for Sunday's season-opening Daytona 500 — on the front row next to Hendrick Motorsports teammate Chase Elliott — and is the star of Speedweeks. All the drivers had a chance to address a variety of topics Wednesday. The highlights:

Turn 4 troubles: Hendrick Motorsports has been admit-

tedly aggressive in preparing for the Daytona 500, and it may be the cause of the problems the team has had in Turn 4 at Daytona International Speedway.

Jimmie Johnson twice spun in that turn Sunday during an exhibition race, and pole-sitter Elliott got loose in the same spot in practice. In last year's Daytona 500, both Elliott and Earnhardt spun in Turn 4.

"We can't sit still. We need faster cars. Everybody is working on it," Johnson said. "We were very aggressive in the [Clash] trying to create speed for the car, and I'm a guy that likes a loose race car so I was willing to roll dice."

Johnson also noted that Alex Bowman and Kasey Kahne had no problems with Turn 4 in Sunday's race.

"We have great notes to fall back on. We had a very good driving car in last year's 500, and then two teammates that didn't spin out in the Clash, so we have plenty of notes to go to, but we're definitely being aggressive."

Toyota teamwork: A solid game plan got Toyota its first

Daytona 500 victory last season, and the manufacturer wants to use that same teamwork this year during Speedweeks. It was on display during the Clash on Sunday when the Toyota entries ran 1-2-3-4 for most of the race.

It remains to be seen if the same strategy will work in the Daytona 500. The Toyota fleet now includes a pair of rookies in Erik Jones and Daniel Suarez.

"Game plans don't necessarily all work out," said Toyota driver Matt Kenseth. "You've got to have strong cars to do it. The car has to end up there, not be separated by bad pit stops or strategy. I thought we had it lined up really good in the Clash. We had all four of us in a row for a while."

"We just weren't quite fast enough."

Race favorites? Brad Keselowski and Joey Logano teamed to win six of the last nine restrictor-plate races, and Logano won the exhibition Clash on Sunday.

It means Team Penske is a heavy favorite for Sunday, and eager for the 500 to arrive.

M. Waltrip emotional as his final start nears

Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — Michael Waltrip tries not to get too nostalgic or reflective at Daytona International Speedway.

"It's too emotional," Waltrip said Wednesday.

The two-time Daytona 500 winner will make his 30th and what he expects to be his final NASCAR start in "The Great American Race" on Sunday. Waltrip signed a one-race deal with Premium Motorsports, wanting to say goodbye at the track that has provided him triumph and tragedy. Waltrip won the Daytona 500 in 2001, the same day his car owner, Dale Earnhardt, was killed on the final lap; he won again two years later in a rain-shortened race.

"I have faced a range of emotion that humans probably aren't designed to face, and it all happened within 10 seconds," Waltrip said. "So that's hard to think about and it's hard to figure out, but I love Daytona. I've been coming here since I was a kid, so every time we talk about coming to Daytona, I get a big smile on my face, which is

crazy, but that's racing."

Waltrip has a lofty goal for his final race. He wants to run up front and finish in the top 10. If that happens, the 53-year-old driver would "walk away proud."

One problem: He was 35th in pole qualifying Sunday, hardly the kind of speed needed at one of NASCAR's fastest tracks.

"Unless our strategy is, 'We've got them right where we want them; they don't even know we're here,' then we might be in a little bit of trouble on this one," Waltrip said. "But I'm looking forward to trying."

Waltrip announced last month that this would be his career finale behind the wheel. He didn't want to go out with last year's Daytona 500 run, in which he got into a minor wreck and finished 30th.

"I just didn't want to quit like that," he said. "I went to Talladega (last year) and we got a 12th-place finish and I ran up front a little bit and then I decided we would just try to have one more competitive run down here this year. You've got to quit sometime."

Daytona seemed like the perfect place to end his career. He won four times in 32 years around NASCAR, with two of them coming at its most famous track. That one of his wins came on one of the worst days in NASCAR history, he can't do anything about that.

"It's just what I live with," Waltrip said. "I wouldn't call it haunting. It's just my life. ... I think we have a number of days when we're born that we're going to live. Everybody has that number and that was Dale's day, and me winning was the perfect person to win because I just wanted to give him the credit. I still honor him by giving him the credit."

"As I get older, as you think about your day coming up, it's a pretty good day when you're watching your two cars drive off to win the Daytona 500 and then you're in heaven right after that. Obviously, I wish I could have got a hug from him and everything had have turned out different, but that's just not the way it was meant to be."

Warriors continue to build 'chemistry'

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Zaza Pachulia holds his own during competitive games of poker on the airplane alongside Stephen Curry and Klay Thompson — they call it the “Good Guys Table.” Andre Iguodala and JaVale McGee, one-time teammates with Denver reunited in Oakland, hold secret chats.

“We’re building an empire,” Iguodala joked. “We’ve got secret stuff we can’t talk about.”

Jonnie West — son of Hall of Famer and Warriors executive Jerry West — joins Curry, Pachulia and Thompson for their card games.

“It depends how Klay feels. If he’s tired, then no card game,” Pachulia said.

With all that was made before

the season about adding Kevin Durant to an already star-studded roster, Golden State’s players have jelled just fine. The NBA-best Warriors (47-9) are gearing up for the second half and what they hope is another championship run, and chemistry sure isn’t holding them back.

Two-time reigning MVP Curry and KD love to watch each other accomplish amazing things on the floor, along with Green and Thompson and all of the others who contribute off the bench.

Curry initially allowed Durant to find his groove, then began to assert himself more and increase his shots. Experience playing together is the biggest factor to keep building team bonds, if you ask

Iguodala.

“Weathering storms builds chemistry and adversity builds chemistry,” he said. “The season’s long and you want to have all types of ups and downs. And that’s where you build it the most, and off the court, plane rides. I think when you play with teammates seven, eight years, you’re still building throughout that time. You continue to learn about each other. You’ve just got to understand that that’s part of the process and you’ve got to want to learn from one another.”

The Warriors are counting on every advantage they can gain, on and off the court. During flights, team dinners, anywhere.

After a heartbreaking Game 7 to end last season’s NBA Fi-

nals, Golden State’s players want nothing short of a championship. Many of them got a taste winning the title two years ago for the franchise’s first in 40 years.

Steve Kerr, last year’s NBA Coach of the Year, gets a kick out of watching his teams come together each year.

“It’s one of my favorite parts of coaching honestly, is seeing how a team comes together, seeing the relationships develop, seeing guys laughing together, seeing who hangs out with who,” Kerr said. “It’s great. This team has a really, really good chemistry that developed really quickly. Obviously, we had the core group intact from last year. We lost some key guys, too. The additions have been great. The chemistry is really good.”

Rakell helps Ducks snap Bruins’ four game streak

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Rickard Rakell broke a tie with his second goal with 2:34 to play, and the Anaheim Ducks snapped Boston’s four-game winning streak under new coach Bruce Cassidy with a 5-3 victory over the Bruins on Wednesday night.

Rakell also scored in the second period for the Ducks and has 24 goals in his outstanding season. Ondrej Kase, Josh Manson and Andrew Cogliano also scored for Anaheim, and Jonathan Bernier made 26 saves in his first victory since Jan. 23.

Frank Vatrano scored the tying goal in the third period for the Bruins, who hadn’t lost since Cassidy replaced Claude Julien on Feb. 7. Defensemen Brandon Carlo and Zdeno Chara scored early goals, and Tuukka Rask stopped 20 shots.

Anaheim beat Boston for the seventh straight time.

The Ducks also kept pace with Edmonton for second place in the Pacific Division race with a wild finish.

Anaheim killed five Bos-

ton power plays, but Vatrano slipped behind Manson and scored on a breakaway with 8:25 left. Rakell then tapped in the winning goal after the puck deflected off Corey Perry, who had two assists.

Cogliano got credit for an empty-net goal with 48.7 seconds left when Torey Krug hooked him to the ice with a clear path to the net.

Bernier started his second straight game in place of John Gibson, a late scratch with a lower-body injury.

Forward Nic Kerdiles made his NHL debut for the Ducks, becoming the first player from Orange County to suit up for Anaheim.

Kerdiles lived in Irvine for most of his childhood and regularly attended games at Honda Center before the club drafted him in 2012. The 23-year-old scorer missed several months earlier this season with a concussion, but has played 10 outstanding games for the Ducks’ AHL affiliate in San Diego.

After Carlo opened the scoring, Kase evened it early in the second with his first goal in 19 games since Jan. 6. The

Czech rookie’s goal was just the Ducks’ fifth in their last 258 minutes of play.

Chara added his sixth goal of the season, but Rakell evened it again when Rask accidentally back-heelled a rebound into his own net.

Manson then put the Ducks ahead with his third goal in 62 games — and his second in three games.

Matt Beleskey returned to the Bruins’ lineup after sitting as a healthy scratch in two of the previous three games. The longtime Ducks forward, who got a \$19.8 million contract from Boston after scoring a career-best 22 goals for Anaheim in 2014-15, hasn’t had a goal in 17 games since Nov. 19.

Oilers 4, Panthers 3: Kris Russell’s goal with 7:58 left was his first in more than a year and helped visiting Edmonton end the Florida’s five-game winning streak.

Russell’s goal was his first since Feb. 11, 2016, when he played for Calgary. He went goalless in his first 48 games with the Oilers.

Fellow defenseman Oscar Klefbom also scored for Ed-

monton, as did forwards Zack Kassian and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins. Connor McDavid, who came into the night leading the NHL scoring race, had an assist on Russell’s goal.

Aleksander Barkov, Colton Sceviour and Jonathan Marchessault scored for Florida. Keith Yandle had two assists for the Panthers, giving him 400 points for his career.

Cam Talbot stopped 31 shots for the Oilers, who have won their last eight games at Florida — last losing on the Panthers’ ice in 2002. James Reimer made 31 saves for the Panthers, who just completed a 5-0-0 road trip.

Capitals 4, Flyers 1: Evgeny Kuznetsov scored two goals, Braden Holtby made 33 saves and visiting Washington beat Philadelphia.

Nicklas Backstrom and T.J. Oshie also scored for the NHL-leading Capitals, who snapped a two-game losing streak.

Brayden Schenn had the lone goal for the struggling Flyers, who are 2-5 in their last seven games. Michal Neuvirth stopped 25 shots for Philadelphia.