

STARS AND STRIPES®

Saturday, February 17, 2018

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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DOD IG raises doubts about war progress

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon inspector general raised fresh doubts Friday about progress in the 16-year-old U.S. war in Afghanistan and suggested that restrictions on the public release of information make it difficult to gauge the effectiveness of U.S. strategy.

The Defense Department's office of the inspector general, in a report done jointly with the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development, said the Afghan government by the end of 2017 had not expanded its areas of control, even as the U.S. added about 3,500 troops and intensified airstrikes against the Taliban.

"On the sole quantifiable metric discussed publicly to date — expanding security to 80 percent of the Afghan population by the end of 2019 — Afghanistan made no significant progress in 2017," the report said.

That assessment underpins doubts ex-

pressed by others, including members of Congress who are impatient for progress.

Sen. Richard Burr, chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said this week that recent Taliban attacks killing scores of people in Kabul make it appear the Taliban insurgency is "nowhere near folding," and that the government is incapable of protecting its own citizens.

Earlier this month, Deputy Secretary of State John J. Sullivan said after visiting Kabul and meeting with President Ashraf Ghani and other Afghan government officials that he realized it wasn't a "rosy situation." He told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the Taliban attacks in January were "a real shock to many people in the government."

More than 2,400 Americans have died in Afghanistan since the U.S. launched its war in October 2001 in response to the al-Qaida 9/11 attacks.

The administration touts its Afghan strategy, announced by President Don-

ald Trump in August, as a realistic and more aggressive approach to achieving the goal prior administrations have pursued: to bring the Taliban to an Afghan peace table and to prevent extremist groups like al-Qaida or Islamic State from using the country as a launch pad for attacks on the West.

In its report Friday, the Pentagon watchdog said it is too early to judge whether the Trump strategy will compel the Taliban to reconcile with the government. It said it's difficult to measure the plan's effectiveness because useful pieces of information — such as Afghan military casualty rates — are being withheld from public release at the request of the Afghan government.

Also withheld from public release, the report said, are data on the size, status and combat readiness of Afghan security forces. The U.S.-led coalition also "classified or otherwise restricted information" about the possible creation of a new Afghan National Army militia force, it said.

McMaster talks tough at security conference

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

MUNICH, Germany — National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster brought a hard-line message to global leaders here Saturday, saying the international community must do more to isolate North Korea and Iran and must be prepared to take action against Syria for the continued use of chemical weapons.

"It is time for all nations to hold the Syrian regime and its sponsors accountable for its actions," McMaster said during a speech at the annual Munich Security Conference.

McMaster took shots at Russia when he referred to Friday's U.S. federal indictment against 13 Russian nationals, saying the evidence of Moscow's meddling in the 2016 U.S. election

was "incontrovertible."

When asked about the indictments during the conference, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov shrugged to the audience, which included McMaster. "Until we see the facts, everything else is just blabber," he said.

McMaster called out Germany, South Korea and Japan for doing business with Iran, which he equated to "cutting a check" for Iranian terrorism initiatives.

"The time is now, we think, to act against Iran," McMaster said. "Let's do everything we can to cut off funding."

He also said that countries that evade full enforcement of an economic blockade against North Korea are "acting irresponsibly."

McMaster's remarks were greeted with modest applause

in the convention hall at the swanky Bayischer Hof Hotel, where European leaders have expressed unease with U.S. foreign policy under President Donald Trump. Some allies regard the administration's policies as bellicose.

Germany's defense and foreign ministers said what is getting lost in foreign policy is the need for more development initiatives.

McMaster emphasized the need for strong alliances, but also said institutions that the West has come to rely on are failing in their mission and need to be reformed. He said some of "the worst offenders" are sitting on the U.N.'s human rights council.

German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen, said Friday that the U.N. needs to be strengthened. "It is a point of

concern to us that some of our partners continue to roll back spending on diplomacy, international aid and the United Nations," von der Leyen said.

It wasn't just traditional allies in the West that took shots at the U.S.

Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim accused the U.S. of supporting terrorism in Syria.

While Kurdish fighters have been a key part of U.S. strategy in the battle against Islamic State, Turkey regards them as an extension of the PKK Kurdish terrorist group — Turkey's decadesold enemy.

Turkey's incursion into Syria to fight Kurdish elements in Afrin has raised concerns that the U.S. and its NATO ally could eventually come to blows.

Haircut email causes stir at AF Academy

By TOM ROEDER

The Gazette
(Colorado Springs, Colo.)

An email sent to Air Force Academy cadets went off the rails this week when a sergeant went from discussing appropriate grooming to a statement that basketball star Michael Jordan “was never seen with a gaudy chain around his neck.”

The school has since apologized for the Wednesday “microaggressions” and said “the commandant is working with her staff to ensure that dignity and respect are upheld at every level in the cadet wing.”

The incident started when Master Sgt. Zachary Parish sent an email to cadets com-

plaining about haircuts that didn’t comply with Air Force regulations. As the top enlisted airman over the cadet wing, Parish said he wants cadets to keep their hair trimmed.

“It’s unfortunate that a small percentage of cadets who fail to maintain their hair appropriately cast a negative impression that’s reflected on the entire ... cadet population and armed service members at large,” Parish wrote in an email that later hit Facebook and was confirmed as authentic by the academy.

Enlisted leaders across the military are the enforcers of shaving and haircuts, so Parish’s admonition was a common one.

But then came his treatise on Michael Jordan.

“He was never seen with a gaudy chain around his neck, his pants below his waistline, or with a backwards baseball hat on during public appearances,” Parish wrote.

This sparked outrage among some recipients of the message who saw the sergeant’s words as a swipe at African-Americans.

A stinging rebuke was quickly issued in an email sent by Col. Julian Stevens, vice-commandant of cadets at the academy.

“Let me apologize for the email sent earlier today by our first sergeant,” Stevens wrote. “The comments were very disrespectful, derogatory and

in no way reflective of (cadet wing) permanent party views.”

What Stevens wrote next has sparked a backlash of its own.

“Microaggressions such as these are often blindspots/unintentional biases that are not often recognized, and if they are recognized they are not always addressed,” Stevens wrote.

The emails wound up on Facebook in a group aimed at Air Force sergeants, who immediately expressed outrage with the colonel for alleged oversensitivity.

“This is a perfect example of why we’re going to lose a war with Russia/China,” one commenter, among hundreds, wrote.

Magazine: Ex-playmate had affair with Trump

Associated Press

NEW YORK — President Donald Trump had a nine-month extramarital affair with the 1998 Playboy Playmate of the year beginning in 2006, showing the woman his wife’s bedroom in Trump Tower and bringing her to his private bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel, according to the woman’s eight-page, handwritten account of the relationship obtained by The New Yorker magazine.

The woman, Karen McDougal, confirmed in the story published online Friday that she wrote the account but said she was constrained in what else she could say publicly about Trump because she’d signed a confidentiality agreement.

The affair ended in part after McDougal started feeling guilty about it and after Trump made an offensive comment about her mother’s age as well as a vulgar remark about the anatomy of black men, the magazine reported.

The story said McDougal was paid \$150,000 during the 2016 presidential campaign for the rights to her story of an affair with any “then-married man” by the supermarket tabloid National Enquirer, which never ran it.

Just before Election Day, The Wall Street Journal reported that the tabloid, whose publisher, David Pecker, is a longtime friend of Trump’s, had paid for McDougal’s story but wasn’t printing it, a tabloid industry practice known as “catch and kill.”

Former staffers at American Media Inc., which publishes the Enquirer and other gossip sites, have told The Associated Press the company often bought the rights to unflattering stories about certain celebrities. The practice, described by six former employees who had participated in such deals, could give Pecker leverage over celebrities so that he could elicit future favors, such as appearing on his magazines’

White House clearance procedure overhauled

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Under pressure over his handling of abuse allegations against a top aide, White House chief of staff John Kelly has ordered sweeping changes in how the White House clears staff members to gain access to classified information, acknowledging that the administration “must do better” in how it handles security clearances.

Kelly issued a five-page memo Friday that acknowledged White House mistakes but also put the onus on the FBI and the Justice Department to provide more timely updates on background investigations, asking that any significant derogatory information about staff members be quickly flagged to the White House counsel’s office.

The issue has been in the spotlight for more than a week after it was revealed that former staff secretary Rob Porter had an interim security clearance that allowed him access to

classified material despite allegations of domestic violence by his two ex-wives.

Dozens of White House aides have been working under interim clearances for months, according to administration officials, raising questions about the administration’s handling of the issue and whether classified information has been jeopardized.

Kelly’s plan would limit interim clearances to 180 days, with an option to extend them another 90 days if background checks had not turned up significant troubling information. The memo also recommends that all Top Secret and SCI (Sensitive Compartmented Information) clearances that have been pending since last June be discontinued in a week.

That change could potentially put at risk the clearance of Jared Kushner, the president’s son-in-law and a powerful senior adviser, who has been working on an interim clearance for more than a year.

Anger erupts at funerals for shooting victims

Associated Press

PARKLAND, Fla. — As families began burying their dead, authorities questioned if they could have prevented the attack on a South Florida high school where a gunman took the lives of 14 students, the athletic director, a coach and a geography teacher.

At funerals and in the streets of Parkland, a suburb on the edge of the Everglades, anger bubbled over at the senselessness of the shooting and at the widespread availability of guns. A rally to support gun-safety legislation was scheduled for Saturday at the federal courthouse in Fort Lauderdale.

During a funeral Friday for Meadow Pollack, 18, her father looked down at his daughter's plain pine coffin and screamed

in anguish as Gov. Rick Scott and 1,000 others sat in Temple K'ol Tikvah.

"You killed my kid!" Andrew Pollack yelled, referring to Nikolas Cruz, who is accused of gunning down Meadow and 16 others. "My kid is dead. It goes through my head all day and all night. I keep hearing it. This is just unimaginable that I will never see my princess again."

Not long after that funeral, the FBI said it received a tip last month that Cruz had a "desire to kill" and access to guns, and could be plotting an attack, but agents failed to investigate. The governor called for the FBI director to resign.

A person who was close to Cruz called the FBI's tip line on Jan. 5 and provided information about Cruz's weapons and his erratic

behavior, including his disturbing social media posts. The caller was concerned that Cruz could attack a school.

In more evidence that there had been signs of trouble with Cruz, Broward County Sheriff Scott Israel said his office had received more than 20 calls about him in the past few years.

Cruz was being held at the Broward County Jail on 17 counts of first-degree murder.

Across the internet, students who were caught in the crossfire at the school spoke out. Some took politicians to task on Twitter. A 17-year-old junior wrote an essay for CNN, saying that he and his classmates planned to pressure politicians into taking action. One student asked President Donald Trump to meet with her.

Drone crash, close calls underscore growing risks

Bloomberg

A helicopter's crash landing in South Carolina last week may have been triggered by a drone, which would make it the first drone-related crash in the U.S.

The incident Wednesday involved a student pilot and an instructor, both of whom told investigators a small drone appeared directly in front of them, according to a Charleston Police Department report. The instructor took over the controls and attempted to avoid a collision, and the tail of the helicopter hit a tree or brush, triggering a crash landing.

Neither the pilot nor student was injured, though the helicopter's tail appeared to have significant damage, said a person familiar with the incident.

The accident investigation is the second incident involving a drone in less than a week and comes as aviation groups are demanding tighter regulations on civilian drone use following reports of other possible near collisions involving the devices.

In the U.S., drones are typically restricted to flights within 400 feet of the ground and within sight of the operator. They also are supposed to stay clear of traditional aircraft. But

in the thousands of FAA reports of possible drone safety incidents, many involved apparent illegal flights.

In the Charleston incident, the drone appeared to be a model group known as the Phantom, manufactured by SZ DJI Technology Co., he told police. The drone and its operator weren't located.

Authorities in Canada released a report Wednesday on a collision there involving a drone and a small charter plane. The FAA said earlier this week it was trying to confirm whether an air-tour helicopter in Hawaii clipped a drone. The incidents come just days after leading aviation-industry groups urged Congress to tighten regulations on hobbyist drones because of a video apparently showing one flying feet from an airliner near Las Vegas.

The FAA in a study based on computerized models last fall concluded that drones would cause more damage than birds of similar size because they contain metal parts. Significant damage to windshields, wings and tail surfaces of aircraft was possible, the study found.

The Academy of Model Aeronautics, which represents hobbyists, called on the FAA and local police to "hold these people accountable."

Cruz was member of marksmanship team

Associated Press

The troubled teen authorities say killed 17 people at a Florida high school excelled in an air-rifle marksmanship program supported by a grant from the National Rifle Association Foundation, part of a multimillion-dollar effort by the gun group to support youth shooting clubs and other programs.

Nikolas Cruz, 19, was wearing a maroon shirt with the logo from the Army Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps program at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School when he was arrested Wednesday shortly after the shooting. Former JROTC cadets said Cruz was a member of the small varsity marksmanship team that trained together after class and traveled to other area schools to compete.

It was a close-knit group. One of the other cadets started calling Cruz "Wolf," and the nickname stuck.

"He was a very good shot," said Aaron Diener, 20, who gave Cruz a ride to shooting competitions when they were part of the same four-member team in 2016. "He had an AR-15 he talked about, and pistols

he had shot. ... He would tell us, 'Oh, it was so fun to shoot this rifle' or 'It was so fun to shoot that.' It seemed almost therapeutic to him, the way he spoke about it."

The JROTC marksmanship program used air rifles special-made for target shooting, typically on indoor ranges at targets the size of a coin.

Records show that the Stoneman Douglas JROTC program received \$10,827 in noncash assistance from the NRA's fundraising and charitable arm in 2016, when Cruz was on the squad. The school's program publicly thanked the NRA Foundation on its Twitter feed.

A spokeswoman for the NRA declined to comment on Friday. The top officers of the foundation are all current or former executives of the NRA.

The more than 1,700 high school JROTC programs nationally also receive financial support from the U.S. military and are typically supervised by retired officers from the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines. The military collaborates with school systems on the training curriculum, which includes marching drills, athletic competitions and shooting teams.

Federal indictment details Russian effort to sway election

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A year before Donald Trump announced his presidential candidacy, two Russian operatives landed in the United States to lay groundwork for an intelligence operation targeting the legitimacy of the 2016 election.

What began as a Cold War-like attack by an old adversary would mix old-fashioned political agitation with 21st century social media tools that ultimately roiled the election and shook America's political landscape.

The indictment of 13 Russians by Special Counsel Robert Mueller on Friday revealed the now well-documented Russian social media campaign also relied on extensive intelligence work by operatives on U.S. soil. It began earlier than commonly believed, aiming to "sow discord" ahead of the 2016 election and later to boost Trump.

The indictment does not specifically tie the influence op-

eration to Russia's intelligence apparatus. Instead, it fingers a group of operatives working for a unit called the "organization," financed to the tune of millions of dollars by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a businessman dubbed "Putin's chef" because his restaurants have catered dinners for the Kremlin leader and foreign dignitaries.

The scheme outlined in the indictment began with fraudulent visa applications for U.S. travel.

Though some of the Russians were rejected, two operatives, Aleksandra Krylova and Anna Bogacheva, allegedly traveled as tourists through at least nine states over about two weeks in June 2014. They had developed "evacuation scenarios" in case their cover was blown.

Prosecutors say the operatives were gathering intelligence used to evaluate political targets on social media. The operation developed metrics on social media groups, measuring things like posting frequency and engagement.

Later, back in Russia, some of the operatives posed as U.S. citizens to contact political and social activists.

Social media accounts were established to lend credibility to their covert efforts. The Russian-based operatives posed as U.S. political activists from all corners. Later, goals were set and enforced by the group's leadership: undermine Hillary Clinton while boosting her primary opponent, Bernie Sanders, as well as Trump.

To obfuscate their efforts, the operatives, working in concert with the Internet Research Agency, a St. Petersburg-based troll farm, purchased server space in the U.S. Using virtual private networks they could conduct their social media interactions while appearing to be based in the U.S.

They also relied on identity theft, stealing and then using the social security numbers, home addresses and birthdates of real Americans without their knowledge, the indictment says.

Kurds say Turkey used gas in attack

Associated Press

BEIRUT — Six civilians suffered breathing difficulties and other symptoms indicative of poison gas inhalation after an attack launched by Turkey on the Kurdish-controlled enclave of Afrin, local doctors and Syria's state-run news agency reported Saturday.

Jiwan Mohammed, a doctor at Afrin's main hospital, said the facility was treating six people who had been poisoned who arrived Friday night from the village of Arandi after it was attacked by Turkish troops. Another doctor, Nouri Qenber, said the victims suffered shortness of breath, vomiting and skin rashes. One of the victims had dilated pupils, he said, quoting one of the rescuers. Both spoke to The Associated Press via messaging service.

State-run news agency SANA and the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group also quoted local doctors in their reports.

The claims could not be independently confirmed, and videos released from the hospital showed people being fitted with oxygen masks who did not otherwise show symptoms of gas attack inhalation such as twitching, foaming at the mouth or vomiting.

SANA on Saturday said Turkey fired several shells containing "toxic substances" on a village in Afrin on Friday night, causing six civilians to suffer suffocation symptoms.

The Turkish military repeated in a weekly statement published Saturday that it does not use internationally "banned ammunition" in its Afrin operation and said, "the Turkish Armed Forces does not keep such ammunition in its inventory."

The army also said it is careful to not harm civilians and only targets "terrorists" and their positions in the Afrin region.

Quake slams south, central Mexico

Associated Press

MEXICO CITY — A powerful magnitude-7.2 earthquake shook south and central Mexico on Friday, causing people to flee swaying buildings and office towers in the country's capital, where residents were still jittery after a deadly quake five months ago.

On Saturday, 13 people were killed and 15 were injured when a military helicopter carrying officials assessing damage from a powerful earthquake crashed in Oaxaca state. All of the dead and injured were on the ground.

The Oaxaca state prosecutor's office said in a statement that five women, four men and three children were killed at the crash site and another person died later at the hospital.

The helicopter was attempting to land on a vacant lot in the city of Jamiltepec, the Mexican army said.

In Mexico City, Maricarmen Trujillo was in the same place Friday on the eighth floor of an office building where she rode out a Sept. 19 earthquake that killed 228 people in the capital alone.

"I relived a lot of those moments," Trujillo said, still jittery. But this time an emergency app on her cellphone gave her a 30-second warning before things started to shake. She stayed in place, but felt more prepared.

Other people in Mexico City and southern Oaxaca state flooded the streets as the ground seethed, memories of collapsed buildings still fresh. A magnitude 8.2 quake on Sept. 7 killed nearly 100 people in Oaxaca and neighboring Chiapas.

In Mexico City, the wounds from the Sept. 19 quake still had not healed when Friday's earthquake struck.

Many buildings left uninhabitable are still awaiting demolition. People pass roped off cracked buildings and cleared lots on a daily basis.

The streets of Mexico City's Condesa neighborhood were flooded by residents fleeing their homes, including one woman wrapped just in a towel.

The U.S. Geological Survey originally put the magnitude of Friday's quake at 7.5 but later lowered it to 7.2. It said the epicenter was 33 miles northeast of Pinotepa. It had a depth of 15 miles.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

6 years for driver who hit kid with hammer

FL PENSACOLA — A former school bus driver in Florida has been sentenced to six years in prison for hitting a student with a hammer.

The Pensacola News Journal reported Jimmy Edwards, 56, was sentenced last week after pleading no contest to aggravated battery on a child, aggravated assault and child neglect. Prosecutors said Edwards must serve at least two years of the sentence, followed by four years of probation.

The Escambia County School Board voted to suspend and then fire Edwards in November 2016 after he struck a Camelot Academy student with a hammer and then left the student at an intersection.

Court records said Edwards attacked the student after the student called him an old man.

A 55-year-old woman who had been on the bus was given 50 hours of community service for not reporting the attack.

Warning of hepatitis exposure at restaurant

AR CORNING — State health officials said people who visited a Taco Bell restaurant in northeast Arkansas may have been exposed to hepatitis A after an employee tested positive for the virus.

The health department said the affected restaurant is in Corning, about 150 miles north-east of Little Rock. The department said anyone who ate food from that Taco Bell between Jan. 24 and Feb. 7 may have been exposed to the virus, which can cause fever, fatigue, nausea, abdominal pain and other symptoms.

The department said people who ate at the restaurant should talk to their doctor about get-

ting vaccinated or receiving an immune globulin treatment.

Video shows marine life at wind farm

MA BOSTON — Offshore wind proponents are touting new undersea footage suggesting a vibrant marine habitat is growing around the nation's first offshore wind farm.

The American Wind Energy Association posted a short video on YouTube last week from Deepwater Wind's five-turbine operation off Rhode Island.

The video shows mussels and fish clustered around the turbine bases, as well as positive testimonials from local recreational fishermen and charter boat owners.

Nancy Sopko, the association's director of offshore wind, said the video shows the potential for the fishing industry as wind projects are planned all along the East Coast.

But Seth Rolbein, of the Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance in Massachusetts, cautioned the footage does little to assuage commercial fishermen's concerns of encountering problems such as getting trawling gear damaged on undersea power cables.

Museum will depict glow-in-dark creatures

NY NEW YORK — Feel like you're in the dark when it comes to the underwater world?

New York's American Museum of Natural History is working on just the solution: a floor-to-ceiling installation depicting creatures that glow.

Photographers got a sneak peek Thursday as one of the centerpieces was installed for an exhibition called "Unseen Oceans."

The intersection of nature and art, dubbed "fishnado," displays hundreds of models of marine species that exhibit biofluorescence.

"Unseen Oceans" opens to the public in March.

911 caller reports prowler, finds sinkhole

FL THE VILLAGES — Several sinkholes opened up in a Florida retirement community, displacing seven people and evacuating some homes.

The Villages resident Doris Morrill said she heard a creaking noise at about 1 a.m. Thursday and suspected a prowler, so she called police. Several hours later, she heard another creaking noise and noticed a crack on the floor of her home. Then she noticed the hole opening up outside.

Emergency Management Director Preston Bowlin told the Ocala Star-Banner that five more sinkholes opened up since Morrill's call. Two homes were condemned, and two were evacuated.

Woman tries to take camera, throws poop

IN INDIANAPOLIS — Police said a woman trying to steal a video camera from an Indianapolis store escaped after throwing feces at a security worker.

Indianapolis police responded Tuesday to a Menards on the city's east side, and a loss prevention officer told them that he saw the shoplifting suspect remove the camera from its packaging and place it into a bag.

The officer told police that when he tried to stop the woman from leaving she reached into her pants, pulled out a handful of feces and threw it at him. He said the feces hit him in the

chest. Police say the woman ran out the door and escaped.

Police said the camera was recovered, and they're trying to identify the woman.

Police doubt ISIS flag was from terror group

UT SALT LAKE CITY — Authorities believe an Islamic State flag found on a flagpole outside a southern Utah high school wasn't put up by the terrorist group.

Hurricane Police said in a news release the flag was discovered Thursday morning along with graffiti on a school wall saying, "ISIS is comi." Police said an American flag was damaged and left at the scene.

The FBI analyzed an image of the ISIS flag and determined it doesn't believe the terrorist group was involved. An investigation is ongoing.

Classes went on as scheduled after police determined there was no danger.

Firefighters rescue 2 dogs from cliff

CA SAN FRANCISCO — It's usually cats in trees that need a firefighter's help but not Friday, when two dogs were rescued by San Francisco firefighters after sliding halfway down a cliff.

San Francisco Fire Department spokesman Lt. Jonathan Baxter said a Labrador and a beagle got stuck on a cliff at Fort Funston. A 14-member crew helped to rescue the pups.

But Baxter said it was firefighter paramedic Art Julaton who was lowered down to strap the dogs in a harness and carry them back up to firm land, where they wagged their tails in gratitude.

From wire reports

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Women's super-G has unlikely winner

Associated Press

JEONGSEON, South Korea — This made no sense to Ester Ledecka. Just simply couldn't be. Could. Not. Be.

Which is why the part-time ski racer, part-time snowboarder from the Czech Republic stood so still, absolutely motionless and expressionless, for several moments after crossing the finish line in the Olympic super-G and seeing the numbers on a video board that appeared to show she was fast enough to be the gold medalist. Not merely any gold medalist, but one of the most unconventional and out-of-nowhere gold medalists in Alpine history.

This, the 22-year-old Ledecka would explain later, was what went through her mind at that moment: "Is this a kind of mistake?"

Then came this: "OK, they're going to change the time. I'm going to wait for a little bit, and you're going to switch and [add] some more seconds."

That never happened. This was no mistake. This was real. Her posted time of 1 minute, 21.11 seconds was, indeed, accurate. It was, indeed, 0.01 seconds — yes,

one one-hundredth of a second — better than Austria's Anna Veith, the defending Olympic champion and, as the leader until the moment when the relatively unknown and low-ranked Ledecka took her turn as the 26th woman down the slope, the presumed repeat Olympic champion.

Instead, it was Ledecka who collected the prized medal. This is someone who has participated in only 19 World Cup skiing races in her entire career — Mikaela Shiffrin, in contrast, has been in 23 this season alone — and only once finished as high as seventh. Someone who is a far more accomplished snowboarder, owning a world championship in the parallel giant slalom, an event she plans to enter next week, an unprecedented achievement.

"She's not a medal favorite. She just wanted to come here and be the first person ever to ski and snowboard race," said Justin Reiter, who competed for the U.S. at the Sochi Olympics in snowboarding and now is Ledecka's coach for that sport. "She stayed in her heart and she stayed in her own head and she skied like she can ski and it was beautiful to watch."

Everything about this was remarkable. Or maybe that doesn't even come close to capturing it. So pick another word. Extraordinary. Astonishing. Unbelievable. It was all of those things, and more, to Ledecka herself. To the rest of the field, which included superstar Lindsey Vonn of the U.S. and other past medalists such as Lara Gut of Switzerland and Federica Brignone of Italy. To everyone.

"Definitely shocking," said Vonn, who tied for sixth. "That's why it's so difficult to win at the Olympics. Because literally anything can happen."

Sure seemed to this time.

Now comes a decision for Ledecka. The Alpine downhill is Wednesday and requires serious training runs down the mountain beforehand. Qualifying for her snowboard event is Thursday.

So which should she focus on?

"I'm sure that my ski coach will be a little bit pushy on downhill," Ledecka said. "But my snowboard coach wants me on snowboard."

Chen dazzles with six quads but no medals for US

Associated Press

GANGNEUNG, South Korea — Three spots in the top 10. A victory in the free skate.

Sounds like a pretty good Olympics for the U.S. men.

It was, sort of.

Two-time American champion Nathan Chen had designs on a medal, preferably gold, when he headed to South Korea. When the pressure and expectations got to him in the short program — he wound up 17th and was fortunate to be that high — a shot at the podium was gone.

But the 18-year-old quad king hit an unprecedented six of the four-revolution jumps Saturday to win the free skate and soar into fifth place.

Just one place behind was teammate Vincent Zhou, another jumping jack at age 17. Zhou did five quads.

And when veteran Adam Rippon, in possibly his last competitive performance, put down a mesmerizing artistic display to grab 10th overall — without a

quad — the United States stood pretty tall, if minus a medal.

"I definitely did want to redeem myself after the two short programs," Chen said, also mentioning his weak performance in the team event, in which the U.S. still managed bronze. "And I definitely did that here. Honestly I am human, I make mistakes. Unfortunately it happened at a really bad time."

Best of all, perhaps, is that Chen and Zhou have set a high bar for competitors to match or leap over. If Chen is the quad king, then Zhou is his prince.

"I was asked about the 2022 Olympics in Beijing and I said, 'It's prime time, baby,'" Zhou said.

Changes might be coming in the sport, including restricting the number of jumps a competitor can stuff into a program. But Chen and Zhou are capable of stretching the parameters on the ice regardless of the rules.

Both are young enough to stick around and improve in the next four years. There was

some thought Chen would stop competing had he won at the Olympics, but it now seems unlikely he will leave when there is so much more he is capable of achieving.

This season, in which Chen also won the Grand Prix Final, his presentation improved immensely. Sure, there is plenty of work to do in that category, but that's usually true of skaters who focus so deeply on jumping.

And Zhou has only touched the limits of his skills.

"It's really, really difficult to put it into words. It's been such a wild ride over my short 17 years," he said. "I've been through so much, it would take me hours to say it all. But to skate like that, to have a successful performance, means so much to me."

He said he will skip the closing ceremony and soon begin training for next month's world championships. It's a grind, but one he has embraced.

"I see my family maybe twice a year," Zhou said. "I spent time

training in places hundreds, thousands of miles from my home, living in apartments that did not have very good conditions. I've been injured, tore my meniscus in my right knee, almost quit skating before. So for this to happen, for everything to come to those 4 minutes and 40 seconds on the ice, to put out such an amazing long program, that's why I was so emotional at the end."

Rippon always is emotional. And classy. And fun.

He will make quite an impression in skating shows if he is done competing.

"I have no idea," he said of the future. "I think first I need a five-minute break, a really stiff drink, and then maybe like a day or two off the ice — at least to dry out my costumes — and then we'll see."

"No matter what, to come away from this Olympic Games and to have skated like this and gone out there every single time, it's just so awesome. It's awesome."

Men's hockey

Russians blank US; Canada loses

Associated Press

GANGNEUNG, South Korea — Ilya Kovalchuk scored two back-breaking goals as the Russians outplayed, outhit and outclassed the United States in a convincing 4-0 shutout Saturday night as each team wrapped up pool play at the Olympics.

With the loss, the United States now must play in the qualification round Tuesday. The Russians finished first in Group B and earned a bye into the quarterfinals on Wednesday.

U.S. goaltender Ryan Zapsolski allowed four goals on 26 shots, including Kovalchuk's goals less than 33 seconds apart at the end of the second period and start of the third. Los Angeles Kings 2012 draft pick Nikolai Prokhorin scored the Russians' first two goals in a dominant performance that U.S. coach Tony Granato and players didn't think was as lopsided as the score.

"I thought we played well enough to deserve better than a 4-0 game," Granato said. "I was really happy with the effort and the confidence that we gained in knowing that we could play with them. We just didn't get the results."

The U.S. rarely generated the kind of quality scoring chances against Vasily Koshechkin that the Russians did around Zapsolski, who played all three preliminary-round games. Koshechkin stopped all 29 shots he faced for his first shutout of the tournament.

This night lacked the tense political subtext of the Cold War from their 1980 meeting and the pomp and circumstance of Russian President

Vladimir Putin attending and the pressure on the home team in Sochi in 2014, but it had the same kind of in-arena atmosphere. U.S. and Russian fans filled Gangneung Hockey Centre and went back and forth with "U-S-A" and the "ROSS-I-YA" chants.

There was at least one disagreement in the stands between those fans and plenty more on the ice. Pushing and shoving followed countless whistles, and at one point U.S. forward Jordan Greenway and Prokhorin got tangled up and came as close to a fight as players can without dropping the gloves.

In a tournament full of mistakes, the U.S. made a couple to allow the Russians to take the lead 7:21 in. Alexander Barbanov had all the time in the world behind the net and dished the puck to KHL star Sergei Mozyakin, who found Prokhorin free and clear in front for the deflection goal.

Czech Republic 3, Canada 2 (SO): The Czech Republic rallied twice to hand the Canadians their first Olympic loss in eight years, riding goaltender Pavel Francouz to a shootout win.

Canada had won 11 consecutive games at the Olympics — the first 10 with NHL players — dating to a loss to the United States in pool play in Vancouver in 2010. Canada opened these games with a comfortable 5-1 win over the Swiss that confirmed its status as one of the favorites in the tournament.

Still, Russia, the United States and now Canada have all lost in the preliminary round.

NHL roundup

Bishop stops 27 as Blues hold off Stars

Associated Press

DALLAS — With his team getting nearly doubled up on shots, Ben Bishop stopped nearly every one that came his way.

Bishop stopped 27 shots and the Dallas Stars held on to beat St. Louis 2-1 on Friday night, moving past the Blues into third place in the Central Division.

"The goalie was the best player in the game for either team," Dallas coach Ken Hitchcock said. "This was a playoff hockey game, two teams that were desperate. This is as well as anybody's played against us for a long time."

Mattias Janmark and Stephen Johns scored for Dallas, which had a season-low 16 shots on goal while winning for the sixth time in seven games. The Stars, who had not been this high in the standings since Nov. 5, are tied with the Blues with 72 points, but have two games in hand.

Islanders 3, Hurricanes 0: Thomas Greiss stopped 45 shots for his first shutout of the season, and visiting New York beat Carolina.

Johnny Boychuk, Anthony Beauvillier and John Tavares scored to help the Islanders move past the Hurricanes into the second wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference. Greiss got his eighth career shutout.

Cam Ward finished with 20 saves for the Hurricanes. They lost their second straight and fell into a tie with Columbus, a point behind the Islanders for the conference's last playoff spot.

Jets 6, Avalanche 1: Blake Wheeler had two goals and an assist and Mark Scheifele had three assists in host Winnipeg's victory over Colorado.

Flyers 2, Blue Jackets 1 (OT): Sean Couturier scored 1:52 into overtime and Philadelphia ended an 11-game losing streak at Columbus.

Speedskating

Krueger ends US drought with silver

Associated Press

GANGNEUNG, South Korea — Samuel Girard yelled and signaled No. 1 with both index fingers as he crossed the finish line first. Just behind him, John-Henry Krueger spread his arms in a can-you-believe-it gesture.

The Canadian and the American claimed gold and silver in the men's 1,000-meter short track Saturday, upsetting the powerful South Koreans.

Girard and Krueger raced to celebrate with their coaches on the sideline. Krueger sank to his knees on the ice, head in hands, still stunned at winning the first U.S. speedskat-

ing medal of the Pyeongchang Olympics.

"There were so many thoughts rushing through my head," Krueger said.

World champion Seo Yira of the host nation earned bronze.

Seo and teammate Lim Hyojun, who earlier won the 1,500, were taken out in the turn approaching the last lap by Liu Shaolin Sandor of Hungary. Seo got up and kept going, but he was too far behind to catch the leaders. Girard and Krueger sprinted to the finish, with the Canadian keeping his lead.

"There is just too much traffic and stuff that can go down if you stay in the back, so we

both stayed up in the front and it paid off for both of us," Krueger said.

In the women's 1,500 final, Choi Min-jeong won the host nation's second short-track gold in front of President Moon Jae-in.

"It was the biggest dream of mine for four years. I can't put it into words. I am so proud of it," Choi said. "Physically I am so burned out, but inside I am so happy, so proud of my whole country."

Li Jinyu of China took silver and Kim Boutin of Canada earned bronze to go with her same colored medal in the 500.

Hield, Bogdanovic lead World

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Buddy Hield and Bogdan Bogdanovic got the All-Star weekend off to a running start in the World's latest victory over the NBA's young Americans.

Hield scored 29 points with five three-pointers, and his Sacramento Kings teammate won the MVP award with 26 points and seven three-pointers in the World team's 155-124 victory over the U.S. team in the Rising Stars Challenge on Friday night.

The annual showcase of the NBA's top rookies and second-year players again served as the opening to the three-day All-Star festivities, which are being held in Los Angeles for the record sixth time.

But this show was headlined by two shooting stars from the upstate rivals of the hometown Lakers and Clippers, with Hield and Bogdanovic combining to hit 12 of the World's 23 three-pointers. The World has won this All-Star showcase four consecutive times.

"You know, it was (an) All-Star Game, so it wasn't like a really competitive game," Hield said. "But the World has been getting better. I'm proud to see a lot of guys around the world from France, Australia, you have (Joel) Embiid from Cameroon. Everybody is showing progress, and the world is showing progress catching up to American basketball. This shows how hard we've been working and how dedicated we are

to this game."

Indeed, the 10-man American team struggled to keep up with the 10-man team representing everywhere else, from Canada to Croatia to Cameroon. Eight of the World's 10 players hit double figures, including 21 from Denver's Jamal Murray, the Canadian MVP of this game last season with 36 points.

Boston's Jaylen Brown led the U.S. with 35 points and 10 rebounds. Kyle Kuzma, the hometown Lakers' promising rookie, added 20.

Philadelphia's Ben Simmons also was sharp in his rookie debut in the game, with the Aussie No. 1 pick contributing 11 points, 13 assists, six rebounds and four steals while catalyzing the World's offense. His 76ers teammate, Croatia's Dario Saric, also hit four three-pointers.

Hield, who is from the Bahamas, will be sorry to see the end of his eligibility for this game, in which he scored 28 points last season in New Orleans as a rookie with the Pelicans. The sweet-shooting Kings guard hit five three-pointers.

Bogdanovic, from Serbia, was even better from long range, going 7-for-13 on three-pointers and even adding six assists to earn MVP honors.

"I approach every single game the same way," Bogdanovic said. "Try to compete to be the best version of myself that day, and it just happened tonight. You never know when it's going to happen."

Bonnies top No. 16 Rams

Associated Press

OLEAN, N.Y. — Standing alone with the ball under the basket, St. Bonaventure forward LaDarien Griffin had only one thought come to mind.

"Don't miss," Griffin said of his dunk with 21.5 seconds remaining that provided the go-ahead points in the Bonnies 77-74 win over Rhode Island, and snapped the 16th-ranked Rams' 16-game winning streak on Friday night.

Griffin, actually, didn't miss much on either end of the court in a thrilling back-and-forth game in which neither team led by more than six points.

Aside from scoring eight of his 14 points in the final 5:24, the junior forward also got his hand up to alter Jared Terrell's potential game-tying basket with 4.8 seconds left. Griffin, who added eight rebounds and three blocks, even kept playing after losing his shoe.

"He didn't tie it tight enough," coach Mark Schmidt said with a laugh, referring to Griffin losing his shoe while running up the court with about three minutes left and then throwing the shoe off to the sideline.

"I don't know," Griffin said, sheepishly. "I just ran down the floor and threw it out of bounds."

Matt Mobley made up for Jaylen Adams' offensive struggles by scoring 26 points. Adams hit just two of 12 attempts for 10 points.

The Bonnies (20-6, 10-4 Atlantic 10 Conference) won their eighth straight. St. Bonaventure also reached the 20-win plateau for a third consecutive season.

The Rams (21-4, 13-1) had the nation's longest winning streak snapped in losing for the first time since a 68-64 decision at Alabama on Dec. 6. The loss also snapped Rhode Island's 21-game winning streak in conference play.

Terrell led the Rams with 23 points. E.C. Matthews scored all of his 14 points in the second half, playing three days after hurting his left knee in an 85-67 win over Richmond.

"I think their grittiness kind

Stars descend on LA for NBA showcase

Associated Press

The stars will be out in Los Angeles, on the basketball court and all around it.

The NBA's All-Star festivities are back at Staples Center, with the usual events on All-Star Saturday night and a new format for the game Sunday.

Captains LeBron James and Stephen Curry drafted players from the pool of All-Stars and the winning team gets a \$350,000 donation from the NBA to the charity it chose. The league is hoping the new format that replaced the traditional East-West matchup will make it more competitive after a couple of lackluster games the previous two years.

Perhaps the players can heed the words of 18-time All-Star Kobe Bryant, who won the MVP award on his home floor when the All-Star Game was last in Los Angeles in 2011.

"I feel like we have a sense

of responsibility and we are voted in for what we do during the season, which is play hard," Bryant said following that game. "And we come here, that's what the fans want to see. They want to see us go at it and see us compete and that's what I try to do and that's what I try to tell my teammates to do."

Bryant is gone now but Beyonce and Jay-Z, Jack Nicholson and Justin Bieber are among the celebrities who attended that game and were scheduled to be back for at least some of this weekend.

Some things to watch as Los Angeles hosts the All-Star Game for a record sixth time:

LeBron in L.A.: James refuses to discuss his free agency during the season, but figure on it coming up in Los Angeles since there's been such speculation about him signing with the Lakers. The Lakers, after a trade with James' Cavaliers

last week, would have enough salary cap space to offer a maximum contract to James and another star if he opts to become a free agent and leave Cleveland this summer.

Homecoming kings: The Los Angeles area is home to a number of All-Stars, including 2017 MVP Russell Westbrook of Oklahoma City and runner-up James Harden, along with Oklahoma City's Paul George and Toronto's DeMar DeRozan.

Sidelined stars: James' team will look much different than the one he drafted after a number of injuries. DeMarcus Cousins, Kevin Love, John Wall and Kristaps Porzingis all were forced to pull out. George, Andre Drummond, Goran Dragic and Kemba Walker were added as injury replacements by Commissioner Adam Silver.