

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Navy considers building flood wall in DC

Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — The Navy is considering building a 14-foot flood wall around the Washington Navy Yard to protect the historic complex along the Anacostia River from rising sea levels, internal Department of Defense documents show.

Military engineers proposed the wall in a study, obtained through a public-records request, that describes a structure as long as 1.5 miles to protect three dozen buildings at a cost of as much as \$20 million. It's the latest example of a federal agency getting ready for climate change despite the Trump administration's public dismissal of the threat.

The department has been considering a wall at the sprawling complex — which sits on a revitalized waterfront in the nation's capital — since at least

September 2016. That's when it invited Andrew Lewis, a historic preservation specialist with the District of Columbia's planning office, to visit the Navy Yard and discuss the idea. Lewis said he told officials that his office generally preferred to avoid building in front of historic structures.

"It's likely that something like that would have an adverse effect," Lewis said in a phone interview Thursday. He said that whether the city would oppose the project would depend on the specifics, such as the material used for the wall, its exact route and what steps the department took to respond to concerns.

Established in 1799 as a ship-building facility and port, the Navy Yard is the service's oldest installation. It was later used for making ordnance, before getting turned into an administrative center after World War II. It now houses the chief of Naval

Operations, the Navy's highest-ranking officer, as well as the Naval Facilities Engineering Command, the Judge Advocate General and the Navy Inspector General.

In January, the Defense Department released a list of military installations around the country that were threatened by the effects of climate change. The Washington Navy Yard was one of 19 the Navy identified as being at risk of recurrent flooding. Others include facilities in Key West, Fla., San Diego, Pearl Harbor and Guam.

"The Navy's been at the forefront of paying attention to these issues, and that's as it should be," said John Conger, who was assistant secretary of defense for energy, installations and environment under President Barack Obama and now directs the Center for Climate & Security. Compared with the climate risk facing other branches of the

military, he said, "the Navy's got the biggest problem."

The Navy has been public about the threats it faces from climate change. In 2017, the facilities command published a "handbook" for climate change resilience and adaptation, instructing Navy planners to "identify and assess adaptation action alternatives to manage potential impacts to current and planned infrastructure."

The wall proposal also demonstrates the threat that climate change poses to Washington itself and the difficulty of responding to that challenge. The Navy Yard is less than 2 miles southeast of the U.S. Capitol and just east of the stadium where the Washington Nationals play. The area is also home to new condominiums and office buildings, along with high-end shops and restaurants.

Deal with Taliban could curb rights of Afghan women

The Washington Post

After six days of negotiations in Qatar, U.S. and Taliban officials last month announced they were one step closer to an agreement that might finally end the American war in Afghanistan.

The two sides agreed only to the broad outlines of a peace deal, and it remains unclear whether the Taliban will agree to negotiate directly with the Afghan government. Still, the announcement was hailed as a rare sign of diplomatic progress after more than 17 years of fighting.

But some Afghan women fear an American withdrawal will mean a reversion to an Afghanistan in which they had

virtually no rights.

"If they come back, we wouldn't be able to walk outside at all," Shahlah Darwish told The Washington Post's Pamela Constable in Kabul, recalling how women could not study, hold jobs or even leave their homes without wearing a burqa under Taliban rule.

Women's rights have advanced significantly in Afghanistan since the Taliban fell in 2001, particularly in urban areas. Women's equality was enshrined in the constitution, education and employment were made more accessible and women began to serve in government. They also were given increased access to technology, granting them more independence.

Given the progress made, some Afghan officials say it is impossible for the country to backslide.

"I don't believe Afghanistan could fall back. We are a changed nation," Roya Rahmani, the Afghan ambassador to the United States, told NPR. Rahmani is the first woman to serve in the role.

"If I am at the table like many other women, I will be representing half of my population," she said, adding that "no deal would be acceptable if it ignores half of our population."

But there are plenty of reasons for pessimism. While the situation has improved in Afghan cities, many other parts of the country still hold to cultural norms that deem women

second-class citizens. Afghanistan remains one of the worst places in the world for girls to receive an education.

And while the United States has served as an advocate for women in Afghanistan in the past, it is not clear whether that is still the case.

During the Obama administration, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said any peace deal with the Taliban "can't come at the cost of women and women's lives." But the Trump administration has tended to gloss over human rights abuses by other countries, and experts are concerned women's rights may be discarded if it means ending the war.

Pokemon helps vet with TBI fight back

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

A stroke robbed Zach Brooks of his memory, fine-motor skills and even parts of his identity as a soldier, but the father of two is rebounding, partly with help from a world of flaming lizards, electrified rodents and flowering dinosaurs.

While deployed to Kuwait with the North Carolina Army National Guard as an intelligence officer in 2016, Brooks was in a car heading back to base after a run in the desert when a bus T-boned the vehicle, said Lt. Col. Brian Grey, his boss at the time. Brooks' lungs had collapsed and veins in his skull burst, bleeding into his brain and causing a traumatic brain injury.

After being airlifted to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, he suffered weeks of post-traumatic amnesia, unable to remember who he was, what had happened or how to do everyday tasks. While recovering in a hospital bed, he played games to help remap his brain, eventually turning to the popular Pokemon video games featuring animal-like creatures with unusual powers.

"The main things in regrowing brain tissue [are] reading, hand-eye coordination and problem-solving," said Brooks, 32. "Games have all of these."

With some 380,000 troops diagnosed with TBI in the past

18 years, both the Pentagon and Veterans Administration have invested heavily in research to help diagnose and treat such injuries, which can be debilitating. The Army awarded a handful of small businesses more than \$4 million in contracts to research and develop possible video game therapies for TBI between 2009 and 2015.

Rehab can be costly and time-consuming, requiring TBI patients to put in lots of tedious practice, said one of those companies, Southern California-based Blue Marble Rehab, in its proposal to develop a game it hoped would lower costs, improve access and make training more fun, thus increasing time spent on rehabilitation.

Researchers in the U.S. and abroad have found some evidence video games may help by improving TBI-sufferers' independence and ability to perform daily tasks or boosting their attention and cognition.

Brooks needed help with his memory, concentration and more.

"When you have a TBI, you lose your executive function, your planning and execution of whatever you're doing," said his wife, Elaine Brooks.

The first time he showered after the accident, he just stared at the washcloth and a bar of soap he held in each hand, he recalled. His mother had to ex-

plain how to wash and dry off.

Both his mom and wife dedicated themselves to his recovery, rotating every two weeks between home in North Carolina and the hospital in Bethesda, Md. His wife eventually quit her job as a nurse to care for him full-time as he battled the stroke's effects.

His mom began playing card games like "Rummy" and "Phase 10" with him because they didn't need more space than a hospital tray and it forced him to focus and keep score. Early on he struggled, but the more they played, the better he got.

He went from "thinking in the moment" to looking ahead and considering the ramifications of a possible play, said his mom. After a few months, he seemed more like himself, and though he still struggled with some tasks, he adapted.

"I pretty much had to look at things and say, 'OK brain, you can't do this anymore, but you can come up with a new way,'" Zach Brooks said.

After nearly two years at Walter Reed, he was discharged and medically retired as a captain in February 2018. Not being able to return to duty hit him hard, his wife said.

He had to come to terms with the loss of his identity as an officer who could once run 30 miles. He went through all five

stages of grief, she said.

"With a TBI, you're not going to be the exact same person you were before," Elaine Brooks said. "That's probably the hardest thing to accept."

Despite occupational therapy, he still has trouble with mood swings and learning new things, he said. He also has lingering physical effects, such as weakness and a lack of coordination on his right side.

That meant his brain and fingers weren't as fast as before when he'd competed in "Halo" and "Super Smash Bros." video game tournaments — lightning-fast contests requiring quick reflexes and manual dexterity.

So he turned to Pokemon.

Competitive Pokemon doesn't require speed, but it does demand concentration and strategy: Think chess, but with electric yellow mice fighting frog ninjas.

Recent generations of the game are much more complicated than the series' first installment, which Nintendo debuted in 1996. It now has more than 800 different creatures, each with four possible moves and a dozen rated traits affecting gameplay.

"It's like intel," Zach Brooks said. "You have to look at [your] assets, look at your opponent's assets, determine your opponent's main course of action, then execute."

Following US lead, Russia abandons nuclear arms pact

Associated Press

Following in the footsteps of the U.S., Russia will abandon a centerpiece nuclear arms treaty but will deploy intermediate-range nuclear missiles only if Washington does so, President Vladimir Putin said Saturday.

President Donald Trump accused Moscow on Friday of violating the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty with "impunity" by deploying banned missiles. Trump said in a statement that the U.S. will

"move forward" with developing its own military response options to Russia's deployment of banned cruise missiles that could target Western Europe.

Moscow has strongly denied any breaches and accused Washington of making false accusations in order to justify its pullout.

The collapse of the INF Treaty has raised fears of a repeat of a Cold War showdown in the 1980s, when the U.S. and the Soviet Union both deployed

intermediate-range missiles on the continent. Such weapons were seen as particularly destabilizing as they take only a few minutes to reach their targets, leaving no time for decision-makers and raising the likelihood of a global nuclear conflict over a false launch warning.

After the U.S. gave notice of its intention to withdraw from the treaty in six months, Putin said Russia would do the same. He ordered the development of

new land-based, intermediate-range weapons but emphasized that Russia won't deploy them in the European part of the country or elsewhere unless the U.S. does so.

"We will respond quid pro quo," Putin said. "Our American partners have announced they were suspending their participation in the treaty and will do the same. They have announced they will conduct research and development, and we will act accordingly."

Trump changes his reason Mattis left

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Five weeks after the departure of Jim Mattis as defense secretary, President Donald Trump's explanation for how he came to leave the job has continued to shift, as he seeks to marginalize the former Pentagon chief's influence in his administration.

Trump's latest comments about Mattis came Thursday as he claimed in an interview with The New York Times that Mattis submitted a letter of resignation on Dec. 20 "because I said, 'You're not my choice.'" That marks a departure from weeks of Trump administration officials saying Mattis' resignation was a surprise and that he submitted the letter after a series of policy disagreements culminating with Trump's abrupt order to remove all U.S. troops from Syria.

Asked if he had any thoughts about his plans for the defense secretary position, Trump began by relitigating the circumstances of Mattis' departure.

"So I wasn't happy with Mattis," Trump said, according to an interview transcript. "I told

Mattis to give me a letter. He didn't just give me that letter. I told him."

Trump pointed out that he previously had called Mattis "sort of a Democrat" in an October interview with "60 Minutes."

"I didn't like the job he was doing," Trump told the Times. I wasn't happy with it. I wasn't happy with the — I got him more money than the military has ever seen before. And I wasn't happy with the job that he was doing at all. And I said it's time."

In the moments after Mattis first resigned, Trump tweeted that the defense secretary would be "retiring, with distinction," and added that "tremendous progress has been made" at the Pentagon during Mattis' nearly two-year term as defense secretary. On Jan. 2, Trump said he "essentially fired" Mattis, overlooking the resignation letter in his comments.

Trump said Thursday in his interview with the Times that "I have a lot of great people that want" the defense secretary job, though he has nominated no one for the position.

Va. governor loses key support over racist photo

Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. — Virtually every Virginia Democratic official and other key allies urged Gov. Ralph Northam to resign after a 35-year-old racist photo surfaced Friday.

The Virginia Legislative Black Caucus, the state House Democratic Caucus and the state Senate Democratic Caucus all called on Northam to resign late Friday, along with several key progressive groups that have been some of the governor's closest political allies.

Their calls for Northam to step down came in a wave after the Democrat apologized for appearing in a photo in which one person is dressed in blackface and another is wearing a full Ku Klux Klan uniform. The photo appeared in his 1984 medical school yearbook.

However, on Saturday, a Virginia Democrat who had spoken with Northam told The Associated Press that the governor no longer believed he was in the photo and has no immediate plans to resign.

The official was not authorized to speak on the record to detail a private conversation. The official told the AP that Northam planned to address the issue with the public later Saturday afternoon.

The yearbook images were first published Friday afternoon by the conservative news outlet Big League Politics. The Virginian-Pilot later obtained a copy from Eastern Virginia Medical School, which Northam attended. The photo shows two people looking at the camera — one in blackface wearing a hat, bow tie and plaid pants; the other in a full Ku Klux Klan robe.

In his first apology, issued in a written statement, Northam called the costume he wore "clearly racist and offensive," but he didn't say which one he had worn.

He later issued a video statement saying he was "deeply sorry" but still committed to serving the "remainder of my term."

"I accept responsibility for my past actions and I am ready to do the hard work of regaining your trust," Northam said.

But Northam appears to have virtually no path forward to remain in office without any institutional support. His departure would mean current Lt. Gov. Justin Fairfax, a Democrat who is only the second African-American to win statewide office in Virginia, would be the next governor. Northam's term was set to end in 2022.

Trump to stress unity in his State of the Union speech

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump heads into his State of the Union address dogged by bruising midterm losses and sinking poll numbers, wounded by a blistering standoff with Democrats. But for the stately speech, he plans to embrace unity — at least for the night.

"Choosing Greatness" is the official White House theme.

Addressing the nation at the weakest point of his presidency, Trump will seek to use the ceremonial moment to pitch a

unifying vision and reset relations with Democrats. The prime-time presidential set-piece Tuesday night comes amid a bitter border wall fight that nearly derailed the speech altogether, but Trump is not expected to dwell on the rancor.

"I really think it's going to be a speech that's going to cover a lot of territory, but part of it's going to be unity," Trump told reporters last week.

While Trump may strive for a unifying tone for the evening, harsh rhetoric has been a constant of his presidency. Previous efforts by Trump to shift

gears have been short-lived and have struck many as disingenuous, given the ferocity with which he often takes on Democrats. Even on Friday, Trump was going after House Speaker Nancy Pelosi by name, calling her clueless and her ideas dangerous.

In his speech, Trump is expected to highlight rare bipartisan accomplishments from last year and push Democrats to work with him on issues of potential agreement, such as infrastructure, drug prices and vocational training. Still, his recent struggles will be on full

display as he addresses a room packed with Democrats and with Pelosi sitting right behind him.

Trump, who loves to build suspense, has teased that he could drop a big announcement in his speech, suggesting Friday he might make news on his threat to declare a national emergency to circumvent Congress in his quest to build his long-promised border wall.

A senior administration official said Trump will focus on five main areas: immigration, trade, infrastructure, drug pricing and national security.

Cold's human toll: Over two dozen dead

Associated Press

CHICAGO — The dangerous cold and heavy snow that hobbled the northern U.S. last week has retreated, but not before exacting a human toll: more than two dozen weather-related deaths in eight states and hundreds of injuries, including frostbite, broken bones, heart attacks and carbon monoxide poisoning.

In Illinois alone, hospitals reported more than 220 cases of frostbite and hypothermia since Tuesday, when the polar vortex moved in and overnight temperatures plunged to minus 30 or lower — with wind chills of minus 50 or worse in some areas.

Hennepin Healthcare in Minneapolis normally sees around 30 frostbite patients in an entire winter. It admitted 18 in the

past week, spokeswoman Christine Hill said Friday.

"I definitely saw more frostbite than I've ever seen in my entire career just in the last three days," said Dr. Andrea Rowland-Fischer, an emergency department physician at Hennepin Healthcare.

Most of those patients, she said, had underlying problems that made it difficult for them to take care of themselves: the developmentally delayed, the mentally ill, the very young and the very old. They also included people with injuries related to drugs and alcohol — people who passed out or did not realize they were cold or injured.

"It's heartbreaking when there are people who can't take care of themselves and get exposed, just because they either es-

cape from the care that they're being given or because they're not being supervised."

Others got frostbite on their way to work after being exposed to the cold for a short time, often on their hands, feet, ears and face. That included people whose cars would not start or who got stuck outside for other reasons, as well as those who just did not think they could get frostbitten so quickly and went outside without gloves or other protective gear.

Several required "maximal treatment," admission to the hospital's burn unit for therapies that include drugs to restore circulation to try to avoid amputations. Some of them will probably still require amputations, a decision usually made by burn doctors four to 10 days after the injury.

Recount begins in Ky. House seat won by one vote

Associated Press

OWENSBORO, Ky. — At Cravens Elementary School on Election Day, someone voted for both the Democrat and the Republican candidate on a paper ballot in a Kentucky state House election.

The voting machine asked if the person wanted to discard that ballot and fill out another one. But for reasons unknown, the voter declined, casting the ballot knowing it would not be counted in House District 13 — a race Democrat Jim Glenn would win by a single vote.

That ballot could be important in a recount that began Saturday. Kentucky does not have automatic recounts for legislative races. But in a rare move, the Republican-controlled legislature ordered a recount after the GOP candidate, DJ Johnson,

asked for one.

Daviess County election officials cracked open the voting machines on Saturday and counted those paper ballots by hand. They will examine each ballot, including that overvote at Cravens Elementary School. If they can determine the voter's intent, that ballot could be counted.

"That would be the precinct I would look at that would possibly have a difference in it," said Richard House, chief deputy clerk for the Daviess County Clerk's office.

Election recounts are rare, and it's even rarer for a recount to change the outcome of an election. But of the at least 80 recounts nationwide following the 2018 elections, a total of 382 votes changed, according to research by Johnson's legal team. That's an average of 4.8 votes per race, more than

enough to change the outcome in Kentucky's House District 13.

Of those 80 recounts, five were decided by one-vote margins, and two of those recounts resulted in ties. In Fairmont, W.Va., officials chose the winner of a city council seat by flipping buttons in a coffee can.

The recount in Kentucky House District 13 is different than most. Local election officials declared Glenn the winner, and the Kentucky State Board of Elections certified the results. Glenn took his seat in the legislature on Jan. 8. He has an office, staff and has been assigned to committees.

But Kentucky state law allows candidates to contest elections to the full House of Representatives. The House did not convene for its regular session until Jan. 8, more than a month after the election ended.

CDC: Hedgehogs might be carrying salmonella germs

The Washington Post

Quite a bit of news dropped on Friday, so you may have missed a hedgehog-related alert that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued early that afternoon.

Those tiny, prickly, adorable mammals — which have jumped in popularity as household pets in recent years — may be carrying salmonella germs and spreading them to nearby humans, according to the CDC.

"CDC and public health officials in several states are investigating a multistate outbreak of salmonella infections linked to contact with pet hedgehogs," the agency's notice read.

As of Friday, the CDC said there had been 11 people in eight states sickened by a strain of salmonella typhimurium; in 10 of the 11 cases, "ill people reported contact with a hedgehog," the agency said.

Though one person was hospitalized, no deaths have been reported. Three of the cases were reported in Missouri, two in Minnesota and one each in Colorado, Maine, Mississippi, Nebraska, Texas and Wyoming.

Researchers collected samples from hedgehogs in the two Minnesota patients' homes and identified the strain of salmonella that was making people sick. It's still unclear if all or some of the pet hedgehogs

came from "a common supplier," the CDC said.

Symptoms of a salmonella infection include diarrhea, fever and stomach cramps lasting four to seven days. In rare cases, a salmonella infection can lead to death — a dire enough risk that the CDC gently suggested certain households "might consider a different pet."

However, for those who could never part with little "Spike," "Sonic" or "S," the agency has recommended avoiding certain direct contact with their hedgehogs: That is, not nuzzling them or propping them up to your face for the perfect Instagram photo.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police seek man after clash at hot dog stand

CA LOS ANGELES — Los Angeles police said they're looking for a man who punched two women in a clash at a hot dog stand.

In a video that the Los Angeles Police Department posted Tuesday on Twitter, the man is shown throwing one of the women to the ground in the downtown area on Jan. 26, then punching the second as she approaches. He punches the first woman as she stands and hits the second again as she appears to be standing still, knocking her down. He punches the first woman once again as she winds up to hit him, also knocking her down.

Woman accused of pouring water on baby

SC SUMTER — Authorities said a South Carolina woman has been arrested after a video she posted on social media showed her pouring water on her sleeping 9-month-old daughter as "payback."

News outlets reported that the Sumter County Sheriff's Office said Caitlyn Alyse Hardy, 33, was charged with cruelty to children.

A statement from the sheriff's office says Hardy recorded herself pouring a water bottle on her daughter's face Saturday and posted it on Facebook. The baby woke up coughing. Screenshots circulating on social media show Hardy's original post said, "Payback for waking me up all kinda times of da night."

School strip search prompts investigation

NY ALBANY — Gov. Andrew Cuomo has directed the state Education Department to investigate al-

legations that four 12-year-old girls were subjected to strip searches in their middle school nurse's office.

The Democrat on Wednesday also directed state police to assist local authorities investigating the Jan. 15 incident in the Binghamton City School District.

More than 100 people rallied outside the school Tuesday to protest, saying the girls, who are black, were humiliated after being strip-searched for drugs because they appeared "hyper and giddy."

Guard arrested in armored truck theft

KY LOUISVILLE — The FBI said an armored truck guard suspected of fleeing with cash taken from a truck has been arrested in Connecticut.

The FBI said Wednesday Mark Espinosa was arrested near Hartford on a federal warrant for the Dec. 5 robbery of a Garda armored truck in Louisville.

Espinosa had worked for the security company since July. An FBI affidavit says Espinosa and another employee were doing a pickup at a mall on the day of the theft. The other employee went inside, and when he came out, the truck was gone. The affidavit says the truck was moved to another location at the mall and Espinosa had disappeared.

Teen blames mother for machete attack

AL PINSON — Authorities said a teenager whose hand had been nearly severed claimed her mother had assaulted her with a machete.

Al.com reported that Corina D'Andrea, 49, was charged with first-degree domestic violence

and attempted murder.

Jefferson County sheriff's deputies responded to a call for help last Monday afternoon. A sheriff's office statement says deputies arrived to find the 18-year-old victim with severe wounds to her arms, hands and skull. Authorities said her hand was nearly severed.

The victim was taken to a hospital and is in critical but stable condition.

WWII grenade causes Taco Bell evacuation

FL OCALA — When a World War II-era hand grenade came to a Taco Bell in central Florida, everyone else had to leave.

In Facebook posts, Ocala police said a treasure hunter found the grenade while magnet fishing Saturday in Ocklawaha. Magnet fishing is a form of treasure hunting that uses magnets to retrieve items from bodies of water.

Police said the man put the grenade in the trunk of his car and drove to the restaurant in Ocala, about 15 miles away, where he called authorities to report finding the small explosive device.

The restaurant was evacuated, and the Marion County Sheriff's Office bomb squad was dispatched to remove the grenade.

Dogs bred for food in S. Korea at US prison

LA JACKSON — Ten dogs taken from a South Korea breeding operation where they were destined for a dinner table have arrived in Louisiana.

The Advocate reported that the dogs last Monday joined an animal shelter at the Dixon Correctional Institute in Jackson.

The dogs were shipped from South Korea to Canada to a

Delaware shelter before arriving at the prison's Pen Pals animal shelter, which is a no-kill facility.

Man pleads guilty to attempted plane theft

AR TEXARKANA — An Arkansas man has pleaded guilty to trying to steal a jet in order to fly to Chicago to attend a rap concert.

The Texarkana Gazette reported that Zemarquis Scott, 19, of Texarkana, pleaded guilty last Thursday to charges of attempted theft of property and commercial burglary and was sentenced to five years of probation.

Authorities have said Scott was found July 4 inside the cockpit of an American Eagle jet at Texarkana Regional Airport and had hoped to fly to an out-of-state concert.

Ride-sharing students raise smog concerns

CA LOS ANGELES — UCLA students use ride-hailing services such as Uber and Lyft for about 11,000 trips a week to get from one part of campus to another, and that has raised environmental concerns in a city that is often smothered by smog, the Daily Bruin reported.

The student newspaper, citing university transportation officials, said most of the car trips by UCLA students are short, taken by students who said they slept in but did not want to get to class late and summoned an Uber.

But all that traffic is raising concerns among the school's transportation officials that the practice is contributing to smog in Los Angeles.

From wire reports

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STARS AND STRIPES®

Why each team will win the Super Bowl

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS

Associated Press

The Super Bowls have become a yearly ritual for the New England Patriots under Tom Brady and Bill Belichick.

They're back for the third straight year and the ninth time overall despite a taxing season that seemed doomed after Julian Edelman's four-game suspension for performance-enhancers, a 1-2 start to the regular season, various injuries and the arrival and abrupt departure of Josh Gordon.

Yet, as they prepare for Sunday's matchup with the Los Angeles Rams, it's hard to imagine New England, which is a slight favorite, not walking out of Mercedes-Benz Stadium without their sixth Lombardi Trophy.

The reasons begin in the place that matters most: with quarterback Tom Brady.

Yes, he's 41 years old. And yes, he showed some slight signs of decline during his 19th season. But he's also coming off two impressive playoff wins, which doesn't bode well for the Rams.

He bested Philip Rivers in the divisional round. Then he helped the Patriots overcome their playoff road woes by leading 12th postseason game-winning drive of his career to defeat Patrick Mahomes and Kansas City in the AFC championship game.

Brady averaged 267.5 passing yards per game in the postseason before turning 40. Since hitting that milestone, he's thrown for 364.6 yards per game.

"It's a long season. It's a lot like climbing a mountain," Brady said. "You have some really great moments and you have some disappointing things that happen. You gotta kind of figure out your way as you go. The goal is to reach the top and only one team really reaches it."

Linebacker Elandon Roberts said trying to quantify Brady's impact this season is

impossible.

"I can make a list, but I might run out of paper," Roberts said.

While there have been times during the Patriots' run of championships in which they have been dependent on Brady's arm, this season has been notable for the help he's had and continues to lean on during the postseason.

Rookie Sony Michel has reinvented the run game, rushing for an NFL rookie record five touchdowns. He's gotten support from Rex Burkhead (three postseason rushing TDs), James White and even fullback James Develin.

It's added up to fast starts.

The Patriots have been outscored 24-3 in the first quarter of their previous eight Super Bowl appearances. They are poised to change that, having outscored the Chargers and Chiefs 49-7 in the first quarter in their first two victories this postseason.

The defense has also stepped up. First-time All-Pro Stephon Gilmore has helped steady a secondary that ranked as low as 27th in the NFL against the pass at midseason.

There is also the undeniable experience factor that heavily favors New England.

This will be the ninth Super Bowl appearance for Belichick and Brady. But it is the third straight for the Patriots overall.

Safeties Devin McCourty and Patrick Chung and kicker Stephen Gostkowski are preparing to play in their fifth Super Bowls. And they have 25 players who have appeared in at least two Super Bowls.

By comparison, the Rams have only four players on their entire roster that have played in this game.

Brady said last week saying there is "zero chance" that he will retire at the end of this season, adding his plan is to play until age 45.

"He works, plays hard, he probably will," Belichick said.

LOS ANGELES RAMS

Associated Press

The Los Angeles Rams aren't ready to beat the Patriots, according to much of the conventional wisdom around the Super Bowl.

Only four members of the upstart NFC champions have ever played in a Super Bowl. Even though the Rams are coming off a 13-3 regular season and two playoff wins with a brilliant offense and a star-studded defense, who would believe a 33-year-old head coach and a third-year quarterback could prevent the great Bill Belichick and Tom Brady from winning their sixth championship?

Why, to find a head coach and a quarterback who beat the New England Patriots in their Super Bowl debuts, you'd have to go all the way back to ... last year, when Doug Pederson and Nick Foles did it for Philadelphia.

That fistful of rings does not make Belichick and Brady unbeatable, and their Patriots are not infallible in big games.

These Rams may be new here, but they've already demonstrated the talent and tenacity to hang with anybody while going 26-9 since Sean McVay and Jared Goff teamed up.

Their first Super Bowl together is a chance to show it to the world, according to their stars.

"This is the biggest stage I've ever played on, so you've just got to leave it all out there," All-Pro defensive tackle Aaron Donald said. "We're confident against anybody, because we know what we're capable of."

Much of the Rams' hopes rest on McVay and Goff, whose two years together have included very few bad days. While Goff doesn't yet have Brady's steadiness, his best games have been phenomenal — and McVay has had two weeks to prepare him for anything the Patriots might throw at the Rams.

Goff isn't doing this alone, either.

Todd Gurley insists he's at full strength after barely playing in the NFC title game, and C.J. Anderson is a capable re-

placement behind the offensive line that has been the backbone of McVay's success.

Receivers Brandin Cooks and Robert Woods are clicking splendidly with Goff, while McVay frequently uses tight ends Tyler Higbee and Gerald Everett in big situations. Look out for McVay exploiting Gurley's skill as a pass catcher, which could pose a matchup problem for New England.

If both offenses get rolling, the Rams are tough to beat in a shootout. Just ask Kansas City, which lost the teams' 54-51 Monday night epic in November.

But the Rams likely will need to cause havoc for Brady and his offense to win this one, and LA has the talent to give it a shot.

Brady hasn't been sacked in the Pats' two postseason games, but he hasn't faced Donald, the best defensive football player in the world right now. He led the NFL in sacks during the regular season, and his constant pressure up the middle during the postseason has freed up Ndamukong Suh and Dante Fowler to make big plays.

Coordinator Wade Phillips' defense has exploitable flaws, but Donald, Suh and Michael Brockers can cover a lot of them if they can collapse the Pats' sturdy offensive line. They'll aspire to the masterpiece created by Michael Strahan, Osi Umenyiora, Justin Tuck and coordinator Steve Spagnuolo's Giants defense against New England in February 2008.

The Rams insist they won't be awed by the 41-year-old Brady, either. Even if the Patriots stick to quick dropbacks and short routes, Los Angeles came up with 18 interceptions in the regular season, matching the Pats for third most in the NFL.

Most observers believe the Rams have more talent than the Patriots, and McVay is one of the sport's smartest coaches. What Los Angeles doesn't have is Belichick, Brady and Super Bowl savvy.

The Rams are quietly confident it won't matter.

College basketball roundup

Iowa hands No. 5 Michigan second loss

Associated Press

IOWA CITY, Iowa — Michigan's Colin Castleton squared up for a meaningless three-pointer at the buzzer — only to see the ball get stuck between the backboard and the rim in front of jubilant Iowa students clamoring to storm the floor.

It was the brick that encapsulated a lost night for Big Blue.

Luka Garza scored 19 points, Joe Wieskamp added 16 and Iowa stunned fifth-ranked Michigan 74-59 on Friday night, handing the Wolverines their second loss of the season.

Ryan Kriener had 15 points and 10 rebounds off the bench for the Hawkeyes (17-5, 6-5 Big Ten), who snapped a two-game losing streak with their biggest win in years.

"I think what it says about this team specifically is, when you put it together from a game plan perspective and execute, we can be pretty good," Iowa coach Fran McCaffery said.

The Hawkeyes were a lot more than pretty good in blowing past the Wolverines and their top-notch defense.

Iowa put Michigan in its biggest hole of the season, 14 points, late in the first half. The Hawkeyes used a 21-2 run to grab a 42-29 lead at the break — nearly matching the 49 points Ohio State put up against Michigan on Tuesday.

Michigan (20-2, 9-2) clawed back to within 54-49, but a three-pointer by Garza and a three-point play from Wieskamp helped push Iowa's lead back to 67-51 with 5:18 left.

"I can see why they're 17-5 right now," Michigan coach John Beilein said about Iowa. "We got beat by a really good team."

Bowling Green 92, No. 18 Buffalo 88: Dylan Frye scored 25 points and the host Falcons rallied in the second half to beat the Bulls.

Buffalo star CJ Massinburg had a chance to tie the game in the final seconds, but his three-pointer from near the top of the key missed.

Justin Turner added 22 points for Bowling Green (15-6, 7-1 Mid-American Conference), which took first place in the MAC East away from their nationally ranked opponent. Buffalo (19-3, 7-2) was the highest-ranked men's basketball team to face Bowling Green at the Stroh Center, where the Falcons have been playing since 2011-12.

The crowd was appropriately raucous throughout the night, and although the Bulls led 47-39 at halftime, Bowling Green scored the first seven points of the second half, and Buffalo couldn't shake the Falcons.

The decisive stretch was a 12-2 run by Bowling Green, capped by a three-pointer

by Antwon Lillard that put the Falcons up 84-73. Buffalo scored eight straight points after that, and then it was just a question of whether Bowling Green could hold on.

No. 24 Wisconsin 69, No. 21 Maryland 61: Brad Davison scored 21 points and Ethan Happ added 18 as the host Badgers pulled away with a flurry of three-pointers.

Davison finished with four threes for Wisconsin (16-6, 8-3).

The Terrapins (17-6, 8-4) started 6-for-10 from three-point range, but hit just 2 of 10 in the second half.

The Terrapins were forced to go deep into their bench in the second half with starting post players Bruno Fernando and Jalen Smith in quick foul trouble. Fernando was called for this third foul on a charge less than 3 minutes into the second half. Eight seconds later, Smith was whistled for a foul on Happ's layin.

Maryland coach Mark Turgeon turned to Ivan Bender — who averages less than 4 minutes a game — to guard Happ, but he was whistled for a foul on Wisconsin's next possession. Turgeon then tried Joshua Tomaic, who averages less than 3 minutes, before switching to a zone defense.

Eric Ayala led Maryland with 18 points, while Fernando finished with 13 points and Smith five, less than half of his average.

Briefly

Vonn says she'll retire after worlds

Associated Press

Lindsey Vonn transcended her sport in a way only a handful of Olympic athletes could even imagine. She was about more than skiing. She was about more than medals. She was about more than winning.

She was often in the spotlight, appearing in the pages of mainstream and sports magazines, walking the red carpets, mingling with A-list celebrities and dating high-profile sports figures.

The record-setting racer who grew up in Minnesota, then relocated to Colorado, became a

household name in mountain towns and big cities — to people who knew a lot about racing and those who only tuned in every four years.

But now, Vonn is nearing the finish line for the final time. The woman who won more World Cup races than any other female is calling it quits at 34. On Friday, she said she'll retire after the world championships this month.

In other skiing news:

■ Mikaela Shiffrin won the last women's World Cup slalom before the world championships on Saturday in Maribor,

Slovenia, for her personal-best 13th victory of the season.

Shiffrin built on a commanding lead of a full second after the opening run to win the race by 0.77 ahead of Anna Swenn Larsson of Sweden, who earned her first podium in her 100th World Cup start.

Ex-NFL QB, assistant Wilson, 60, dies

DALLAS — Wade Wilson, the quarterback who led the Minnesota Vikings to an NFC championship game and coached the position with the

Dallas Cowboys for more than a decade, died on his 60th birthday Friday.

Police said there was no indication of foul play and that the death was under investigation.

Gordon leads NASCAR Hall inductees

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Jeff Gordon was the top vote-getter in the 10th class of the Hall of Fame, which included the late drivers Davey Allison and Alan Kulwicki, as well as team owners Roger Penske and Jack Roush.

NBA roundup

Irving leads Celtics past Knicks at MSG

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Kyrie Irving had 23 points, 10 rebounds and six assists before a Madison Square Garden crowd eager to start the free agent wooing five months early, and the Boston Celtics beat New York 113-99 on Friday night in the Knicks' first game since trading Kristaps Porzingis.

The trade to Dallas gave the Knicks money to chase two top free agents this summer and fans showed Irving that they want him to be one of them, cheering him before and during his return from a two-game absence with a hip injury.

Marcus Morris added 18 points for the Celtics, who won for the eighth time in nine games.

Damyean Dotson scored 22 points and Kevin Knox had 21 for the Knicks, who dropped their 12th straight.

Irving is one of the headline names in the 2019 free agent class, and though he said at a Celtics fan event last fall that he intended to re-sign in Boston, that may

be no guarantee. He told reporters at the morning shootaround to "Ask me July 1" if his plans had changed.

Irving got a loud ovation when starting lineups were announced and again when he touched the ball early in the game. A brief "We want Kyrie! We want Kyrie!" chant echoed through the arena in the third quarter.

Nuggets 136, Rockets 122: Nikola Jokic had 31 points, 13 rebounds and nine assists, Malik Beasley had a career-high 35 points and host Denver defeated Houston.

The Rockets' James Harden scored 30 points to extend his streak to 25 games of scoring 30 or more points. He needed a late three-pointer to keep the streak alive, and it came well after the game was in hand for Denver.

Hornets 100, Grizzlies 92: At Charlotte, Kemba Walker scored 23 points, Marvin Williams hit two key three-pointers and Bismack Biyombo swatted away a pair of late shots, leading the Hornets past

depleted Memphis.

Memphis suited up just 10 healthy players and was minus star Mike Conley, out because of soreness in his left knee. Starters Kyle Anderson and Jaren Jackson Jr. also were sidelined.

Thunder 118, Heat 102: Paul George scored 43 points and had a career-high 10 three-pointers, Dennis Schroder scored 24 of his 28 points in the second quarter and visiting Oklahoma City extended the NBA's longest current winning streak to seven games by beating Miami.

Russell Westbrook got his fifth straight triple-double and 18th of the season, finishing with 14 points, 12 rebounds and 14 assists. Steven Adams added 13 for the Thunder.

Jazz 128, Hawks 112: Rudy Gobert had 25 points and 13 rebounds to lead Utah over Atlanta.

Seven Jazz players scored in double figures as the Jazz won their third straight at home.

NHL roundup

Vasilevskiy leads Tampa Bay in shootout victory

The Associated Press

UNIONDALE, N.Y. — Victor Hedman scored the only goal in the shootout Friday night to lift the Tampa Bay Lightning past the New York Islanders 1-0 after both goaltenders put on a spectacular display through 65 minutes.

Hedman beat Thomas Greiss on the first attempt in the tiebreaker for the league-best Lightning.

The Islanders had a power play at 3:23 of overtime when Tampa Bay's Nikita Kucherov was called for cross-checking but couldn't convert.

Greiss and Tampa Bay's Andrei Vasilevskiy put on a save-for-save clinic before the shootout. Greiss made 41 saves while Vasilevskiy stopped 36 shots. Vasilevskiy turned away three more during the shootout.

Predators 4, Panthers 1: Viktor Arvidsson scored twice, and Nashville scored all its goals in the third period for a road win.

Behind 1-0, the Predators scored two goals in a span of 2:15 in the third.

Capitals 4, Flames 3: Evgeny Kuznetsov scored a power-play goal with 57 seconds left, and host Washington shook off the ab-

sence of suspended star Alex Ovechkin to end a seven-game losing streak.

With the Flames' Mikael Backlund off for holding, Kuznetsov weaved his way into Calgary's zone before firing a wrist shot past goaltender Mike Smith.

An instant after the final horn sounded, several players traded punches before finally skating off the ice. Ovechkin, who leads the NHL with 37 goals, received a one-game suspension from the league for skipping the All-Star Game.

Penguins 5, Senators 3: Bryan Rust and Jake Guentzel each scored twice to lead Pittsburgh past visiting Ottawa.

Teddy Blueger got his first NHL goal and Casey DeSmith stopped 37 shots as the Penguins won their second straight after losing four of their previous five.

Hurricanes 5, Golden Knights 2: Jordan Martinook scored the go-ahead goal in his first game since signing a contract extension, and host Carolina beat Las Vegas.

Martinook, who signed a two-year, \$4 million extension earlier in the week, scored the tiebreaking goal late in the second period as the Hurricanes won for the third time in four games. The goal was

Martinook's 11th in 51 games this season, tying his single-season career-high.

Red Wings 3, Maple Leafs 2 (OT): Danny DeKeyser scored 2:40 into overtime, lifting host Detroit past Toronto.

The Red Wings retired Red Kelly's No. 4 during a pregame ceremony, making his jersey the eighth to go up in the rafters along with all-time greats such as Gordie Howe, Steve Yzerman and Nicklas Lidstrom.

Stars 3, Wild 1: Tyler Seguin scored two goals in the final eight minutes, lifting host Dallas over Minnesota.

With the game tied at 1, Mattias Janmark took the puck along the boards in the neutral zone and passed across the blue line to Seguin. His slap shot from the top of the right faceoff went under Minnesota goalie Devan Dubnyk and trickled into the net with 7:42 left.

Blackhawks 7, Sabres 3: Patrick Kane celebrated his latest homecoming with two goals and two assists to surpass the 900-point plateau in leading Chicago to a road win.