

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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## GAO: DOD debt collection needs overhaul

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN

*Stars and Stripes*

A congressional watchdog has criticized the Defense Department's debt collection procedures, saying it needs to do a better job of informing servicemembers of their rights when told they owe the government money — often through no fault of their own.

The Government Accountability Office found problems in a review of dozens of debt notification letters sent to military personnel, according to a report published last week.

Letters did not explain servicemembers' right to reviews and written decisions on the matters, or their right to inspect and copy records related to the debts, among other issues, the report said. Often, the military services' policies and procedures involving debt collection were not current, complete or

clear, and were applied inconsistently, the GAO stated.

As a result, servicemembers "may not have been properly notified of their debt, their rights to dispute it, or the potential consequences of inaction, such as involuntary payroll deduction," the report says.

Last year, Congress tasked the GAO to study the Pentagon's process for recouping overpayments made to military personnel.

The direction came after the Pentagon decided to waive more than \$190 million in disputed enlistment bonuses and other payments for California National Guard members.

About 17,500 soldiers were faced with paying back hefty bonuses given to them in error between 2004 and 2010 by recruiters under pressure to meet enlistment goals during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

The Pentagon said at the time

it would review its process for collecting erroneous payments after it was criticized for using tax liens, wage garnishments and other aggressive tactics to try and get the money back.

The GAO didn't review the California National Guard incident but noted the Pentagon's acknowledgement that trying to collect overpayments has placed an undue burden on servicemembers and their families, including financial hardship, garnishment of wages and damage to credit scores.

For its audit, GAO examined 49 debt notification letters sent by the department's various collection offices to military personnel between January 2016 and May 2018. It found that 45 of the letters were missing key information required by the DOD's own debt collection regulations.

More than 40 letters did not include a statement that repay-

ments would be promptly refunded if later waived or found not to be owed; others did not inform the servicemember of the right to inspect and copy DOD records related to the debt or include a statement regarding the right to request a debt remission. Some letters did not advise servicemembers that pay would be deducted if repayment was not received within 30 days, according to the report.

The GAO recommended several revisions to the Pentagon's debt collection process, such as updating debt notification letter templates to include all required information and ensuring DOD regulations and websites clearly state whether and when collection should be suspended during the review process for servicemembers who dispute their debt.

The Pentagon agreed with all recommendations.

## Funding restored for Coast Guard icebreakers

BY SCOTT WYLAND

*Stars and Stripes*

Congress has restored more than \$650 million in funding for new Coast Guard icebreakers that Homeland Security had diverted last year to build a border wall with Mexico.

Funding for the service's first new heavy icebreaker in 40 years, which military leaders say is vital in competing with Russia and China in the Arctic region, is part of the \$333 billion spending bill Congress approved and President Donald Trump signed last week to avoid another government shutdown.

Under the spending package, the Coast Guard will receive \$655 million to begin building an icebreaker to replace the aging Polar Star — its only working heavy icebreaker — and \$20 million more to begin buying materials for a second such vessel, lawmakers said last week.

"With the support of the administration and Congress, we plan to build a new fleet of six polar icebreakers — at least three of which must be heavy icebreakers — and we need the first new Polar Security Cutter immediately to meet America's needs in the Arctic," the Coast Guard said in a statement to USNI News.

The back-and-forth funding reflects Washington's divided politics, which has seen the longest government shutdown in history — 35 days — as lawmakers wrangled over the border wall, one of Trump's key campaign promises.

The GOP-controlled House last year approved diverting \$750 million earmarked for icebreakers toward building the wall. But most Democrats, who took control of the House after last fall's midterm elections, oppose the wall.

The legislation that restored most of the icebreakers' funding was part of a bi-

partisan effort to avoid another shutdown and fund the government through September. It cleared both chambers Thursday, though House Republicans largely voted against it.

Various nations are eyeing the Arctic region with greater interest as a warming climate melts ice caps and opens up access for military, commercial and research vessels. Even as the ice caps weaken and shrink, ships still must carve out passageways.

The Coast Guard currently has one operational heavy icebreaker and one that is inoperative.

Both have exceeded their 30-year service lives. The service also has a medium icebreaker and a research vessel with light ice-breaking ability.

This fleet is miniscule compared with the 40 icebreakers Russia has amassed. Moscow has raised alarms by declaring plans to expand its Arctic domain.

# N. Korea defector talks summit strategy

BY KIM GAMEL  
*Stars and Stripes*

SEOUL, South Korea—North Korean leader Kim Jong Un will never give up nuclear weapons but may agree to reduce production facilities in exchange for sanctions relief during his upcoming summit with President Donald Trump, a prominent defector said Tuesday.

Thae Yong Ho, one of the most senior diplomats to flee the communist state, said Kim's strategy is to persuade Trump to essentially accept North Korea as a de facto nuclear power.

"If you take out nuclear weapons, what else do they have? Nothing," he said at a press con-

ference in Seoul, adding that the regime sees them as essential to its survival.

"They are trying to tip the extremely uneven scale when it comes to conventional weapons compared with the United States and South Korea," he added. "No one in the world can persuade North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons."

He said the bellicose rhetoric in the months before nuclear talks began early last year was part of that effort, but he insisted Pyongyang never intended to go to war.

"That strategy worked," Thae said. "Unfortunately, President Trump fell into this trap."

North Korea will expect to

see a partial easing of international sanctions during the Feb. 27-28 summit in Vietnam, Thae said.

In return, the North may agree to dismantle its Yongbyon nuclear material production facility and to destroy intercontinental ballistic missiles, he said.

The U.S. administration has insisted that it will maintain punishing economic sanctions until the final, fully verified denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is achieved.

But it also is under tremendous pressure to achieve concrete results in Vietnam after widespread criticism that the first U.S.-North Korean summit

in Singapore ended with only vague promises.

Thae warned that the second meeting between the two men in less than a year will be a failure if Trump does not persuade Kim to agree to complete denuclearization and return to key treaties that were abandoned when previous talks collapsed more than a decade ago.

"If the U.S. is really trying to achieve the complete denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula then it needs to first require the North Korean leader to get rid of nuclear weapons and to promise to return to the nonproliferation treaty and the International Atomic Energy Agency," Thae said.

## Air Force to request 8 new F-15 fighter bombers

*Bloomberg*

The U.S. Air Force's next budget will request funds for eight new F-15 fighter bombers from Boeing, beefing up its inventory with an upgraded version of a plane it last bought in 2001 even as it pursues the more advanced F-35 from rival Lockheed Martin.

The F-15s will be proposed in the fiscal 2020 budget, expected around March 11, as the first of a potential 80-plane purchase over the next five years, said people familiar with the Air Force's plan.

Even though the request has White House support, it's likely to raise questions from skeptical lawmakers about why the Air Force, which has spent years saying it needs the "fifth-gen-

eration" F-35, now wants more F-15s as well.

Boeing has kept its F-15 production line in St. Louis going with continued sales to allies including Israel, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The new F-15X for the U.S. would be a variation on planes sold to Qatar but would be able to carry heavier loads of air-to-ground and air-to-air weapons than current F-15s or the F-35s.

With its internal weapons carriage, the F-35 probably can't accommodate planned heavier weapons such as the hypersonic missiles that are now under development. On the other hand, the F-15X would lack the technological advances of the F-35, including its stealth profile to evade the most advanced Rus-

sian and Chinese air defense systems, as well as its sophisticated sensors and data-sharing capabilities.

The Air Force will propose buying the F-15X without reducing the fleet of 1,763 F-35s that it has long planned, the people said. The service would purchase 48 of the 84 F-35s that were called for last year in the Pentagon's plan for 2020, with the remainder going to the Navy and Marines, according to program documents.

Still, Lockheed has been quietly reminding lawmakers and congressional staff of its arguments for the F-35 as the better choice, including through a "fact sheet" distributed in December. That was followed by an attack on the F-15X by five senators

who wrote President Donald Trump last week calling the Boeing plane "outdated."

"The U.S. Air Force fighter budget is unlikely to grow by much, so the fear is that replacing the F-15 fleet, rather than upgrading the old F-15s, would take cash away from F-35 procurement," Richard Aboulafia, an aerospace analyst with the Teal Group of Fairfax, Va., said in an email.

Boeing said in a statement that it's "ready to provide a highly survivable advanced variant of F-15 to the Air Force at an affordable cost."

A spokesman for the Air Force declined to comment on the proposal until the president's proposed budget is released.

## USS Santa Fe conducts exercise with 4 Australian subs

*Stars and Stripes*

The USS Santa Fe sailed in formation with four Royal Australian Navy submarines during Exercise Ocean Explorer off Australia's western coast, the Australian Fleet commander

said in a tweet Tuesday.

Rear Adm. Jonathan Mead wrote it was "great to have our American partner and friend [down under]" during the exercise.

The Santa Fe, home-ported at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-

Hickam in Hawaii, is a fast-attack submarine with 12 vertical launch tubes for Tomahawk cruise missiles, according to the Navy.

This is the third year for Ocean Explorer, in which the British and New Zealand na-

vies also participate. The three-week exercise began Sunday, according to the Royal Australian Navy.

Participants are practicing maritime security, humanitarian and disaster relief and warfighting.



# From caliphate to courtyard

## ISIS militants in Syria reduced to final stand or surrender

Associated Press

BAGHOUZ, Syria — The collection of tents was largely silent on a sunny winter Monday afternoon. Few people were visible, but the few out and about were calm. Two men in long robes and pants walked slowly together through the grass; a woman leisurely came out of her tent to look around; a man on a motorcycle drove toward the river.

This is the last speck of land held by Islamic State — a patch along the Euphrates River in eastern Syria where an estimated 300 militants are mixed in with hundreds of civilians, refusing to surrender and trying to negotiate an exit with the U.S.-backed forces surrounding them.

An Associated Press team got a rare glimpse of the ISIS-held settlement, standing on a rooftop about a half-mile away during a media tour to the front

lines organized by the Syrian Democratic Forces. The roof looked out over a flat, green landscape with scattered palm trees to an earthen berm and a line of pickup trucks put up by the militants at the edge of the camp.

At one point, gunfire crackled in the distance. An SDF commander on the roof with a number of fighters said it isn't always so quiet. Only days earlier the militants surprised the soldiers with an attempted night raid. The SDF can't assault the site or call in airstrikes because of the civilians, he said, adding that his fighters have seen the militants moving civilians around at gunpoint as protection.

"They try a psychological war. But that is it! The war is over, and we won," said the commander, who spoke on condition he be identified only by his nom de guerre, Baran, in line with SDF rules.

The tense standoff by the village of Baghouz is the endgame for the militant group that since 2014 controlled a vast stretch of territory across Syria and Iraq — at one point nearly from Aleppo to Baghdad — and ruled for years, aspiring to create an enduring and expanding jihadi state. The 300 militants in the pocket may include high-level figures and are believed to hold hostages.

Activists said a truce in place has been extended for five days as of Sunday. A person familiar with ongoing deliberations said the group has asked for an exit through a corridor to the rebel-held northwestern province of Idlib and has demanded to be allowed to leave along with the civilians. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak about the talks, which he described as taking place indirectly.

# Trump urges Venezuela's military to back Guaido

Associated Press

MIAMI — President Donald Trump on Monday pleaded with Venezuela's military to support opposition leader Juan Guaido and issued a dire warning if they continue to stand with President Nicolas Maduro's government.

"You will find no safe harbor, no easy exit and no way out. You will lose everything," Trump said in a speech at Florida International University in Miami before large American and Venezuelan flags.

Trump added, "We seek a peaceful transition of power, but all options are open."

The Venezuelan military could play a decisive role in the stalemate but has largely remained loyal to Maduro.

In remarks broadcast on state television, Maduro accused the U.S. president of speaking in an "almost Nazi style" and lashed out at Trump for thinking he can deliver orders to Venezuela's military.

"Who is the commander of the armed forces, Donald Trump from Miami?" Maduro said. "They think they're the owners of the country."

Trump said "a new day is coming in Latin America" as he sought to rally support for Guaido among the largest Venezuelan community in the U.S. The U.S. recognizes him as the country's rightful president and condemns Maduro's government and its socialist policies.

As the monthslong political crisis stretched on, the military has blocked the U.S. from moving tons of humanitarian aid airlifted in recent days to the Colombian border with Venezuela. The aid shipments have been meant in part to dramatize the hyperinflation and shortages of food and medicine that are gripping Venezuela. Trump said of Maduro, "He would rather see his people starve than give them aid."

Critics say Maduro's re-election last year was fraudulent, making his second term illegal.

# 16 states sue over wall funding tactics

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — A coalition of 16 states filed a federal lawsuit Monday to block President Donald Trump's plan to build a border wall without permission from Congress, arguing that the president's decision to declare a national emergency is unconstitutional.

The lawsuit, brought by states with Democratic governors — except for one, Maryland — seeks a preliminary injunction that would prevent the president from acting on his emergency declaration while the case plays out in the courts.

The complaint was filed in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, a San Francisco-based court whose judges have ruled against an array of other Trump administration policies, including on immigration and the environment.

Accusing the president of "an unconstitutional and unlawful scheme," the suit says the states are trying "to protect their residents, natural resources, and economic interests from President Donald J. Trump's flagrant disregard of fundamental separation of powers principles engrained in the United States Constitution."

The complaint, filed by the attorneys general of nearly a third of the states and representing tens of millions of Americans, immediately became the heavy-weight among a rapid outpouring of opposition to the president's emergency declaration. In the White House Rose Garden on Friday, Trump announced that he was instituting a national emergency at the U.S.-Mexico border because Congress did not provide enough money for a wall that has stood as one of the most enduring promises from his 2016 campaign.

The Justice Department declined to comment on the lawsuit Monday night.

Several nonprofit organizations already have gone to court or announced plans to sue.

Protesters took to the streets in several cities Monday. Across from the White House, demonstrators held neon-colored letters that spelled "Power grab."

Through the president's declared emergency, White House officials plan to use \$8 billion to build sections of a barrier that Trump says will obstruct or deter migrants from crossing into the country. That sum is about \$6.6 billion more than Congress allotted for the purpose in its latest spending plan. To fill in the gap, the White House intends, among other things, to divert \$3.6 billion from military construction accounts and \$2.5 billion from Department of Defense efforts to fight illicit drugs.

# W.Va. teachers strike over education bill

Associated Press

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — Nearly a year to the day after West Virginia teachers went on a strike that launched a national “Red4Ed” movement, they’re doing it again.

Unions called a statewide walkout Tuesday over complicated education legislation that they view as lacking their input and as retaliation for last year’s strike.

How long this one goes on will be a day-to-day decision, leaders of three unions for teachers and school service workers said at a news conference Monday.

“We are left with no other

choice,” said Fred Albert, president of the American Federation of Teachers’ West Virginia chapter.

The 2018 walkout launched the national movement that included strikes in Kentucky, Oklahoma, Arizona, Washington state and, more recently, Los Angeles and Denver. Teachers in Oakland, Calif., have authorized a strike starting Thursday.

Now the movement has come full circle.

Nearly all of West Virginia’s 55 counties called off public school classes Tuesday.

The unions have said lawmakers never asked for their insight into what has become

a rushed process in the Senate, which narrowly passed an amended bill Monday night. It now goes back to the House of Delegates.

West Virginia Education Association President Dale Lee said that, based on the Senate’s actions, “it appears that they are more interested in listening to the outside interests than they are the educators across West Virginia.”

“We will work as closely as we can to get a resolution, but at this point, there doesn’t seem to be a resolution.”

One sticking point has been a provision to create the state’s first charter schools, which the unions believe would erode tra-

ditional public education but bill advocates say would give parents more school choices. Charter school laws have been enacted in 43 other states and Washington, D.C.

The Senate version would allow for up to seven charter schools statewide and provide for up to 1,000 education savings accounts for parents to pay for private school. The accounts would be for special-needs students and those who have been bullied.

The House version does not call for such savings accounts and would limit charter schools to one each in Cabell and Kanawha counties.

## Ginsburg returns to the Supreme Court bench

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg was back on the bench Tuesday for the first time since her recent cancer surgery as the Supreme Court returned from its winter break and resumed hearing cases.

Ginsburg, 85, was the first justice to ask a question during the oral arguments in a case centering on whether the government could be considered a “person” able to challenge a patent.

Ginsburg participated in a private conference Friday with her colleagues as they considered which cases to accept for review, said court spokeswoman Kathleen Arberg.

Ginsburg missed January arguments after undergoing a pulmonary lobectomy Dec. 21 to remove two malignant nodules from her left lung. It was the first time the justice had missed oral arguments since she joined the court in 1993, even though she has had two bouts with can-

cer in that time.

During the court’s hearings in January, Ginsburg worked from home reviewing briefings and arguments in the January cases, and Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. said she would participate in deciding them.

Ginsburg was treated for colorectal cancer in 1999, and pancreatic cancer was discovered at a very early stage 10 years later. She scheduled treatment for both during the court’s off days, and did not miss a day

of oral argument.

She has also suffered broken ribs several times, including last November after a fall in her chambers. That actually turned out to be lucky, as it was during treatment for that injury that the malignant modules were discovered.

Ginsburg has said repeatedly in interviews that she will continue in her role on the court as long as she feels she is able to do the job. She has hired law clerks through the 2020 term.

## Catholic religious orders sorry for abuse inaction

Associated Press

VATICAN CITY — Catholic religious orders from around the world apologized Tuesday for having failed to respond when their priests raped children, acknowledging that their familylike communities blinded them to sexual abuse and led to misplaced loyalties, denial and cover-ups.

The two umbrella organizations representing the world’s religious orders issued a joint statement ahead of Pope Francis’ sex abuse prevention summit, which opens Thursday.

They vowed to implement accountability measures going forward to ensure that cover-ups by religious superiors end and

that children are always safe in the presence of clergy.

With a few exceptions, religious orders have largely flown under the radar in the decadeslong scandal, since the focus has been on how diocesan bishops protected their priests and moved them from parish to parish where they were free to abuse again.

Yet congregations such as the Jesuits, Salesians and Christian Brothers have some of the worst records, since they too moved abusers around and had easy access to young victims as many orders specialize in running schools.

The Union of Superiors General represents the leadership of male religious or-

ders, which count around 133,000 priests globally. The female branch, the International Union of Superiors General, represents some 500,000 religious sisters. They will each send around a dozen representatives to the Vatican sex abuse summit.

In the statement, the groups said they were ashamed at how they had failed the most vulnerable they were meant to serve and blamed “the strong sense of family” that their communities fostered for having blinded them to the warning signs.

The statement also condemned recent revelations of priests and bishops who sexually abused seminarians and nuns — an abuse of power that has largely gone unpunished since the victims are adults.



# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## NYC aims to stop bias over hairstyles

**NY** NEW YORK — New York City doesn't want people to have their hairstyles held against them, and it has unveiled novel anti-discrimination guidelines.

The city Human Rights Commission released the guidelines Monday. The New York Times first reported the guidelines and said they're believed to be the first such measures nationwide.

They enable people to seek fines and other remedies if they've been harassed or punished in workplaces, schools or public spaces because of their hair texture or style.

## Rescue workers plead guilty to leaving cats

**OH** NEWARK — Two women who ran an Ohio animal rescue operation have pleaded guilty to charges related to the abandonment of more than 20 cats in a trailer that was then tied shut.

They were charged in August after the Licking County Humane Society took custody of the cats left behind by the women's Pittie Paw Rescue agency.

The Advocate in Newark reported animal rescue officials found 21 live cats and two dead in the central Ohio trailer, which had no food or water for the animals. One cat had to be euthanized.

Kristin Beaupry, of Centerville, and Joyce Meisenhelder, of Heath, pleaded guilty to misdemeanor charges of prohibitions concerning companion animals and abandoning animals.

## Man dies after running from flaming toilet

**MD** BALTIMORE — A man died after being engulfed in flames and running

from a portable toilet that was also on fire in the parking lot of M&T Bank Stadium in Baltimore on Sunday afternoon.

The man was seen, running and on fire, by a security guard for M&T Bank Stadium, according to Blair Skinner, a spokeswoman for the Baltimore Fire Department.

By the time medics arrived, the man was dead and three portable toilets were on fire. It wasn't clear how long he had been in the toilet or what had caused the fire.

## Dog back with owner after 8-month journey

**ME** SOUTH PARIS — A dog that went missing in Massachusetts months ago was reunited with its family after being found in Maine, 175 miles away.

The Bangor Daily News reported 5-year-old king shepherd Kaiser made his way from Ashby, Mass., to South Paris over a span of eight months. The pooch jumped a wall at the home of a woman who was caring for him before going missing.

Kaiser's owner, Tom Wollcott, and his children were reunited with the dog Sunday morning.

A Bethel, Maine, woman had been feeding Kaiser and called animal control, which took the dog to a no-kill shelter in South Paris. The shelter said in a Facebook post that Wollcott was then able to identify Kaiser.

## Authorities rescue mountain lion in tree

**CA** HESPERIA — Authorities northeast of Los Angeles rescued a cat from a tree, a cat that happened to be a mountain lion.

The Victorville Daily Press reported a homeowner in Hesperia contacted authorities Saturday after noticing the big cat while working in the yard.

San Bernardino County Fire officials said firefighters were sent to the home, finding the mountain lion perched about 50 feet up the tree.

State wildlife personnel tranquilized the animal. Firefighters then lowered it to the ground using a rescue harness.

## Animals rescued for 3rd time in 8 years

**MO** ST. LOUIS — The Humane Society of Missouri said dogs and cats were rescued from filthy conditions at the same western Missouri site for the third time in eight years.

The society said in a news release that the owner voluntarily surrendered 21 dogs and 20 cats from a site in Bates County.

The Bates County Sheriff's Office arrested the animals' owner Thursday on charges stemming from the seizure of more than 100 dogs and cats in December 2017.

The Humane Society also rescued more than 50 dogs from the property in 2011.

## Work release inmates aid in rescue of baby

**FL** NEW PORT RICHEY — Some work release inmates made a Valentine's Day rescue when a Florida couple accidentally locked their baby inside their SUV.

Pasco County Sheriff's Office spokesman Kevin Doll told WFLA-TV the parents could not afford a locksmith, and the father intended to break a window.

That's when a crew of trustees working nearby in their black-and-white striped uniforms offered to help.

They helped pry open the front door just enough for one inmate to use a coat hanger to push a button that unlocked the SUV.

The baby's mother, Shadow Lantry, told WPEC-TV the infant was "just sitting there happy" throughout the ordeal.

## Mustard maker drops Chief Wahoo logo

**OH** CLEVELAND — The maker of Cleveland's ballpark mustard is removing the Chief Wahoo logo from its branding and packaging to maintain long-standing ties with the Cleveland Indians baseball team.

Cleveland.com reported the Indians have told official partners such as Bertman Foods Co., the maker of Bertman Original Ballpark Mustard, those relationships can't continue unless they stop using Chief Wahoo. The caricature is widely seen as racist and offensive to Native Americans.

The Indians will stop using Chief Wahoo on player uniforms starting this season.

## Peeps company leader is honored by city

**PA** BETHLEHEM — With prime Peeps season about to get underway, the Pennsylvania city where they're "born" honored the man who brought marshmallow chicks to the masses.

The (Allentown) Morning Call reported that Bethlehem Mayor Robert Donchez proclaimed Friday as "Bob Born Day" in a ceremony at company offices.

Born, now 94, joined his father's candy business in 1946 and figured out a way to automate production of Peeps, which had been made by hand. Today, Just Born produces about 5.5 million Peeps per day.

From wire reports

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# At 45, Ichiro still isn't ready to quit

Associated Press

PEORIA, Ariz. — Ichiro Suzuki fluidly went through a variety of stretches on the floor in the Seattle Mariners clubhouse even before going onto the field. Once outside, he smoothly went through fielding, hitting and baserunning drills.

At 45 and in spring training again, Suzuki is working toward the chance to play for his original major league team in his home country.

"Being able to put on the Seattle Mariners uniform as a player, being here the first day, it is just amazing, it is great," Suzuki said through a translator. "Very satisfied with today and how it went, and I'm just going to take it day by day."

The former MVP and 10-time All-Star outfielder is in camp on a minor league deal after serving in a special assistant's role most of last year when he still worked out with the team. If he's healthy, Suzuki will be part of the Mariners' expanded 28-player roster next month for their season-opening two games in Tokyo against Oakland.

"My body really hasn't changed," he said.

Suzuki, who said he took off only two or three days from working out during the offseason, checked in at camp with only 7 percent body fat.

"He looks unbelievable, like he's prepared every minute of every day to get to this time, and it's probably because he has," general manager Jerry Dipoto said. "He's so focused on his goals, and right now his goal is to make sure that he is on that plane when we leave for Tokyo."

Large groups of fans and Japanese media followed Suzuki everywhere he went during the first workout.

When asked how much he looked forward to the Japan series, Suzuki insisted that he's not yet thinking about that. The player with 4,367 career hits — 3,089 in the 18 big league seasons and 1,278 in nine seasons in Japan before that — is focused on his daily work.

"I think a 45-year-old baseball player really shouldn't be thinking about the future. It's about today," said Suzuki, who would be MLB's active career hits leader if he's on the big league roster, seven more than Albert Pujols since Adrian Beltre retired after last season

with 3,166 hits.

After the Japan series, it is unclear where or even if Suzuki would fit into a team that is in a rebuild mode with a focus on younger players, and 34 newcomers for the start of camp. And there will be three fewer roster spots after the first games against the A's.

No matter what happens, Suzuki said the Mariners uniform would be the last he will wear in the big leagues.

Dipoto said the team is set with its primary outfielders — Mitch Haniger, Domingo Santana and newcomer Mallex Smith — along with veteran newcomer Jay Bruce, who is expected to float between the corner outfield spots, first base and designated hitter. While Smith is dealing with some right elbow discomfort, manager Scott Servais said the issue isn't serious.

"Today I was talking to Jay Bruce and found out that he's 31," Suzuki said. "He's 14 years younger than me. I was pretty shocked about that."

The Mariners also have Yusei Kikuchi, a 27-year-old rookie from Japan who relishes the opportunity to play with the outfielder he watched growing

up.

"One of my goals when I turned pro as time went by was that one day that I would play with players that were kids when I was still playing," Suzuki said. "And right now I'm at the point I'm playing with guys that were in grade school when I was playing here. That was more of a goal that I had, so I think through those years working hard and being able to be where I am today definitely gives me satisfaction."

Suzuki was both the 2001 AL Rookie of the Year and MVP with the Mariners, and won a pair of AL batting titles. After being traded to the Yankees midway through 2012 and playing parts of three seasons in New York, he had three seasons in Miami before 44 at-bats in limited action with the Mariners early last season.

"He'll have as much energy, if not more, than the rest of the guys. It's just how he's wired," said Servais, the manager only six years older than Suzuki. "He's always ready. Our young players are going to be blown away, like this guy is how old, how long has he been doing this? That's why he's the greatest. He's awesome."

## Giants manager Bochy says this is his final season

Associated Press

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — Bruce Bochy has always managed with his gut. Those same instincts told him it's nearly time to retire.

Bochy announced Monday this will be his last season managing the San Francisco Giants, his 25th in all as a big league manager.

He told the team before Monday's spring training workout at Scottsdale Stadium.

"In my mind it's time," he said.

Bochy, who turns 64 on April 16, had offseason hip replacement surgery that has him moving more swiftly and he

insists "the health's great" and didn't factor into the choice.

He begins his 13th season with the Giants. He led the club to World Series championships in 2010, '12 and '14.

"I've managed with my gut. I came up here in 2007 on my gut. So it's a gut feeling it's time," Bochy said. "It's been an unbelievable ride. There's so much in there to be grateful for, with the players, the city, the fans, my ride here. It's time. I'll stay in baseball and do something. ... I'm not going too far, trust me. I love this game. It's been in my blood, so sure I'll be doing something in another capacity and I look forward to it."

Bochy came to San Francis-

co from the San Diego Padres before the 2007 season, in time to watch Barry Bonds break Hank Aaron's career home run record that August. He managed Matt Cain's perfect game in 2012 and a pair of no-hitters by Tim Lincecum against the Padres in July 2013 and June '14.

"This will give me time to go back and reflect and even watch some games and think about some of these great achievements and milestones these players have reached," Bochy said. "I've always had a deep appreciation for the gifts and talents of these players. I consider myself fortunate to have managed players like a

Bonds and Lincecum."

Every other manager with three or more titles has been inducted into the Hall of Fame.

"I haven't even thought about that," Bochy said.

Bochy has faced daily questions about his future, and he wanted to address his plans now and avoid distractions later in the season when he hopes to have a contender again following two years out of the playoffs. He intends to stay in baseball.

"It's something I put a lot of thought into," Bochy said. "There's a lot of things that I look forward to doing, but right now my head's at this moment, hey, I'm going to focus on getting this team ready."



## Top 25 roundup

# Guy helps No. 3 Cavs top Hokies

Associated Press

BLACKSBURG, Va. — Kyle Guy scored 23 points and it was his big first half that gave No. 3 Virginia a chance to get things right in the second half.

Thanks to Guy's 17 first-half points and some uncharacteristically poor shooting by No. 20 Virginia Tech, the Cavaliers overcame a sloppy start and outlasted the Hokies 64-58 on Monday night, sweeping the season series from their state rivals.

"In the first half, they definitely missed a lot of open looks," guard Ty Jerome said. "They're a great shooting team so we got a little lucky in the first half, and then in the second half I think we did a better job of dialing in, beating hand-offs better and we made some adjustments."

Had it not been for Guy, who hit four first-half three-pointers, it would have been a much taller task for the visitors.

"In the first half, they were just missing shots, open shots," Virginia coach Tony Bennett said of the Hokies. "Kyle kept us in it with his three-point shooting. ... We weren't sharp defensively. We were loose with the ball. ... We were too finesse, and then in the second half it turned in the right direction, but his banging shots — he had what, 17 in the first half? — that kept us in it because we were not doing the job."

The Hokies, though, were unable to take advantage. Despite arriving as the third-best three-point shooting team in the country at 41.8 percent, they were 2-for-13 from beyond the arc in the half, which ended with them trailing 32-29. They added their third and last three-pointer of the night 17 seconds into the second half to pull even at 32-all, but finished 3-for-28 from long range, or just 10.7 percent.

"Tonight just wasn't our night as a team shooting," said Ahmed Hill, who was 1-for-9 from behind the arc.

And Virginia, one of the nation's best at defending against

three-pointers, got back to playing its way.

"Offensively, they took their time, they got what they wanted and kind of wore us down," Hill said.

Jerome added 16 points and De'Andre Hunter had 10 for the Cavaliers (23-2, 11-2 Atlantic Coast Conference), who won for the sixth time in their last eight visits to Cassell Coliseum.

Kerry Blackshear Jr. had 23 points and 13 rebounds for the Hokies (20-6, 9-5), who played their sixth game in a row without floor leader Justin Robinson (injured foot). Hill added 16 points and Nickeil Alexander-Walker had 11, but those two were a combined 10-for-31 from the field.

The game was tied at 32 after Hill's three-pointer to open the scoring in the second half, but the Cavaliers gradually built their lead to 48-38 with about 11 minutes to play. The Hokies scored the next five points, rousing a sold-out crowd, but Virginia turned up its defense and held the Hokies scoreless for six possessions over the next 4½ minutes and opened its largest lead at 56-43 with 5:51 to play.

Hill broke the drought for Virginia Tech with a steal and dunk, and Alexander-Walker followed a Virginia miss with a basket in traffic, but Jerome answered with a driving bank shot for the Cavaliers and their lead was 58-47 with 4 minutes to play. Three-pointers by Guy, his sixth of the game, and Braxton Key rebuilt the Virginia lead to 64-54 with under a minute left.

The way Virginia's first half ended was indicative of the entire 20 minutes.

Kihei Clark rebounded a Hokies miss with 5 seconds left, but immediately turned the ball over, Isaiah Wilkins laying it in for the Hokies.

The Cavaliers led 32-29 at the break and Jerome said he was feeling fortunate that his team was ahead, but Bennett fixed that.

"What he said to us at halftime, it was kind of hard to re-

member we were up," Jerome said. "He really gave it to us."

**No. 22 Wisconsin 64, Illinois 58:** Brad Davison scored 18 points, Khalil Iverson added 16 and host Wisconsin held off Illinois.

The Badgers (18-8, 10-5 Big Ten) ground out a win over Illinois (10-16, 6-9) with leading scorer Ethan Happ on the bench down the stretch.

Happ, who averages 18 points, scored just six points on 3-for-7 shooting, was 0-for-3 from the foul line and had three turnovers, including one just before he sat out the final minutes.

But Davison led the Badgers down the stretch. His short jumper put the Badgers up 54-52 with 3:21 left, giving them the lead for good. After Iverson blocked Giorgi Bezhanishvili, Davison collected the loose ball to take it in for a layup and a 56-52 lead with 2:45 to go.

From there the teams traded blows until Nate Reuvers' put-back dunk on a missed 3 gave Wisconsin a 62-58 lead. Iverson then stole the ball on the next Illinois possession, helping put away the game.

**No. 23 Kansas State 65, West Virginia 51:** Barry Brown scored 21 points and visiting Kansas State remained atop the Big 12 standings.

A 14-0 run midway through the second half, led by a couple of three-pointers by Xavier Sneed, gave the Wildcats (20-6, 10-3) their sixth straight conference road win.

After shooting poorly in the first half and only holding a two-point lead, Kansas State kept the Mountaineers (10-16, 2-10) at bay with 50 percent shooting in the final 20 minutes.

Sneed added 19 points for Kansas State, including five three-pointers. Dean Wade, who was questionable going into the game, scored 10 points and grabbed six rebounds.

Lamont West led West Virginia with 16 points.

# Source: Machado to Padres

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — A person familiar with the negotiations tells The Associated Press that All-Star infielder Manny Machado has agreed to a \$300 million, 10-year deal with the rebuilding San Diego Padres, the biggest contract ever for a free agent.

The person spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity Tuesday because the agreement was subject to a successful physical and had not been announced. Machado can opt out after five years and become a free agent again, the person said.

Machado's deal, if completed, would be the second-largest in baseball history behind Giancarlo Stanton's \$325 million, 13-year deal signed with the Miami Marlins ahead of the 2015 season.

Speaking at spring training in Peoria, Arizona, Padres executive chairman Ron Fowler said: "We do not have a deal with any free agent player. We are continuing discussions, and that's all we have to say."

Teams draw a distinction between an agreement subject to a physical and a finalized deal.

San Diego is making a stunning move early in spring training for the second straight year after reaching a \$144 million, seven-year contract last February with first baseman Eric Hosmer. The Padres, who have been rebuilding with prospects, have not had a winning season since 2010, and haven't been to the playoffs since 2006 and have never won the World Series.

Machado is expected to fill the team's gaping need at third base. He began last year with Baltimore, was traded to the Los Angeles Dodgers after the All-Star break and struck out to end the World Series loss to Boston.

# Blues' Binnington makes most of chance

Associated Press

Jordan Binnington doesn't let much get to him.

When junior goaltending coach Greg Redquest put him through the paces of a post-practice skate, he came away seeing the same chill Binnington.

"He doesn't sweat," Redquest said. "He's just too cool."

Binnington is playing cool and has made the St. Louis Blues the hottest team in the NHL. After finally getting his call-up from the minors at age 25, Binnington is 12-1-1 with four shutouts in his first 14 starts and the Blues have won 10 in a row to go from out of the race to firmly in a playoff

position.

When Binnington made his first start Jan. 7, St. Louis sat dead last in the Western Conference, nine points back of a playoff spot. The Blues turned to him to make a difference. No pressure, kid.

"With a little bit of pressure comes opportunity, right?" Binnington said. "You try to do your best to feel confident and prepared for the moment, so you just work hard off the ice and on the ice in practice, and when the moment finally comes, hopefully you're prepared. That's kind of how I looked at it."

It has been a near-perfect look. Binnington has stopped 356 of 380 shots for a 1.58

goals-against average and .937 save percentage. He's the first goalie since Curtis Sanford in 2005-06 with multiple 30-save shutouts.

That kind of play is just what the Blues needed to crawl out of a hole dug before Craig Berube replaced Mike Yeo as coach.

"He's played really well," Berube said. "He's stopped the ones he's supposed to stop, and he's looked really confident in net, and aggressive."

A lack of confidence has never been the problem. Redquest, who coached Binnington for four seasons with the Ontario Hockey League's Owen Sound Attack, said the goalie's technique has always been on point, with the need for just a

few tweaks here and there.

The mental part of the game was a work in progress. Redquest, who still works with Binnington in the summer, said if a bad goal gets in, sometimes he'd just ask about what Binnington did the previous night to get his mind off it and back on track.

Binnington hasn't allowed many goals, but he has shown an uncanny ability to shake them off, not allowing more than four in a game so far.

"If the puck goes in, it doesn't bother him," Redquest said by phone Monday "(Blues veteran goalie) Jake Allen, he plays a little bit deeper in the goal than Jordan. Jordan comes out and challenges a bit more."

## NHL roundup

# Kucherov's five points help Lightning blast Jackets

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Nikita Kucherov had two goals and three assists, and the Tampa Bay Lightning beat the Columbus Blue Jackets 5-1 Monday night for their sixth straight win.

Brayden Point scored twice and Steven Stamkos also had a goal for the Lightning, who are 8-1-2 in their last 11 games. Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 40 shots and got his 26th win. Kucherov now has 99 points to lead the league, with seven goals in the last five games.

Lukas Sedlak scored and Joonas Korpi finished with 15 saves for the Blue Jackets, who had won four straight.

Columbus outshot the Lightning 19-6 in the first period, but Kucherov scored twice. Stamkos made it 3-0 with just 28.1 seconds left in the second, and Point scored twice in the third.

Sedlak spoiled Vasilevskiy's bid for a third consecutive shutout with 1:45 remaining.

**Capitals 3, Kings 2:** Alex Ovechkin scored two power-

play goals, and visiting Washington beat Los Angeles.

It was the 10th multi-goal game this season for Ovechkin, who leads the NHL with 42 goals. He has scored a goal in three straight games and has 12 points (five goals, seven assists) in the past eight games. He is on pace for 57 goals, which would be the second-most in his 14-year career. He scored 65 goals in 2007-08.

Brett Connolly scored Washington's other goal and John Carlson had two assists to go over 300 for his career. Phoenix Copley made 26 saves for his third straight win.

**Blackhawks 8, Senators 7:** Alex DeBrincat had three goals and two assists, and host Chicago held on to beat Ottawa for its ninth win in 11 games.

Patrick Kane scored his 36th goal and added two assists to extend his point streak to 18 games — with 14 goals and 26 assists during the stretch — the longest by a player in the NHL this season. Dylan Strome also had a goal and two assists in his fourth three-point game since joining the Blackhawks on Nov.

25, and Brandon Saad, Gustav Forsling and Jonathan Toews also scored.

The 21-year-old DeBrincat's five points set a career high. His fourth NHL hat trick gives him 32 goals in his second season.

**Bruins 6, Sharks 5 (OT):** Charlie McAvoy scored his fourth goal of the season with 1:01 left in overtime and visiting Boston beat San Jose in a game featuring two of the NHL's hottest teams.

The Bruins won their season-best sixth straight game and extended their point streak to 11 games (8-0-3).

Boston moved to three points ahead of Toronto for second place in the Atlantic Division.

The Sharks lost despite Joe Thornton's fifth career hat trick. San Jose had won seven of its previous eight games and 14 of 18 going into Monday.

**Avalanche 3, Golden Knights 0:** Andrew Agozzino scored his first NHL goal, Semyon Varlamov stopped 40 shots for his second shutout of the season and Colorado ended a six-game home skid.

Tyson Jost and Matt Calvert also scored as the Avalanche won their first game at the Pepsi Center since Jan. 19. Agozzino also added an assist.

Malcolm Subban had 35 saves for a Vegas team that's now dropped eight of its last 11 games.

**Flames 5, Coyotes 2:** Michael Frolik and Mikael Backlund each had a goal and an assist in the third period to help host Calgary beat Arizona.

Mark Giordano also had a goal and an assist, and Derek Ryan and Austin Czarnik had the other goals for the Flames, who won their second straight to improve to 3-3-2 since the All-Star break. Elias Lindholm assisted on both third-period goals, Rasmus Andersson also had two assists, and Mike Smith stopped 27 shots in his third straight start (2-0-1).

Conor Garland and Jordan Weal scored for the Coyotes. Calvin Pickard finished with 29 saves in his third start for Arizona since being claimed off waivers from Philadelphia on Nov. 29.