

STARS AND STRIPES®

Sunday, February 16, 2020

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Navy sails cruiser through Taiwan Strait

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS

Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The United States sailed a guided-missile cruiser through the Taiwan Strait on Saturday, three days after flying an Air Force tanker over the contentious area, officials said.

The USS Chancellorsville's transit through the 110-mile-wide waterway that separates Taiwan from mainland China "demonstrates the U.S. commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific," 7th Fleet spokesman Lt. Joe Keiley told Stars and

Stripes in an email Sunday.

"The U.S. Navy will continue to fly, sail and operate anywhere international law allows," he added.

The transit follows an Air Force mission Wednesday that sent an MC-130J Commando II north to south along the airspace over the Taiwan Strait, while two B-52 Stratofortress bombers flew along Taiwan's east coast, according to Pacific Air Forces spokeswoman Maj. Victoria Hight.

The U.S. operations were held after Chinese naval and air forces operated near Taiwan twice last week. Beijing,

which regards the island as its own, held a "combat-readiness patrol" with bombers, jet fighters, early warning aircraft, destroyers and frigates near Taiwan on Feb. 9, according to the Chinese Defense Ministry.

The U.S. considers Taiwan's status unsettled, but adheres to the "One China" policy, acknowledging that Beijing considers Taiwan part of China. The Taiwan Relations Act, however, provides a framework for the U.S. to aid the self-governing island's defense.

Last Monday, China held naval and air drills in the waters off the southeastern coast

of Taiwan, including air-to-ground assault and fire-support exercises, a Tuesday Defense Ministry statement said.

Chinese fighter jets during the Monday exercise went over the Taiwan Strait and crossed its "middle line," flying closer to Taiwan than mainland China, according to a report Tuesday by China's state-run Global Times newspaper.

The Navy's Saturday sail was the second Taiwan Strait transit this year. The guided-missile cruiser USS Shiloh made the trip Jan. 16, Keiley said at the time.

Sailors receive reprimands for 'MAGA' patches

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS

Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Sailors who donned patches with a cartoon depiction of the president and the phrase "Make Aircrew Great Again" during his May speech at the Yokosuka Naval Base received nonjudicial punishments, according to a report Thursday on Military.com.

A Navy investigation document revealed that the patches featuring the twist on President Donald Trump's 2016 campaign slogan violated a Department of Defense order banning troops from participating in political events in uniform, the report said.

While the number of sailors punished was not released, 18 sailors and officers from Guam's Helicopter Sea Squadron 25 were told days after the speech that they were suspected of violating the policy — nine had worn the patches to the speech aboard the amphibious

‘All Department of Defense personnel must be steadfast in our commitment to defend the Constitution and our nation’s principles ... We uphold DOD’s longstanding tradition of remaining apolitical as we carry out our official responsibilities.’

Mark Esper

U.S. Secretary of Defense

assault ship USS Wasp, according to Military.com.

Some officers also received nonjudicial punishments. Five commissioned officers and a chief petty officer in the helicopter squadron were also investigated on suspicion of violating the policy in connection with the patches, according to the report. It's unclear whether they were all reprimanded.

Comment from the Pacific Fleet was not immediately available on Friday.

Nonjudicial punishments are disciplinary actions carried out by commanders for minor offenses. They are documented in

service members' records and can include loss of rank and pay, extra duties, restriction to quarters and sometimes brief confinement.

News of the reprimands comes after Defense Secretary Mark Esper issued a memorandum Feb. 5 for all military personnel and DOD employees to "avoid any action that could imply endorsement of a political party, political candidate or campaign by any element of the Department.

"All Department of Defense personnel must be steadfast in our commitment to defend the Constitution and our nation's

democratic principles," according to Esper's memorandum. "As public servants who have taken an oath to defend these principles, we uphold DOD's longstanding tradition of remaining apolitical as we carry out our official responsibilities."

In July 2018, Stars and Stripes photographed a helicopter crew chief wearing the same patch at the Barking Sands missile range in Hawaii during Rim of the Pacific exercises. The Pentagon itself used a photo of a sailor wearing the same patch in a 2017 Twitter post, Stars and Stripes reported last year.

Vets point to Stars and Stripes' value amid funding threat

BY STEVE BEYNON
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Many veterans are speaking out about the importance of Stars and Stripes as a news source for troops in light of the Pentagon's decision this week to gut the historic news agency of its annual funding to free up more money for what it considers to be crucial warfighting expenses.

Stars and Stripes began operations in the Civil War and has been a critical, and often the only, means for troops on the front lines to keep up with the news back home. Even with the post-9/11 wars occurring in the internet age, thousands of troops have been fighting in war zones where digital access is either inconvenient or nonexistent.

"We were mostly on a mountain near the Pakistan border during the deployment," said Michael Gerstmann, who served in the Army as a cavalry scout in Afghanistan in 2009 and left the military as a staff sergeant in 2011. "You know, there's nothing to do in these [combat outposts]. If you aren't doing missions or working out, not much is going on. Stripes was a good way to connect to home, even with some of the guys not being big news people, it was still something to do. Anything to take your mind off stuff was always good."

In Afghanistan and Iraq, the U.S. military set up dozens of combat outposts where small numbers of troops would operate out of in the most remote parts of those countries. In many cases, service members lived in austere conditions sometimes devoid of plumbing and cooked food and had few recreational amenities. In rural Afghanistan, these outposts were sometimes located at the bottom of a valley, con-

ceding the high ground to the Taliban, making them prone to constant attack.

Even in cases where troops served in larger, more established bases with amenities such as coffee shops and fully equipped gyms, the internet could still be a luxury, making it difficult to keep up with current events. In a lot of cases at bases such as Camp Leatherneck and Kandahar Airfield in Afghanistan, troops would have to go to recreation centers and wait in a line for time-limited internet use on a slow connection. In those cases, service members mostly used the time to communicate with their families.

"I grabbed hard copies of Stars and Stripes outside the [dining facility] on [Combat Outpost] Speicher [in Iraq], and it was a lifeline to what was happening back home. Read it front to back every day I could," said John Ismay, a former Navy lieutenant commander who handled bomb disposals and now is a New York Times reporter. "Having a copy in my hands made me feel connected to all those earlier generations of American service members I'd seen photos of holding their own copies in earlier wars."

Defense Secretary Mark Esper on Thursday defended the Pentagon's decision to strip Stars and Stripes of its federal funding, telling reporters in Europe that the independent news organization is not a priority.

"Their hard work and dedication in reporting on issues that matter the most to the military community continues to be of value," Esper said. "However, as we look forward to the current budget proposal and beyond, the DOD must prioritize spending to support our warfighters in the most critical areas of need. Therefore,

the department has made the difficult decision that, beginning in fiscal year 2021, it will no longer provide appropriated funds to Stars and Stripes."

The Defense Department still needs to get its proposed budget through Congress. Whether congressional lawmakers will try to preserve Stars and Stripes' funding is up in the air, though some House members have signaled they will push back against the Pentagon ahead of the new fiscal year, which starts in Oct. 1.

"Stars & Stripes was a link to home when I was in Iraq and Okinawa," tweeted Rep. Ruben Gallego, D-Ariz., a Marine veteran. "It's an A+ indie take on everyday DoD news, f*** ups, and Administration and General Officer BS. No wonder this President [Donald Trump] wants to cut it. He's got a fight on his hands."

David Nelson, a former captain in the Marine Corps who served in 1971-1973, has kept decades-old copies of Stars and Stripes.

Nelson recounted some of historical front-page headlines from Stars and Stripes.

"Look at the memories stored on one page of the Jan. 24, 1973, Stars and Stripes — the announcements of LBJ's death, the Supreme Court decision in Roe v. Wade, the Paris peace talks preceding the end of the Vietnam War, and George Foreman's boxing knock-out of Joe Frazier," Nelson said. "What a treasure and keepsake that issue of Stars and Stripes has been to me for the past 47 years, along with many other issues."

EDITOR'S NOTE: The writer served two tours as an Army cavalry scout in Kunar, Paktika and Helmand provinces of Afghanistan.

DOD scraps \$1B Hawaiian radar system

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — The Defense Department has dropped plans to build a \$1 billion ballistic missile tracking system in Hawaii, shifting funding instead to higher priorities.

During a briefing with reporters last week on the proposed fiscal 2021 budget, Vice Adm. Jon Hill, director of the Missile Defense Agency, said funding had been zeroed out in the proposed budget for the Pacific radar system, which would have also included a second site in a not yet chosen host nation in the region.

Hill said on Monday the decision was based on "host nation issues."

The Homeland Defense Radar-Hawaii has been "postponed as we resolve issues related to siting," Heather Cavaliere, a spokeswoman for the Missile Defense Agency, said in a statement Friday.

Hill said that the region would continue to be defended from ballistic missile threats by an existing radar on Hawaii, the deployable Sea-Based X-Band radar and Aegis defense systems on ships at sea.

But there has long been agreement that such a defense system is inadequate, said Riki Ellison, founder and chairman of the Missile Defense Advocacy Alliance, which promotes development of systems to fend off ballistic missile attacks.

"If you can't see it, there's no way you can shoot it down," he said. "That's a primary objective that I think everybody agreed on years ago under [U.S. Pacific Command head Adm. Harry Harris] to get this. This was the first step — and then get the interceptors after the radar was put in."

How a 7-day truce deal could lead to peace in Afghanistan

Los Angeles Times

By agreeing to pause hostilities for seven days, the U.S. and the Taliban could set Afghanistan on the path toward a peace agreement that has eluded the country for nearly two decades.

But analysts say an agreement between the Trump administration and Taliban representatives, a year and a half in the making, would actually

ANALYSIS

be the easy part.

What follows is likelier to be much more complex: negotiations between the Taliban and Afghan government officials over a possible role for the Islamist militant group in the government and the future shape of the Afghan state.

The U.S. and Taliban were expected as early as Sunday to announce a truce that would begin with a seven-day “reduction in violence” by both sides. If it succeeds, the longtime adversaries would sign a broader agreement whose details have not been disclosed, but are believed to include a timetable for the phased withdrawal of U.S. troops.

In exchange, the Taliban would agree to stop transnational terrorist groups from op-

erating in Afghanistan — their sheltering of al-Qaida is what prompted the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 that resulted in their loss of power — and to enter into talks with the Afghan government and other power brokers.

It is those intra-Afghan talks that will determine whether a country that has been mired in conflict for many decades can achieve a durable peace.

“The U.S.-Taliban deal is not a peace deal,” said Laurel Miller, Asia director for the International Crisis Group. “It’s a first step in that direction. The peace process will be the talks among Afghans, which may or may not reach a conclusion.”

If the U.S. and Taliban sign an agreement, they will have achieved several breakthroughs. One is that the Taliban, by committing to sit down across the table from President Ashraf Ghani and other Afghan leaders, would acknowledge the legitimacy of a government they have long dismissed as a Western puppet.

But another is that the U.S. will have acknowledged that it cannot defeat the Taliban militarily and is willing to support a peace process that could result in militant leaders hold-

ing power in the Afghan government, one that American taxpayers have spent billions of dollars to build and finance since the invasion nearly two decades ago.

When the Taliban ran the country for several years in the late 1990s, the fundamentalist group banned girls’ education, persecuted religious minorities, carried out public executions and refused to share power.

Omar Samad, a former Afghan diplomat who is non-resident fellow at the Atlantic Council, said the talks could reshape Afghanistan’s post-2001 political order.

“It could be a power-sharing arrangement, constitutional amendments, a whole new system,” Samad said. “Some very basic questions that we thought we had resolved over the past two decades, such as the rights of women and minorities, how to shape the national security forces, how to reintegrate Taliban fighters — these are all very complicated issues that have to be dealt with.”

The Taliban also would be negotiating from a position of strength, across the table from an Afghan political and military establishment that has only grown more divided.

Lawmaker calls for vasectomies in Alabama

Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — An Alabama lawmaker fed up with her colleagues’ attempts to outlaw abortion has filed legislation to require all men over 50 to get vasectomies.

Democratic Rep. Rolanda Hollis said Friday that she introduced the bill to send “the message that men should not be legislating what women do with their bodies.”

Alabama lawmakers last year approved a ban on abortion unless the woman’s life was in danger. A federal judge blocked the law from taking effect while a legal challenge plays out in court.

“Year after year the majority party continues to introduce new legislation that tries to dictate a woman’s body and her reproductive rights. We should view this as the same outrageous overstep in authority,” the Birmingham lawmaker wrote in a statement.

Hollis’ bill suggests the state require a man to get a vasectomy within one month of turning 50 or after the birth of his third child. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that forced sterilization is unconstitutional.

Miss. braces for flooding as river may burst banks

Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. — Authorities in Mississippi were bracing Sunday for the possibility of catastrophic flooding in and around the state capital of Jackson as water levels rise precipitously in a river swollen by days of torrential rain.

Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves said water from the rain-swollen Pearl River would continue to rise throughout the day, and he warned the state is facing a “precarious situation that can turn at any moment.”

Officials called on residents to pay attention to evacuation orders, check on road closures before traveling and stay out of

floodwaters — warning that seemingly placid waters could mask quickly moving currents and pollution. Law enforcement officials have been going door to door telling people in affected areas to evacuate, Reeves said. Rescuers performed four assisted evacuations but said that none were needed overnight.

“We expect the river to continue to rise over the next 24 hours or so,” Reeves said during a news conference in Jackson. “We are not out of the woods yet.”

The National Weather Service reported Sunday on its Twitter feed that the river was expected to crest in the Jackson area

at 37.5 feet Monday.

Officials Saturday night released water from a nearby reservoir — the Ross Barnett Reservoir — to cope with the rising river levels. They called on residents in northeastern Jackson who live in the flood zone to leave immediately. By Sunday morning, Reeves said the inflow and the outflow of the reservoir had equalized.

Reeves said once the river crests Monday it will take three to four days before the waters start to significantly go down. Part of the reason is that forecasters are expecting several inches of rain between midday Tuesday and Wednesday evening.

Rocket sends snacks to Space Station

Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — A cargo ship rocketed toward the International Space Station on Saturday, carrying candy and cheese to satisfy the astronauts' cravings.

Northrop Grumman launched its Cygnus capsule from the Virginia seashore. The nearly 4-ton shipment should arrive at the orbiting lab Tuesday. It took three tries over the past week to get the Antares rocket off the pad, with it finally taking flight at 3:21 p.m. — an auspicious 3-2-1.

"Awesome launch," Joel Montalbano, NASA's deputy space station program manager, said once the capsule reached orbit.

Besides the usual experiments and gear, the capsule holds cheddar and manchego

cheeses, fresh fruit and vegetables, chocolate and three kinds of gummy candy expressly requested by the three station astronauts: Skittles, Hot Tamales, and Mike and Ike's.

Periodic supply runs by Russia, Japan and NASA's two private shippers, Northrop Grumman and SpaceX, usually provide more than experiments, equipment, clothes and freeze-dried meals. The capsules also bring family care packages, as well as fresh food to offset the run-of-the-mill station grub.

This latest delivery should have arrived well before Valentine's Day. But last-minute equipment concerns at the Wallops Island launch pad Feb. 9 halted the countdown for the Antares rocket, then bad weather moved in. Dangerously high wind scuttled

Friday's attempt.

This was the company's 13th space station delivery for NASA. The Cygnus capsules get their name from the Swan Constellation.

This particular Cygnus is christened the SS Robert H. Lawrence in honor of America's first black astronaut. Lawrence, an Air Force major, was chosen in 1967 as an astronaut for a classified military space program known as the Manned Orbiting Laboratory. He was killed five months later in a plane crash and never flew in space.

The space station is now home for Americans Jessica Meir and Andrew Morgan and Russian Oleg Skripochka. Morgan has been there since July and the two others since September; they'll remain on board until April.

Storm Dennis brings record floods to UK

Associated Press

LONDON — Storm Dennis hammered Britain on Sunday, bringing a month's worth of rain in just 48 hours to parts of South Wales, which bore the brunt of the country's second severe storm inside a week.

Rivers across Britain burst their banks and a number of severe flood warnings remained in place as authorities strove to get people to safety and to protect homes and businesses. The Met Office, Britain's meteorological service, said the disruption is set to carry through into Monday.

Dennis has been so intense that England posted a record number of flood warnings and alerts and a rare "red warning" for extremely life-threatening flooding was announced for South Wales.

The Met Office only issues a red warning when it thinks the weather will be so dangerous there's a "risk to life" and that people must take immediate action to protect themselves. It was the first time a red warning has been sounded since December 2015.

Though the warning only lasted a few hours, South Wales Police declared a major incident as firefighters and rescue crews continued to help communities following multiple floods, landslides and evacuations. Nearby Gwent Police said residents of Skenfrith were being advised to evacuate due to the flooding.

The Met Office said the highest wind gust recorded was 91 mph at Aberdaron in north Wales on Saturday. It also said 6.1 inches of rain fell at Crai Reservoir in the Welsh county of Powys over 48 hours to Sunday morning. One of the worst-hit areas in South Wales was the village of Nantgarw, near Cardiff, which saw entire streets underwater since the early hours of Sunday morning.

As the wet and windy weather started to clear across parts of the south and headed north and eastwards, the number of flood warnings across the U.K. declined but there were still around 360 of them in place Sunday, from the north of Scotland through to Cornwall in southwest England.

Israel: Hamas hackers tried to 'seduce' soldiers

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — The Israeli military Sunday said it has thwarted an attempt by the Hamas militant group to hack soldiers' phones by posing as young, attractive women on social media, striking up friendships and persuading them into downloading malware.

Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus told reporters that the phones of dozens of soldiers had been infected in recent months, although he said the army detected the scam early on and prevented any major secrets from reaching the Islamic militant group.

"We do not assess there is any significant breach of information," the military spokesman said.

Conricus said this was the third attempt by Hamas to target male soldiers through fake social media accounts, most recently in July 2018. But he said this latest attempt was by far the most sophisticated.

He said Hamas used a number of social media platforms, including WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and Telegram, to make contact with unsuspecting soldiers. Posing as young women on social media, the

group struck up friendships with the soldiers, sending photos, texts and voice messages to them.

The "women" claimed to be new immigrants to explain their poor Hebrew, and even claimed to be deaf or hard of hearing as an excuse for texting, instead of speaking directly on the phone, Conricus said. The profiles appeared on multiple platforms, and he said the photos were disguised to make it difficult to "reverse track" them, giving the accounts additional authenticity.

"We see that the level of social engineering is much higher and much more advanced and sophisticated when compared to previous attempts done by Hamas," he said. "We see that they're of course learning and upping their game."

Eventually, they sent the soldiers links to "seduce" them into downloading what they said was a Snapchat-like app to exchange photos that could quickly disappear, Conricus said. In reality, the links were to three malware programs — Catch&See, ZatuApp and GrixyApp — that allowed Hamas to gain access to the soldiers' phones.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Blue lobster gifted to New England aquarium

MA BOSTON — The New England Aquarium has a new resident: a bright blue lobster.

The Boston aquarium was recently gifted the colorful crustacean that was caught in the wild by Patriot Seafoods. It's on display in the aquarium's Isle of Shoals exhibit after a 30-day quarantine to ensure it was healthy.

The aquarium says the incidence of blue lobsters in the wild is estimated to be about one in 2 million.

The blue lobster joins other oddly colored lobsters already at the aquarium, including a yellow lobster, a calico lobster and a half black, half orange lobster, which the aquarium calls the "Halloween" lobster.

Man cuts off girlfriend's arm with machete

NC FAYETTEVILLE — Police in North Carolina said that a man cut off his girlfriend's arm with a machete.

Citing court documents, The Fayetteville Observer reported that the woman's left arm had been severed below the elbow.

The woman, 54, told police that she had asked Ryan Alexander Tyndall, 27, for some Xanax. Court documents said he told her the medication was in the bedroom. After she walked in, she said she felt a sharp pain in her arm and saw that her arm had been cut, court documents stated.

The woman said she ran away. She was airlifted to Duke Medical Center and underwent emergency surgery.

Tyndall was charged with attempted first-degree murder and assault with a deadly weap-

on with intent to kill inflicting serious injury.

Man looking for store gets directions to jail

FL SUMMERFIELD — A Florida man, 63, who stopped a sheriff's deputy to ask how to get to an auto parts store instead got directions to jail when the deputy arrested him on DUI and cocaine possession charges.

Juan Zamora was driving near Ocala when he flashed his headlights at a Marion County Sheriff's deputy's squad car, an arrest report said. Deputy Calvin Batts pulled over and Zamora asked him for directions to the auto parts store.

Batts wrote in the report that he could smell alcohol and observed Zamora's bloodshot and watery eyes.

Batts wrote that he found a small bag with a powdery substance in Zamora's shirt pocket that field-tested for cocaine. The arrest report said Batts also found a bottle of whiskey in the car.

Boy honored after saving family from fire

GA KINGSTON — A boy who saved his family from a house fire received special recognition from officials in northwest Georgia.

Noah Woods, 5, woke up to flames in the room he and his sister, Lilly, 2, shared. Officials said he pulled himself and his sister to safety through a bedroom window. He then ran next door, according to an online funding campaign, and grabbed his uncle, who helped the rest of the family of eight escape.

Noah was presented with a proclamation from Bartow County Commissioner Steve Taylor honoring him with

his very own day, WXIA-TV reported.

The Bartow County Fire Department also presented Noah with his own badge, certificate, helmet and firefighter pajamas. He also got a chance to ride in the firetruck.

Women find notes on cars from 'Alex'

DE WILMINGTON — Several women in Delaware said that they've found notes on their cars in recent months from a man named Alex. He said in each note that he finds the women attractive. He also asks them to chat and leaves his phone number.

The News Journal in Wilmington reported that the women found the notes tucked into their door handles while parked at shopping plazas near Ogletown and Stanton.

Master Cpl. Michael Austin of the Delaware State Police said police have investigated the notes. He said the telephone number was a non-working number and that no evidence of criminal activity was found.

Museum seeks to name robotic dinosaur

NM ALBUQUERQUE — The New Mexico Museum of Natural History & Science is trying to find a name for the robotic version of the Bisti Beast tyrannosaur.

The museum in Albuquerque has collected suggestions for names from visitors for months.

They have narrowed down the choices to the top five most popular suggestions and want the public's help choosing the final name.

Museum officials said the most popular suggested names include Juniper, Bailey, Bella, Betty and Bonita.

They plan to announce a name for the Bisti Beast on March 14 when the museum opens its next dinosaur exhibit.

Area's first wolf pack in 70 years confirmed

CO DENVER — Colorado Parks and Wildlife officials confirmed the first documentation of a wolf pack in Colorado in more than 70 years.

DNA testing of scat samples taken near an elk carcass in Moffat County in January confirmed the samples came from wolves, KMGH-TV reported.

The test results from northwestern Colorado indicated three female wolves and one male and showed the animals were related and likely to be full siblings.

Officers heard distinct howls in the area before spotting six wolves through binoculars, the department said.

Whale-watching cruise has close encounter

CA DANA POINT — A delighted passenger on a whale-watching cruise was able to pet a 35-foot gray whale that surfaced near the boat off Southern California.

The curious whale appeared near the surface of the water near Dana Point, the Orange County Register reported.

The passenger splashed her hand in the water, tapped the boat's side and blew kisses to the giant marine mammal.

Suddenly the whale's head popped out of the water and the woman reached out and pet it.

The up-close encounter is rare in Southern California, where whales typically keep a distance from boats as they migrate between Alaska and Mexico, the newspaper said.

From wire reports

On a mission to provide objective reporting
to America's military, wherever they serve.
Read us online at www.stripes.com.

STARS AND STRIPES®

Jones Jr., Hield, Adebayo big All-Star winners

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Aaron Gordon lost another epic dunk contest. And it was by a couple of inches — namely, the top of Tacko Fall's head.

Derrick Jones Jr. finally got his long-awaited dunk contest title as an exclamation point to an scintillating All-Star Saturday Night, both for him and the Miami Heat. Jones and Gordon needed a dunk-off to decide a winner, Jones prevailing 48-47 in the one that determined who left with the trophy.

Miami's Bam Adebayo won the skills title as well, and Sacramento's Buddy Hield took the three-point crown. Their wins were absolute, without ambiguity: the ball going in told the tale. But the dunk contest — much like the one between Michael Jordan and Dominique Wilkins in Chicago 32 years earlier — came down to the judges' call.

Gordon brushed against the back of Fall's head, and that was enough to sway three of the judges — they gave 9s, and that combined with two 10s added to the final 47. Jones said he would have settled for another dunk-off round.

"He clipped Tacko's head when he did that dunk, so I knew they couldn't have gave him a 50 for that one," said Jones, who was in the dunk contest in 2017 as well. "I would have respected it if they gave him another 48, so we can go again."

Thing is, it wasn't clear if they would have dunked again had it still been tied after Gordon's final attempt. The NBA was not going to permit co-champions, and there would have been a

point — which they were possibly at — when judges would have had to vote and decide a winner.

Controversy reigned regardless. And much like 2016, when Gordon lost to Zach LaVine in one of the best dunk contests ever, the Magic forward — who set a dunk contest record with five perfect scores — left frustrated.

"I feel like I should have two trophies," Gordon said.

When Gordon brought the 7-foot-5 Fall to come out for his last dunk — Fall played college basketball in Orlando at UCF — it was the ultimate risk-reward moment.

Gordon, who wanted to jump over the slightly shorter-than-Fall Shaquille O'Neal but got that invitation declined, needed a 49 to win. But he didn't totally clear his very tall prop, and just like that, Jones was the champion.

"Tallest dude in the gym," Gordon said. "Jumping over somebody 7-5 and dunking it, it's no easy feat. What'd I get, a 47? Come on, man. What are we doing?"

Jones lauded Gordon for trying a dunk over Fall.

"If I would have thought of it earlier, I'd have did it," Jones said.

The first round was full of props: Jones — celebrating his 23rd birthday — had a birthday cake and Adebayo on the court for his first dunk, Gordon went over Chicago native Chance The Rapper for a slam, Milwaukee's Pat Connaughton leaped over Bucks teammate Giannis Antetokounmpo and kissed the ball off the glass before his second dunk, and the Los Angeles Lakers' Dwight Howard brought

back his Superman dunk from 11 years ago as well.

Jones Jr. and Gordon emerged as the two finalists. Gordon was perfect on every dunk until his last one. But in the end, Jones proved prophetic.

"I said I would do it," Jones said.

Adebayo drew 2018 skills champion Spencer Dinwiddie of Brooklyn in the first round, having no problem with the accurate pass into a tight window, layup and three-pointer that, to win, need to be made before an opponent completes the same course. Same thing in the second round, Adebayo finished off Toronto's Pascal Siakam without a miss again to earn his spot in the final.

"I told Spencer I'm going to be the champion," Adebayo said. "We were walking in, and I told Spencer I was going to be a champion."

It came down to big men: Adebayo against Indiana's Domantas Sabonis. It took three tries for Adebayo to make his three-pointer to win, and he still wound up beating Sabonis to the final make. Sabonis felt he rushed his second shot, giving Adebayo a leg up.

Neither Sabonis nor Adebayo was surprised that a pair of bigs wound up dueling for the skills title.

"It's just showing how the game is changing and how big men and power forwards are basically bringing up the ball, passing the ball," Sabonis said.

Adebayo dedicated the win to his mother — she'll be getting the trophy as well — and said he was particularly honored to compete with a patch on that paid tribute to Kobe Bryant, his daughter Gianna and the other

seven victims of the helicopter crash that took their lives in Southern California on Jan. 26.

All competitors Saturday wore a patch with the numbers 2 and 24 — for Gianna and Kobe — surrounded by nine stars, signifying nine victims.

Adebayo won his trophy with a three-pointer on the final shot, so perhaps it was fitting that Hield won his in the same manner.

The three-point contest came down to Hield, Booker and Washington's Davis Bertans after five others — including defending champion Joe Harris — were knocked out in the first round. Bertans went first in the final round, scoring 22. Booker went next, scoring 26.

And that left Hield, who made his last six shots of the opening round and needed to get hot again late in the final.

No problem.

His "money ball" rack — the one where every shot was worth two points — was the final of his five full racks, and he got to that corner with 19 points. That meant he had to go 4-for-5 on the last rack to catch Booker.

First one, make. Second one, make. Third one, make.

Hield then missed the fourth shot before letting the final one fly — dancing for joy when it dropped through the net, giving him a walkoff victory.

"As a shooter, this is on your bucket list," Hield said. "You have to come in and you want to win a three-point shootout. With a stacked field like that, it makes it even better. Pressure is on, and you've got to show up."

That was the theme of the night, all the way to the end.

Gragson gets first career Xfinity series victory

Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — Noah Gragson won his first career Xfinity Series race when Saturday's opener was stopped on the final lap by a crash well behind the winning JR Motorsports Chevrolet.

It was the third consecutive win at Daytona for a car fielded by Dale Earnhardt Jr., his sister and Rick Hendrick in what they consider a family business.

"It never gets old, man," Earnhardt Jr. said. "I don't expect I will do it ever again

as a driver, but if I get here as an owner and have success like this, it's a great feeling."

Gragson and Chase Briscoe swapped the lead in the closing three-lap sprint to the finish, but NASCAR threw the yellow-flag for a multicar crash on the

final lap.

Harrison Burton and Timmy Hill, who was to make his Daytona 500 debut on Sunday, were second and third in Toyotas. Briscoe was fourth in a Ford for Stewart-Haas Racing.

NHL roundup

Lightning strike again on home ice

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 30 shots and the Tampa Bay Lightning set a franchise record for consecutive home wins in a 5-3 victory against the Philadelphia Flyers on Saturday.

Alex Killorn, Nikita Kucherov, Brayden Point, Cedric Paquette and Carter Verhaeghe all scored for Tampa Bay, which won its 11th game in a row on home ice. The Lightning also won their 10th consecutive game overall to become the third team in NHL history to have two separate winning streaks of at least 10 games in the same season.

The 1929-30 and 1970-71 Boston Bruins are the only other teams with multiple winning streaks of 10-or-more games in the same season.

“To go on a run like that is pretty cool. Everyone is having fun around the room,” Tampa Bay center Anthony Cirelli said. “At the end of the day, though, it’s still just part of the season.”

Vasilevskiy improved to 19-0-2 in his past 21 starts.

Kings 3, Avalanche 1: Tyler Toffoli scored twice in the final minute to complete a hat trick and Los Angeles won at the Air Force Academy in the third and final outdoor game in the NHL this season.

Toffoli put the Kings ahead 2-1 with 54 seconds remaining, then scored an empty-netter with 4.3 seconds left.

Los Angeles won its second straight, improving to 4-12-1 since New Year’s Day.

At 6,621 feet above sea level, this was the highest altitude ever for an NHL game.

Colorado goaltender Philipp Grubauer stopped 14 of 15 shots before leaving after teammate Ian Cole slammed into him early in the third period and sent him tumbling. He was replaced by backup Pavel Francouz with 17½ minutes remaining.

Coyotes 3, Capitals 1: Antti Raanta stopped 36 shots to keep Alex Ovechkin at 698 career goals, Phil Kessel scored early in the third period, and host Arizona beat Washington.

Raanta was sharp all night and made a tough early save

against Ovechkin, who has gone four straight games without a goal for the first time this season. He went three games without a goal before notching No. 600 with his wife in the stands in 2018.

Golden Knights 1, Islanders 0: Marc-Andre Fleury got his 60th career shutout, Reilly Smith scored late in the second period, and host Vegas edged New York.

Fleury finished with 19 saves for his fourth shutout this season.

The Golden Knights are 6-3-2 since coach Pete DeBoer replaced the fired Gerard Gallant on Jan. 15.

Fleury improved to 26-11-6 with five shutouts in his career against the Islanders. The wins are the third-most against any opponents for Fleury, while the shutouts are tied for second-most.

Oilers 4, Panthers 1: Adam Larsson scored his first goal since last February, Leon Draisaitl added an insurance goal seconds into the third period and Edmonton won at Florida.

Predators 4, Blues 3: Mi-

kael Granlund scored a power-play goal early in the third period and Nashville won at St. Louis.

Bruins 4, Red Wings 1: David Pastrnak scored his 42nd goal of the season to lead Boston past visiting Detroit, giving Bruce Cassidy of the Bruins his 200th victory as an NHL coach.

Sharks 2, Wild 0: Martin Jones stopped 39 shots for his first shutout of the season, and Dylan Gambrell scored his third goal for San Jose in a win at Minnesota.

Maple Leafs 4, Senators 2: Auston Matthews scored and Jack Campbell made 24 saves for his third win in four games with Toronto.

Stars 4, Canadiens 3 (OT): Tyler Seguin scored twice, including the overtime winner, to give Dallas a comeback victory at Montreal.

Blackhawks 8, Flames 4: Alex Nylander had two goals and Chicago snapped a five-game losing streak with a win at Calgary.

Baker to MLB: Tell teams to stop criticizing Astros

Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — Dusty Baker wants action from Major League Baseball: End the criticism of the Astros from across baseball over sign stealing, and take steps to ensure pitchers don’t throw at his players.

“It’s not good for the game, it’s not good for kids to see it, so I think both,” the new Houston manager said Saturday. “Stop the comments and also stop something before it happens.”

Baker spoke in response to a wave of harsh comments during spring training about the Astros’ use of video to steal signs in 2017 and 2018. Los Angeles Dodger first baseman Cody Bellinger said Friday the Astros “stole” the 2017 World Series title from them and adds that Jose Altuve did likewise with the MVP, denying the Yan-

kees’ Aaron Judge.

Houston players, management and ownership spent the first day of camp apologizing for their actions and professing remorse. But many players and front offices around the league didn’t feel they went far enough.

Washington general manager Mike Rizzo said he wanted to hear the Astros use the word “cheated” when addressing the situation.

“I’m depending on the league to try to put a stop to the seemingly premeditated retaliation that I’m hearing about,” Baker said. “In most instances in life you get kind of reprimanded for when you have premeditated anything.”

Dodgers pitcher Ross Stripling indicated he might intentionally throw at Houston batters if he faced them.

“We don’t start nothing,” Baker said. “This is kind of the slogan of my team: We don’t start anything — not intentionally. Guys are going to be getting hit intentionally and unintentionally. If you say you are going to drill somebody and all of the sudden you drill them, you can’t say, ‘I wasn’t trying to hit them,’ you know what I mean?”

Cubs star Kris Bryant said he expects teams to throw at Houston hitters, adding that players involved in the scandal “absolutely” should have been punished.

“They’re going to have a tough year this year for sure. I got booed really loud in St. Louis, and they’re going to get ... wow, everywhere they go, rightfully so,” Bryant said at Chicago’s camp in Mesa, Ariz.

“I’m sure they will (get hit by pitches). Pitchers aren’t happy about it.”

Top 25 roundup

Clemson shocks No. 5 Louisville

Associated Press

CLEMSON, S.C. — Clemson's John Newman III had one goal against No. 5 Louisville — stay aggressive.

That resolve brought the Tigers a stunning 77-62 upset win over the Cardinals — and another major moment in what's been an up-and-down season.

Newman had a career-high 23 points as Clemson beat its second AP top-five opponent this year — something it hadn't done since the 1975-76 season.

"It's just crazy for real," Newman said.

"People that know me just tell me to stay aggressive because sometimes I'm passive," he continued. "My coaches, my teammates they believe in me."

Newman made seven of nine shots and went 7-for-7 from the foul line as Louisville (21-5, 12-3 Atlantic Coast Conference) desperately tried to come back by sending the Tigers to the foul line down the stretch.

Newman hadn't cracked double-figure points in more than a month, his last time coming when he scored 14 in the 79-72 upset over then-third-ranked Duke.

It's no coincidence that when

Newman is active and engaged, Clemson (13-12, 7-8) is a more dangerous team, Tigers coach Brad Brownell said.

"When we get multiple guys playing well, we're just a different team," Brownell said.

No. 1 Baylor 70, No. 14 West Virginia: Jared Butler scored 16 of his 21 points in the first half, and the host Bears never trailed while tying the longest winning streak in Big 12 history at 22 games.

The Bears (23-1, 12-0 Big 12) cruised without second-leading scorer MaCio Teague, a junior whose streak of 90 consecutive games ended because of a right wrist injury.

No. 2 Gonzaga 89, Pepperdine 77: Filip Petrushev had 27 points and 12 rebounds for his eighth double-double of the season, and Corey Kispert scored 19 as the Zags won on the road to extend their winning streak to 18 games.

Petrushev scored 20 points in the first half and the sophomore forward created matchup problems all night for the Waves in the paint. He finished four points shy of his career high, set Jan. 30 at Santa Clara.

No. 7 Duke 94, Notre Dame 60: Vernon Carey Jr. scored

21 points, Tre Jones added 19 and the host Blue Devils used their high-intensity man-to-man defense to beat the Fighting Irish.

No. 9 Maryland 67, Michigan State 60: Anthony Cowan scored 11 of his 24 points in the final two-plus minutes, helping the Terrapins win on the road with a strong finish.

Providence 74, No. 10 Seton Hall 71: Alpha Diallo scored a career-high 35 points to lead the host Friars past the Pirates.

Missouri 85, No. 11 Auburn 73: Guards Dru Smith and Xavier Pinson each scored 28 points to lead host Missouri to the upset.

No. 12 Kentucky 67, Mississippi 62: Nick Richards had 16 points, including two go-ahead free throws with 1:11 remaining, and Immanuel Quickley and Keion Brooks each made two more in the closing seconds to help the host Wildcats.

No. 16 Colorado 69, Oregon State 47: Tyler Bey scored 21 points to lead the Buffs to a road win and into sole possession of first place in the Pac-12 Conference.

Georgetown 73, No. 19 Butler 66: Terrell Allen tied a

career high with 22 points, including key baskets on back-to-back possessions late, and the short-handed Hoyas endured on the road without its top two scorers.

SMU 73, No. 20 Houston 72 (OT): Emmanuel Bandoumel hit an off-balance three-point shot with 30 seconds remaining in overtime to give the host Mustangs the upset.

Rutgers 72, No. 22 Illinois 57: Ron Harper Jr. hit all five of his three-pointers and scored 27 points and the Scarlet Knights remained unbeaten at home, sending the Illini to their fourth straight loss.

No. 23 Creighton 93, DePaul 64: Ty-Shon Alexander matched his season high with 24 points in one of his best all-around games, and the Bluejays won at home.

Oklahoma State 73, No. 24 Texas Tech 70: Jonathan Laurent and Kalib Boone each scored 16 points as the host Cowboys registered their first win over a ranked opponent this season.

Alabama 88, No. 25 LSU 82: Kira Lewis Jr. scored 27 points, Jaden Shackelford had 26 and the host Crimson Tide held off a big comeback.

Service academies

Air Force ends skid with win over San Jose State

Associated Press

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. — Ryan Swan and Lavelle Scottie scored 22 points apiece as Air Force snapped its seven-game losing streak, topping San Jose State 95-86 on Saturday.

Swan made 9 of 12 shots. He added eight rebounds and three assists. Scottie had five assists.

A.J. Walker had 10 points, 11 rebounds and nine assists for the Falcons (10-16, 4-10 Mountain West Conference). Ameka Akaya added 10 points.

Richard Washington scored a career-high 31 points and had nine rebounds for the Spartans (7-19, 3-11), who have now lost

five straight games. Seneca Knight added 13 points. Brae Ivey had 10 points.

Air Force won the season series against San Jose State.

Army 79, Lehigh 66: Tommy Funk totaled 26 points, seven rebounds and seven assists and Matt Wilson scored 21 with eight rebounds as the host Black Knights cruised past the Mountain Hawks.

Funk made 9 of 12 shots from the floor, including 3-for-6 from three-point range, and 5 of 6 free throws for the Black Knights (13-12, 8-6 Patriot League). Wilson knocked down 10 of 13 shots for Army, which shot 57% overall and 37.5% from distance (6 of 16).

Jeameril Wilson scored a career-high 20

points on 8-of-11 shooting for the Mountain Hawks (7-19, 4-10 Patriot League).

The Black Knights improve to 2-0 against the Mountain Hawks on the season. Army defeated Lehigh 80-79 on Feb. 1.

Boston University 77, Navy 54: Walter Whyte had a double-double, Max Mahoney nearly recorded another and the Terriers won on the road.

Whyte had 12 points and 10 rebounds and Mahoney added 17 points and nine rebounds for Boston University (16-11, 10-4 Patriot League), which earned its fourth consecutive road victory.

Richard Njoku had 12 points for the Midshipmen (13-12, 7-7), the only Navy player in double figures.