

STARS AND STRIPES[®]

Monday, January 5, 2015

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Formal training mission in Iraq underway

BY JON HARPER

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The formal mission to train Iraqi troops to take on Islamic State militants is underway, according to the Pentagon.

On Monday, Defense Department spokesman Col. Steve Warren told reporters that approximately 170 U.S. soldiers from the Army's 1st Infantry Division are training four Iraqi army battalions near Taji. The effort began Dec. 27 and is expected to last six weeks.

In addition, Marines from a Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force are training soldiers from the Iraqi army's 7th Division at Al Asad Air Base in Anbar province, Warren said. There are about 320 American

troops at Al Asad training Iraqi security forces and performing other advise-and-assist missions. The formal training mission at Al Asad began Dec. 20. Warren did not give a timeline for when that process will be completed.

The U.S. plans to conduct training at two other sites — in Irbil and Besmaya — but it will be weeks before those are up and running, Warren said.

Warren said all Iraqi troops in training have been vetted to make sure they don't have ties to the Islamic State or other terrorist groups.

Training Iraqi forces to fight the Islamic State group on the ground is the linchpin of the Obama administration's strategy to defeat the militants, who have taken over large chunks

of Iraq and Syria. President Barack Obama has ruled out sending U.S. ground forces into combat in Iraq, leaving the burden of dislodging the terrorist organization to local forces.

The U.S. and its allies plan on training 12 Iraqi security forces, or ISF, and peshmerga brigades. The larger training mission will be a long one, according to officials. Lt. Gen. James Terry, the commander of Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve, said last month that it will take "a minimum of three years" before the ISF and Kurdish peshmerga are capable of defeating the Islamic State group.

There are approximately 2,140 American troops in Iraq, 800 of whom are engaged in providing security and force

protection; the remainder are training, advising and assisting the ISF and peshmerga. Obama has authorized the deployment of an additional 1,000.

Although American ground forces are not engaged in combat with the Islamic State group, they are not completely out of harm's way. Warren said the Al Asad base is coming under "regular" indirect fire, but there have been no U.S. casualties as a result.

"The fire has been completely ineffective," Warren said, describing them as "purely nuisance attacks." He said he is not aware of any American troops returning fire, but U.S. forces maintain the right of self-defense.

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Lawmaker to reintroduce military justice bill

BY JENNIFER HLAD

Stars and Stripes

The debate over a commander's role in the military justice system isn't over.

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand's legislative efforts to remove prosecutorial authority from commanders in most serious crimes failed last year, but the Democrat from New York will reintroduce her bill during the new session of Congress, which begins Tuesday.

While Gillibrand is determined to force change, she will face even more hurdles pushing the bill forward as a member of the minority party.

She's not without Republican supporters: Sen. Chuck Grassley of Iowa, Sen. Susan Collins of Maine, Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky, Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas and Sen. Dean Heller of Nevada stood with her at a press

conference in favor of the bill in early December. Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., then the Senate minority leader, voted for the legislation in March.

Yet when she tried to force a vote just a few days before the Senate adjourned last year, Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., a powerful member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, would not have it. "You're going too far," Graham said. "This is no longer about reforming a system. This is a political cause going out of control."

The bill died without a vote. "The [Department of Defense] has failed on this issue for over 20 years now," Gillibrand said, "and the scandals of the last 12 months and the latest data shows that they still don't get it."

Gillibrand first introduced the legislation in November 2013, but she was not the first

member of Congress to propose removing prosecution authority from the chain of command. Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., in 2011 introduced the Sexual Assault Training, Oversight and Protection Act, which differs from Gillibrand's legislation in that it would remove prosecution authority only for sexual assaults, not for other serious crimes such as murder or robbery. Speier has reintroduced the STOP Act in each session of Congress since, but it has never been voted on by the House.

Gillibrand had better luck gaining support for her bill, but in March 2014 it fell five votes short of the 60 needed to break a filibuster threat in the Senate.

She began a new push for the bill just after Thanksgiving, standing with the former chief prosecutor of the Air Force and a bipartisan group of colleagues two days before the DOD re-

leased its report outlining how many sexual assaults were officially reported and how many more they estimate were not reported.

Gillibrand's timing appeared to be calculated to get in front of the report, which President Barack Obama ordered in 2013, saying he would consider additional reforms if he didn't see the kind of progress he expected.

Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has consistently fought Gillibrand's efforts to remove prosecution authority from the chain of command. But in March, he seemed open to a different path if there was no improvement.

"If we haven't been able to demonstrate we're making a difference, you know, then we deserve to be held to the scrutiny and standard," he said.

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Amid racial issues, cops defiant

The Washington Post

The frustration and defiance of the nation's police officers were on display again Sunday in New York City, where tens of thousands of them gathered for the funeral of the second of two officers whose murders happened at the height of the ongoing protests and scrutiny after several high-profile deaths of unarmed black males.

A large number of the officers who stood under grey skies, dressed in their formal, blue uniforms, staged their own protest, turning their backs when Mayor Bill de Blasio rose to speak at the funeral. Even some out-of-town officers joined NYPD members in the show of disrespect toward de Blasio, an outspoken critic of some policing tactics.

As the nation continues to grapple with the thorny issues of race and policing, some officers have been bruised by comments made by some local and national officials and have accused them of showing more support for the protesters, some of whom have violently clashed with police, than for their police departments. Law enforcement officials say morale is flagging among the rank and file, who they say feel "betrayed" by President Barack Obama and Attorney General Eric Holder in their calls for tough reforms of policing tactics.

Attack on police in Kabul kills 1

The Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — A suicide car bomber struck near the headquarters of the European police training mission in Kabul on Monday, killing one Afghan civilian and wounding 16 people, police and EUPOL said.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack, the first against a foreign target in the Afghan capital in 2015.

According to EUPOL, the driver of the explosives-laden car apparently targeted a mission convoy of vehicles near its headquarters on the eastern outskirts of Kabul.

"The vehicle's occupants were uninjured," said EUPOL, which funds and trains Afghan-

istan's 157,000-strong police force.

The spokesman for the Afghan public health ministry, Kaneshka Baktarsh Turkistany, said three Afghan troops also were wounded.

Earlier on Monday, an explosion near Kabul's international airport caused no casualties. Kabul was hit by several attacks in the last weeks of 2014 as the Taliban targeted government, military and foreign installations. The flurry of attacks killed six foreigners.

In southern Helmand province, an Afghan investigator said Monday that two soldiers were arrested over the deaths of at least 28 people during New Year's Eve, when artillery shells hit a house where a wed-

ding party was underway. The explosion also wounded more than 50 people.

Din Mohammad, part of a presidential delegation sent to Sangin district to investigate the incident, said the probe had determined there was a heavy firefight with insurgents nearby at the time.

The two soldiers will face unspecified charges, Mohammad said, adding that further investigation would determine whether they deliberately targeted the house.

Also on Monday, a roadside bomb hit a NATO convoy in eastern Nangahar province, damaging one vehicle but inflicting no casualties, spokesman Capt. Frank Hartnett said.

Jury selection starts in Boston bombing

The Associated Press

BOSTON — Potential jurors stared intently at Boston Marathon bombing suspect Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, 21, as jury selection in his federal death penalty trial began Monday under tight security.

Tsarnaev, flanked by his attorneys, sat at a table in the front of the jury assembly room. Wearing a dark sweater and khaki trousers, he picked at his beard, looked at the potential jurors and looked at the judge.

During the next three days, about 1,200 people will be called to federal court to be

considered as potential jurors. The first 200 were given initial instructions Monday by Judge George O'Toole Jr. Twelve jurors and six alternates are to be selected.

The judge said the trial will begin on Jan. 26 and will last three to four months.

Prosecutors say Dzhokhar and his brother, Tamerlan Tsarnaev — ethnic Chechens who had lived in the United States for about a decade — carried out the bombings as retaliation for U.S. actions in Muslim countries. Tamerlan Tsarnaev, 26, died after a firefight with

police several days after the bombings.

The defense is expected to argue that Dzhokhar had a difficult childhood and was heavily influenced by his elder brother, who authorities believe became radicalized in the last few years of his life, including during a six-month trip to Dagestan and Chechnya in 2012.

The courthouse was under tight security Monday, with dozens of police officers inside and outside the building. One bombing victim, Karen Brassard, was outside the jury room waiting to observe jury selection.

Obama to test power with Republican-run Congress

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama this week will test whether he still has the power to keep Washington focused on his own goals, even as a new, Republican-run Congress is eager to take him on.

Obama already has begun

preparing for his annual State of the Union address to Congress on Jan. 20 — the agenda-setting speech that is his best chance to set the agenda for 2015 on his own terms. Obama, fresh off a two-week Hawaii vacation, will roll out new executive steps and proposals for Congress this week on home ownership,

higher education and manufacturing jobs — a menu similar to what he has offered in the past.

Republicans, emboldened by their sweeping victories in the November elections, have a different plan. After expanding their majority in the House of Representatives and winning control of the Senate, giving

them full control of Congress for the first time of Obama's presidency, Republicans look forward to an all-out offensive against Obama's policies.

Congress reconvenes after a series of high-profile presidential moves in the last six weeks of the year energized Obama — and infuriated Republicans.

Hunt carries Toledo to bowl victory

The Associated Press

MOBILE, Ala. — Sophomore Kareem Hunt is already one of the most accomplished running backs in Toledo history. The five seniors blocking for him were intent on ending their college careers with a victory.

Combine the two and the Rockets were a running juggernaut that Arkansas State simply couldn't stop.

Hunt ran for a bowl-record 271 yards and five touchdowns to lead Toledo (9-4) over Arkansas State 63-44 on Sunday night. He averaged 8.5 yards per carry and scored three touchdowns in the first half as the Rockets took a 35-17 lead by halftime.

"Kareem has a special gear and it happens a lot when you least expect it," Toledo center Greg Mancz said. "That's what makes him so special."

The 5-foot-11, 200-pound Hunt capped a phenomenal season by slicing through Arkansas State's defense early and often. The performance easily set a GoDaddy Bowl record, topping the previous mark of 207 set by Tulsa's Tarrion Adams in 2009.

Hunt, who was the game's offensive MVP, said he wished he could give the trophy to the offensive line.

"We just had to keep putting points on the board," Hunt said. "Our offense definitely did that and the offensive line never stopped blocking."

Arkansas State (7-6) pulled within 49-38 in the fourth quarter, but could get no closer. The Red Wolves were playing in their fourth straight GoDaddy Bowl and fell to 2-2 over that span.

Arkansas State's Fredi Knighen threw for 403 yards and five touchdowns.

No. 5 Louisville wins ACC debut

The Associated Press

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. — Chris Jones kept No. 5 Louisville's first Atlantic Coast Conference game from turning into its first ACC loss.

Jones scored 20 of his 22 points in the second half and the Cardinals won in their ACC debut, pulling away to beat Wake Forest 85-76 on Sunday night.

Jones — who entered with only six more assists than turnovers for the season — added a career-high 10 assists and had only two turnovers.

"All Chris Jones has to do to be one of the better point guards in the country is listen," coach Rick Pitino said. "He's gone from never listening in junior college and high school to listening about 70 percent of the time. All he's got to do is get it to 100 and we've got ourselves a special player."

Jones quibbled only with his Hall of Fame coach's math.

"I'd say I listen 80 percent," Jones said, smiling. "Coach is wrong. I'll tell him he's 10 percent wrong."

Montrezl Harrell had 25 points and 13 rebounds for the Cardinals (13-1, 1-0), who let a 13-point lead slip away before Jones took over late, scoring 14 points in the final 8 minutes.

Devin Thomas had a career-high 31 points and 11 rebounds for Wake Forest (8-7, 0-2), which led 69-68 on Konstantinos Mitoglou's layup with just under 6 minutes to play.

Jones put Louisville ahead to stay two possessions later with a contested jumper that started decisive run. He was 6-for-6 from the free-throw line in the final 5 minutes for Louisville, which scored on nine of its last 10 possessions.

Codi Miller-McIntyre and freshman Mitchell Wilbekin had 14 points apiece for Wake Forest, which had its three-game winning streak snapped but won't have

to wait long for another shot at a top-five team: No. 2 Duke visits later this week.

"We could play with anybody with that effort," Thomas said. "We've just got to be better with details, the scouting report, and we've got to learn how to finish games."

Terry Rozier added 18 points for the Cardinals, who are playing in their eighth basketball conference and their third in three years, with their one-season stint in the American Athletic Conference in 2013-14 coming after the Big East broke up.

Stanford 68, No. 21 Washington 60 (OT): Chasson Randle's driving layin with 2.2 seconds left in regulation sent the game into overtime, Rosco Allen hit a key three-pointer in OT after missing all six of his free throws during regulation, and Stanford spoiled No. 21 Washington's Bay Area trip.

Robert Upshaw missed a pair of free throws for Washington (11-3, 0-2 Pac-12) with 40.2 seconds remaining in OT and the Huskies missed all three of their field-goal tries in the extra 5 minutes after a pair of 28-point halves by each team.

Stanford (10-3, 2-0) won its fourth straight and held off another ranked team in overtime after a 74-71 win at then-No. 9 Texas on Dec. 23.

No. 4 Wisconsin 81, Northwestern 58: Frank Kaminsky and Sam Dekker scored 16 points apiece, leading Wisconsin past host Northwestern.

The Badgers (14-1, 2-0 Big Ten) made 12 three-pointers and shot 53 percent from the field overall. Dujie Dukan had 14 points in Wisconsin's seventh consecutive victory, and Nigel Hayes finished with 10 points. Kaminsky also had 10 rebounds and six assists.

No. 8 Arizona 73, Arizona

State 49: Rondae Hollis-Jefferson had 13 points and eight rebounds, and Arizona routed Arizona State to open Pac-12 play.

Arizona (12-1) was sharp after an extended break, dominating Arizona State at both ends to quickly turn its rivalry game into a runaway. The Wildcats took control with a big early run while building a 20-point halftime lead and kept the pressure up to get their conference season off to a rousing start.

No. 10 Utah 71, UCLA 39: Delon Wright had 11 points, seven rebounds, five assists and four steals in host Utah's victory.

Jakob Poeltl had nine points and 10 rebounds for the Utes (12-2, 2-0 Pac-12), who beat the Bruins in Salt Lake City for the second straight season.

No. 13 Kansas 76, UNLV 61: Frank Mason had 18 points and seven assists, Wayne Selden added 16 points and host Kansas pulled away late in the Jayhawks' nonconference finale.

Perry Ellis also had 16 points, Kelly Oubre had 12 points and 10 rebounds and Cliff Alexander scored 10 off the bench to help the Jayhawks (11-2) win their 15th straight at Allen Fieldhouse.

No. 16 Wichita State 70, Illinois State 62: Ron Baker scored 15 points on 7-for-8 shooting and Wichita State won its 20th straight victory over a Missouri Valley Conference foe.

Wichita State (12-2, 2-0) also has won 24 straight at Koch Arena, the fifth-longest active streak in the country.

No. 23 Northern Iowa 67, Loyola (Illinois) 58: Jeremy Morgan scored a career-high 18 points and host Northern Iowa beat Loyola of Illinois for its third win in four games.

Ducks edge Predators in SO, maintain NHL's best record

The Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — The Anaheim Ducks have achieved the best record in the NHL by winning close games and wearing down their opponents along the way. The Nashville Predators found that out the hard way in their first meeting of the season.

Defenseman Francois Beauchemin scored the tying goal with 2:17 left in regulation and Ryan Kesler got the deciding goal in the shootout, giving the Ducks a 4-3 victory Sunday night after they outshot the Predators 14-3 in the third period. Seventeen of Anaheim's last 19 victories have been by one-goal margins, including four in overtime and four by shootouts.

"It's not the way we draw it up," the Ducks' Corey Perry said. "They're a heck of a hockey team. They can skate, they can make plays, and it was a battle out there tonight. They play really hard and battle for every inch."

Perry and Matt Beleskey also had goals in regulation for the Ducks, who have a league-best 58 points, and Frederik

Andersen made 27 saves in a matchup of division leaders.

"Good teams know how to win those one-goal games," Kesler said. "That's how they are in the playoffs. Playoffs are one-goal games. So if we know how to win them now, it's going to make it that much easier then."

Seth Jones and Craig Smith had power-play goals in the second period and Mattias Ekholm also scored for the Predators. Backup goalie Carter Hutton stopped 30 shots, but remained winless in five starts this season — all on the road.

The Ducks got the tying goal when Beauchemin poked the puck past Hutton's right skate during a goalmouth scramble for his second goal of an injury-plagued season.

The Predators, who blew a three-goal lead against the Stanley Cup champion Los Angeles Kings in the final 2:01 of regulation on Saturday before winning in overtime, slipped into a tie atop the Central Division with Chicago after the Blackhawks beat Dallas in overtime.

Blackhawks 5, Stars 4 (OT):

Patrick Sharp scored 1:17 into overtime to give host Chicago a win over Dallas and end the Stars' four-game winning streak.

Sharp drove past Jason Spezza down the slot, took Duncan Keith's feed from the left point and beat Kari Lehtonen with a shot that slipped between the goalie's body and his blocker.

Chicago's Brad Richards fooled Lehtonen with an improbable sharp-angle shot with 3:57 left in the third period to tie it at 4 and set up overtime.

Capitals 4, Panthers 3: Alex Ovechkin had a goal and an assist to help host Washington beat Florida.

Braden Holtby made 29 saves for Washington.

Hurricanes 2, Bruins 1

(SO): Eric Staal scored the only goal in the shootout to lift host Carolina past Boston.

Anton Khudobin got the start in goal for Carolina in place of Cam Ward, who played the previous four games. Khudobin, a former Bruin, made 19 saves and stopped Reilly Smith, Patrice Bergeron and Torey

Krug in the shootout.

Blue Jackets 4, Avalanche 3: David Savard drove in a shot from just inside the blue line with 1:01 left in the third period, lifting visiting Columbus past Colorado.

Savard was able to get enough on the puck to knock it past Semyon Varlamov for the Blue Jackets' fifth win in their last six road games.

Lightning 4, Senators 2: Tyler Johnson had two goals and Nikita Kucherov had two assists to lead Tampa Bay past host Ottawa.

The Lightning took a 3-2 lead into the third period and increased that to 4-2 at the 7:58 mark on Johnson's second goal of the game.

Oilers 5, Islanders 2: Matt Hendricks scored a pair of goals and host Edmonton topped New York.

Jordan Eberle, Derek Roy and Matt Fraser also scored for the Oilers, who won for just the third time in their last 25 games.



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Mavericks dominate struggling Cavaliers

The Associated Press

CLEVELAND — While the wins keep piling up for the Dallas Mavericks, all the Cavaliers keep adding are injuries.

Monta Ellis scored 20 points, Dirk Nowitzki added 15 and the Mavericks won their fifth straight game Sunday, a 109-90 victory over the Cavaliers, whose news on the injury front gets worse by the day.

Cleveland again played without LeBron James, who is out with knee and back soreness. Kyrie Irving left in the third quarter with lower back tightness and wasn't expected to make the trip to Philadelphia for Monday night's game.

As his team raised its record to 25-10, Mavericks coach Rick Carlisle recognized the Cavaliers are far from full strength.

"This is the kind of team we've got to beat," he said. "They're without the best player in the world and lost one of the best point guards in the league. They were already down bodies when Kyrie went out, but I really did think it was a harder game than the score indicated."

James missed his fourth game in a row and fifth of the season. The Cavaliers are 1-4 when the four-time MVP doesn't play and have dropped 5 of 7 overall.

Nowitzki has 27,397 career points and is 12 shy of tying Moses Malone for seventh place all-time.

Kevin Love scored a season-high 30 points, but the Cavaliers couldn't stay with the Mavericks, who had six players in double figures.

Heat 88, Nets 84: Chris Bosh scored 26 points, Dwyane Wade scored 10 of his 25 points in the final minutes and host Miami held off Brooklyn to snap a four-game losing streak.

Hassan Whiteside had 11 points, 10 rebounds and five blocks off the bench for Miami, which won for only the seventh tie in 19 home games.

Joe Johnson scored 19, Brook Lopez added 16 and Mirza Teletovic had 14 for Brooklyn.

Pistons 114, Kings 95: Brandon Jennings scored 35 points as Detroit beat visiting Sacramento for their fifth straight win.

Andre Drummond had 15 points and 14 rebounds and Greg Monroe had 14 points 11 rebounds for Detroit.

Suns 125, Raptors 109: Eric Bledsoe scored 20 points, fellow guards Goran Dragic and Isaiah Thomas added 18 apiece and host Phoenix handed Toronto their second straight blowout loss.

Seven Suns hit double figures in the team's highest-scoring non-overtime game this season.

Bucks 95 Knicks 82: Zaza Pachulia had 16 points and 14 rebounds as visiting Milwaukee handed New York their 11th straight loss.

Tim Hardaway, Jr. had 17 points for the Knicks (5-31), who lost a franchise-record 10th straight home game.

Giannis Antetokounmpo had 16 points and 12 rebounds for Milwaukee (18-17).

Lakers 88, Pacers 87: Kobe Bryant scored 20 points and hit the go-ahead short jumper with 12.4 seconds to play to lead Los Angeles to a comeback victory over visiting Indiana.

Bryant scored nine points in the final 2:32 while the Lakers rallied past the Pacers, who blew a 13-point lead in the second half.

Romo, Cowboys rally past Lions

The Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Tony Romo has his first come-from-behind victory in the playoffs, a refreshing reprise for a career filled with season-ending disappointments.

The Dallas quarterback's late touchdown pass to Terrance Williams gave the Cowboys a 24-20 wild-card victory over Detroit on Sunday and sent them to Green Bay for their first postseason visit since the Packers won the Ice Bowl for the NFL championship 47 years ago.

Anyone looking for a big exhale from the 34-year-old quarterback who avoided more heartache in Dallas' first playoff game in five years, well, it's not happening.

"There is no sense of relief," said Romo, who also had a 76-yard TD toss to Williams to start the rally from an early 14-0 defi-

cit. "Our aspirations weren't winning the division, as great as that was. And it's not just winning a playoff game, as great as that was."

The Cowboys (13-4) will play their third divisional round game under Romo against the Packers on Sunday. He lost the first two, including at home to the New York Giants during the 2007 season when Dallas was the top seed in the NFC.

"I think people appreciate Tony as having the skills that he has," owner Jerry Jones said. "I hope they see that he's made some pretty impressive plays and had big games. The only thing that will ever get them off his back totally would be to get that Super Bowl win."

The 34-year-old who had back surgery in December 2013 and missed one game with another back injury bounced back from a season-high six sacks to finish with 293 yards and a passer rating right in line with a franchise-best 113.2 that led

the NFL in the regular season.

"I'm thrilled for him," said Jones, who gave Romo the first \$100 million contract in franchise history almost two years ago.

The Lions (11-6) went 99 yards for one of two first-quarter touchdowns, but Matthew Stafford couldn't get them in the end zone again.

Detroit was driving with a 20-17 lead midway through the fourth quarter when referee Pete Morelli announced a pass interference penalty against Anthony Hitchens on a third-down pass to Brandon Pettigrew. But officials reversed the call without explanation, and Sam Martin followed with a 10-yard punt.

"Not a good enough one. I'm going to leave it at that," Lions coach Jim Caldwell said of the explanation he got. "I'm not going to sit up here and act like that was the play that made a difference in the game."

Luck's heroics help lift Colts over Bengals

The Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Andrew Luck is eager to get right back to work.

Rather than celebrate Sunday's 26-10 win over Cincinnati, the Colts' quarterback immediately explained he was moving on. And rather than engage in a discussion about another matchup with his predecessor, Peyton Manning, Luck focused on the big picture.

Yes, the third-year quarterback is starting to sound like a seasoned playoff veteran.

"I think we face the Broncos," Luck said when asked about Round 3 with Manning. "It's not the quarterback versus quarterback thing. We're not on the field at the same time. I have a lot of respect for him, what he does, what he still does is amazing. He's a stud. I'll worry about the Denver defense, that's what I worry about."

That's a stark contrast to the Luck of the last two seasons.

After a nine-game turnaround in 2012, they were the AFC's surprise playoff team and subsequently made a first-round exit. Last year, after Luck pulled off a 28-point

comeback to beat Kansas City, the Colts were overjoyed. They wound up losing the next week.

This year, Luck and the Colts (12-5) have adopted a business-like approach.

Luck wound up 31 of 44 with 376 yards and finished a playoff game without a turnover for the first time. He also delivered the game-changing 36-yard TD pass as Carlos Dunlap took him to the turf.

Now the Colts have bigger plans.

If Luck beats the Broncos (12-4) on their home turf, something he failed to do in a 31-24 opening-week loss, Indy will face either New England (12-4) or Baltimore (11-6) in the AFC championship game. It won't be easy.

"They're a great football team and obviously they've got a great, great quarterback," Colts coach Chuck Pagano said. "It's always a huge challenge and at the same time, we're going to embrace the opportunity, embrace the moment. It's exciting, it's fun. It's always a great chess match"

Here are some takeaways from Sunday's game:

Historic Misery: Cincinnati be-

came the first NFL team to lose four consecutive opening-round games. Andy Dalton tied Warren Moon for the most consecutive opening-round playoff losses (four) by a quarterback. Coach Marvin Lewis tied Marty Schottenheimer, Jim Mora and Steven Owen for most consecutive playoff losses (six) by a coach. Lewis also tied Mora, the former Colts coach, for most consecutive playoff losses to start a career, and tied Owen for most consecutive playoff losses with one team. Oh, and the Bengals (10-6-1) haven't won a playoff game in 24 years.

De-fense: The Colts' defense is often overlooked. But Indy has been playing well lately. Against a depleted Bengals offense, the Colts limited Jeremy Hill to 13 carries for 47 yards. Indy also dominated the second half, giving up just 98 total yards and five first downs to the Bengals.

Road Woes: Struggles on the road are common in the playoffs. Luck is 0-2 in his career, Cincinnati is 0-7 all-time and Indy has lost its last three playoff games away from home. The Colts' last win was 15-6 at Baltimore in January 2007.

Rams owner plans NFL stadium in LA

The Associated Press

INGLEWOOD, Calif. — A newspaper reports the owner of the St. Louis Rams plans to build an NFL stadium in Los Angeles County, boosting the chances that pro football could return to the region.

The Los Angeles Times says Stan Kroenke has partnered with Stockbridge Capital Group, owners of the 238-acre Hollywood Park site in Inglewood.

Kroenke and Stockbridge say they plan to add an 80,000-seat NFL stadium and 6,000-seat performance venue to a massive development of retail, office, hotel and residential space.

The plan will add to pressure on St. Louis to either strike a deal for a new stadium or watch the team return to Southern California, where it played from 1946 to 1994.

It's the latest of numerous Los Angeles-area NFL stadium proposals over two decades.

Washington LB declares for NFL Draft

SEATTLE — Washington linebacker Shaq Thompson is forgoing his senior season and will declare for the NFL draft.

The school announced Thompson's decision Monday. Thompson's final game was the Huskies' loss to Oklahoma State in the Cactus Bowl last Friday.

Thompson was one of three Huskies on the AP's All-America first team, joining linebacker Hau'oli Kikaha and defensive tackle Danny Shelton. Thompson was honored as an all-purpose player after spending part of the season as Washington's starting running back.

Thompson finished his junior season with 81 tackles and scored four defensive touchdowns, including three on fumble returns. He added 456 yards rushing and two touchdowns on offense.

Cavaliers GM: Blatt is staying as coach

CLEVELAND — Cavaliers general manager David Griffin said David Blatt will remain the team's head coach and that no change will be made.

Griffin, speaking to reporters before Sunday's game against Dallas, called scrutiny about Blatt's job status "ridiculous" and said he isn't giving the rookie head coach a vote of confidence because "he never needed one."

Griffin also took issue with reports that LeBron James, who is sidelined with knee and back soreness, is unhappy with Blatt and said the narrative about the coach's job is over.

"It's a non-story," Griffin said. "Coach Blatt is our coach. He's going to remain our coach."

Griffin disagreed with the idea that James isn't supporting Blatt, talk that began in earnest last week.