

# STARS AND STRIPES<sup>®</sup>

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## Islamic State reaches for Taliban territory

*The Associated Press*

CAMP SHORABAK, Afghanistan — Afghanistan and Pakistan, home to al-Qaida and Taliban militants and the focus of the longest war in U.S. history, face a new, emerging threat from the Islamic State group, officials have told *The Associated Press*.

Disenchanted extremists from the Taliban and other organizations, impressed by the Islamic State group's territorial gains and slick online propaganda, have begun raising its black flag in extremist-dominated areas of both countries.

In Pakistan, an online video purportedly shows militants beheading a man while pledging their allegiance to the Islamic State group. In Afghanistan, there have even been reports of militant rivalries, with clashes erupting between Taliban fighters and Islamic State militants.

Analysts and officials say the number of Islamic State group supporters in the Afghan-Pakistan region remains small and that the group faces resistance from militants with strong trib-

al links. However, the rise of even a small Islamic State affiliate could further destabilize the region and complicate U.S. and NATO efforts to end the 13-year Afghan War.

The Taliban remain the region's pre-eminent insurgency, with nearly 20 years of experience battling Afghan warlords and international troops. But the Taliban are "not a particularly sexy ideology or military force, and the risk lies in the Taliban looking increasingly out of date," said a Western diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters.

"It could be that young Afghans look to the more extreme tactics and the great glitzy publicity of IS (Islamic State)," the diplomat said. "They might find it attractive, or the Taliban might feel the need to compete and therefore become a bit more extreme and start carrying out horrific acts the way you see IS doing."

The Islamic State group controls a third of both Syria and Iraq, where it declared a

caliphate governed by a harsh interpretation of Islamic law, or Sharia, and demanded the allegiance of the world's Muslims. The Taliban, by contrast, are focused on Afghanistan and Pakistan, and some leaders have even responded to past peace overtures.

Smaller militant groups in Libya, Egypt, Lebanon and elsewhere have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group's leader and self-proclaimed caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, with some referring to themselves as "provinces."

In Afghanistan's southern Helmand province, residents say a former Taliban commander named Mullah Abdul Rauf has begun recruiting fighters for the Islamic State group.

"People are saying that he has raised black flags and even has tried to bring down white Taliban flags in some areas," said Saifullah Sanginwal, a tribal leader in Sangin district. "There are reports that 19 or 20 people have been killed" in fighting between the Taliban

and the Islamic State group, he added.

Pakistan Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan said in November that there was no Islamic State group presence, only militants using its name.

However, a government letter written a month earlier and later obtained by *The Associated Press* warns local officials that the Islamic State group has begun courting area militants and that the extremists claim the support of up to "12,000 followers" in northwest Pakistan.

A video released in December showed female students and teachers at Islamabad's Red Mosque, which holds great sway with Pakistan's militants, sitting under an Islamic State flag, pledging support to al-Baghdadi as cleric Maulana Abdul Aziz said it would welcome the group. Last week, an online video released by the Islamic State group showed a former Pakistani Taliban spokesman pledging his support with more than a dozen others before beheading a man they identified as a soldier.

## Afghan officials: 5 arrested for Pakistan school massacre

*The Associated Press*

KABUL, Afghanistan — Afghan security services have arrested five men in connection with the massacre at a Pakistan military school last month that killed 150 people, most of them children, officials said Saturday.

The men, all foreigners, helped support the Dec. 16 assault by the Taliban at the Army Public School and College in the city of Peshawar, the three Afghan officials told *The Associated Press*.

They said the men were ar-

rested in recent weeks near Afghanistan's eastern border with Pakistan.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity as they weren't authorized to brief journalists about the arrests. Officials in Pakistan declined to immediately comment.

The attack in Peshawar, which saw seven Taliban gunmen in suicide bomb vests slaughter children gathered in the school's auditorium and hallways, shocked and enraged citizens across Pakistan.

Though the two countries long have been rivals, Afghan

President Ashraf Ghani has pledged to have closer relations with Pakistan.

Within 24 hours of the school attack, Pakistan's chief of army staff, Gen. Raheel Sharif, flew to Kabul to meet with Ghani to discuss closer cooperation on combating cross-border terrorism.

Western diplomats and military officials have said the level of cooperation between Kabul and Islamabad since the Peshawar attack is unprecedented.

One Western diplomat, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence mat-

ters, said those arrested by Afghanistan might be used in a prisoner swap deal with Pakistan. The diplomat did not say whom Afghanistan might get in return.

Both countries accuse each other of harboring terrorists on the other's territory, enabling them to plan and carry out assaults before sneaking across the mountainous borders they share. Pakistan is in the middle of an operation to attack suspected militant hideouts in its tribal region bordering Afghanistan.

# Report: Super Hornet crash was preventable

*The (Norfolk, Va.) Virginian-Pilot*

Several thousand feet above the Atlantic Ocean a year ago Thursday, two Navy fighter jets banked toward each other at more than 400 mph.

The aerial sparring — intended to simulate a high-stakes combat engagement with an enemy fighter — is typical off the coast of Virginia Beach, where pilots from Oceana Naval Air Station regularly practice basic flight maneuvers.

But on this day, Jan. 15, 2014, something was about to go terribly wrong. The investigation that followed revealed shortcomings in pilot training, and it serves as a cautionary tale for novice fighter pilots still learn-

ing how to keep their bearings while twisting and turning through the sky at the speed of sound.

After their third round that morning, the two pilots from Strike Fighter Squadron 143 leveled off and prepared for one more drill.

In one of the jets, a young pilot was flying his first training mission since becoming qualified to use a special helmet that projects key flight data — such as air speed, altitude and target range — onto his visor.

The pilot, investigators learned later, hadn't gone through a recommended computer-based course before being cleared to fly with the visor-mounted display. In fact, the

investigator discovered, out of 17 squadrons based at Oceana, none reported requiring pilots to complete the course; only one squadron was even aware it existed.

The younger pilot pushed the throttle to maximum power and angled his jet down as he entered a left-hand turn at 12,000 feet above sea level. He began the turn at more than 400 mph, well above the recommended speed for an extreme nose-down maneuver.

Within 15 seconds, the jet had accelerated to more than 575 mph and was descending at a 70 degree angle. The pilot, while monitoring his visor-mounted display and doing his best to keep an eye on the other jet,

apparently had lost track of his rate of descent.

Four seconds later, the jet was pushing 700 mph — nearly the speed of sound — and dropping fast. A warning tone sounded, alerting the pilot that he had fallen below 5,000 feet.

He pulled the throttle back to idle, but the jet continued to descend.

A few seconds later — at roughly 2,500 feet above sea level and still flying at well over 600 mph — the pilot pulled the ejection handle, sending the \$85 million aircraft into the ocean and blasting the aviator up into the air. He survived.

Oversights in training and mission prep were contributing factors, the investigator wrote.

## Stage set for historic ruling

*The Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Supreme Court's decision to hear arguments on whether same-sex couples have a right to marry everywhere in America sets the stage for a potentially historic ruling on one of the country's most sweeping social issues.

The court announced Friday it will take up gay-rights cases that ask it to overturn bans in four states and to declare for the entire nation that people can marry the partners of their choice, regardless of gender. The cases will be argued

in April, and a decision is expected by late June.

The court chose not to decide this issue in 2013, even as it struck down part of a federal anti-gay marriage law that paved the way for a wave of lower-court rulings across the country in favor of same-sex marriage rights.

But the momentum has shifted dramatically in the United States in recent months in favor of gay marriage. America has seen a rapid, dramatic change in public opinion and laws regarding same-sex marriage.

## Terrorist in France attacks buried quietly

PARIS — City officials in Reims say one of the terrorists responsible for deadly attacks last week that killed 17 people was buried in the eastern French city over their objections and despite concerns that the grave could become a shrine for extremists.

Said Kouachi, the elder of the two brothers who together

gunned down 12 people Jan. 7 in their attack on the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, was buried at the demand of the French government, Reims city officials said in a statement Saturday.

"Given the risk of disturbance of the peace and in order to quickly turn the page of this tragic episode, it was decided to do the burial quickly," the city said.

From The Associated Press

## Scientists get a look at vets' brain injuries

*The Washington Post*

Johns Hopkins scientists have discovered what a traumatic brain injury suffered by a quarter-million combat veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan looks like and it's unlike anything they've seen before: a honeycomb pattern of broken connections, primarily in the frontal lobes, our emotional control center and the seat of our personality.

"In some ways it's a 100-year-old problem," said lead author Vassilis Koliatsos, referring to the shell-shock victims of World War I, tens of thousands of British soldiers who returned home physically sound but mentally wounded, haunted by their experiences and unable to fully resume their lives."

Many of the lingering symptoms of shell shock, or what today is known as neurotrauma, are the same as they were 100 years ago. Only the nature of the blast has changed, from high-explosive artillery to improvised explosive device.

Koliatsos and his team examined the brains of five recent U.S. combat veterans, all of whom suffered a traumatic brain injury from an IED but died of unrelated causes back home.

"We saw a type of disease in the brain not seen before," he said. "We didn't even know if we'd see any sign of disease."

Koliatsos and his team began their research by searching for the presence of a protein called amyloid precursor protein, or APP, which is transmitted between neurons along a fiber known as an axon.

TBIs cause those axons to break, and APP coalesces at those breaks, causing a swelling. In car accidents, those swellings are large and bulbous, but in the veterans' brains, they were medium-sized, more spheroidal and formed a honeycomb pattern near blood vessels.

The researchers also noticed that these unusual swellings were particularly evident in the frontal lobes, the seat of executive functions.



# No shortcuts when constructing contenders

*The Associated Press*

SEATTLE — Game plans vary from week to week, opponent to opponent. Any NFL coach will scoff at the notion there's a formula that works the same against everyone.

The exact opposite is true when constructing a contender. In building a successful team, the basics must be adhered to:

- Stability in coaching, the front office and, perhaps most importantly, ownership.

- Forward thinkers.
- Strong drafting and personnel decisions.

- Oh, and standout quarterbacks.

Pete Carroll, who won national championships at Southern California and now has a Super Bowl ring with the Seahawks, never thought he could top USC. His mind has changed.

"I thought I had seen the top of it. We won for so long," Carroll says of his Trojans years.

"We won a lot of games there, a lot of games in a row, and did a lot of stuff. How could you hope to hit it again? I've been around coaching a long time. It's hard to do that and it's rare when it happens. So it just feels like we were very fortunate that we've been able to find a way to put it together in this fashion."

Let's see how this Final Four stacks up.

**Seattle (13-4):** On the verge of becoming the first defending Super Bowl champion in a decade to reach the game again, the Seahawks easily check off all those categories.

Hired in 2010 and given full power by

owner Paul Allen — perhaps the NFL's richest man, but one who doesn't interfere in how the team is run — Carroll added John Schneider as general manager, and off the Seahawks went. They made the playoffs that first season, albeit as the first division winner with a losing record (7-9), and upset New Orleans in a wild-card game.

The building had just begun, though, and it didn't all come together until 2013.

Seattle has done its best work in the draft. Such stars as QB Russell Wilson, DBs Richard Sherman and Kam Chancellor, LB Bobby Wagner, and mainstays C Max Unger, LBs K.J. Wright and Malcolm Smith (last February's Super Bowl MVP), and TE Luke Willson were drafted after the first round. Key wideouts Doug Baldwin and Jermaine Kearse were undrafted.

The Seahawks have hit the mark with veteran free agents DLs Michael Bennett, Tony McDaniels and Cliff Avril, too.

As for forward-thinking minds, simply look at their belief that 2012 third-rounder Wilson should start as a rookie. He merely has a record-setting 36 regular-season wins already.

**Green Bay (13-4):** The only publicly owned NFL team, the Packers haven't allowed democracy to slow them in the Mike McCarthy era. While Packers President Mark Murphy is a steadying presence in Tuletown, McCarthy and GM Ted Thompson have built a winner around All-Pro QB Aaron Rodgers.

Their philosophy is to build from within — rarely does Green Bay delve into free agency, although the addi-

tion of DE-LB Julius Pepper was masterful this season. Of course, when you've gone from a Hall of Fame type quarterback in Brett Favre to another one in Rodgers, it makes personnel moves easier.

"This is the ninth year of our program," says McCarthy, who led the Packers to the 2010 NFL championship. "We've gone through this. Having 20-25 percent of your roster turning over and the majority of it being first- and second-year players, it's a process that you go through from Game 1 until today, and you put your best foot forward Sunday."

McCarthy and his staff aren't afraid to gamble, be it trusting that a jack-of-all-trades collegian such as Randall Cobb could become a star receiver, or that moving standout outside LB Clay Matthews inside would make the defense more formidable.

**New England (13-4):** Robert Kraft is one of the most powerful NFL owners, with input on all key issues. He might be more involved in league matters than those of his team, because he has Bill Belichick in charge.

And Belichick has Tom Brady behind center. Enough said.

New England's hierarchy reports to Kraft on business matters, to Belichick on anything football-wise. With all personnel matters in his hands, Belichick is willing to take chances (see Randy Moss, Chad Johnson, LeGarrette Blount, et al) on veterans with troubled histories. He also reads the draft better than most — except perhaps the Seattle group — finding gems everywhere, from DT Vince Wilfork in the first round (2004) to Brady

at No. 199 way back in 2000 to quarterback turned star receiver Julian Edelman (232nd in 2009).

No one pushes the limits in all aspects like Belichick. Some of it (Spygate) gets him in hot water, and others — last week's use of eligible players at ineligible positions — is totally legal, if devious.

**Indianapolis (13-5):** When Peyton Manning was at quarterback, this was a model franchise under coach Tony Dungy and owner Jimmy Irsay. Much changed when Manning missed all of 2011 following neck surgeries; Dungy had retired in 2009. Irsay has been the constant, and he's had his own personal issues, including a six-game league suspension after he was arrested on preliminary charges of misdemeanor driving while intoxicated and four felony counts of possession of a controlled substance.

But Irsay is a first-rate owner and his choice of Chuck Pagano as coach has been a terrific one. The Colts have gone 11-5 all three of Pagano's seasons, and have progressed one step further in the playoffs each year.

A major reason: they lucked into Andrew Luck. Manning departed in 2012 just when Luck was coming out of Stanford, and the Colts "earned" the top draft pick.

Pagano is a defensive mastermind, yet the Colts have been more impressive with the ball in his tenure. They've scored beyond Luck in the last three drafts with the likes of WR T.Y. Hilton, TEs Coby Fleener and Dwayne Allen, DEs Bjoern Werner and Jonathan Newsum, and OL Jack Mewhort.

Yes, they belong in this Final Four.

## NCAA restores wins taken from Penn State, Paterno

*The Associated Press*

Joe Paterno is the winningest coach in the history of major college football — again. There will be no asterisk next to his record 409 victories in the NCAA record book. At least not one that can be seen.

The late Penn State coach's record was restored by the NCAA on Friday as part of a settlement with the school, which was challenging the legality of the consent decree used to sanction the Nittany Lions for the Jerry Sandusky child-molestation scandal.

Whether the NCAA's latest giveback to Penn State is viewed as another step toward Paterno's vindication or a failure by the one organization that had the ability to hold the coach accountable for his failure to do more to stop Sandusky is in the eyes of the beholder. One thing is for certain: The number 409, like Paterno's legacy, will never be looked at quite the same way again.

For more than four decades, Paterno was not only the embodiment of Penn State football, he was the face of college football. He was revered in State College, Pa., and widely respected as a coach who won 'the right way.' Penn State was a football powerhouse that played by the rules with players who were both top-

notch students and athletes. That was the story told over and over and there were facts to back it up: high graduation rates, national championships and a clean bill of health from the NCAA.

He was Saint Joe to many Penn State supporters in Happy Valley and beyond and always will be.

That he was dragged down by the Sandusky scandal, and fired unceremoniously by Penn State's board of directors a few days after his long-time defensive coordinator was arrested in November 2011 is still hard for many to reconcile.

Paterno died of lung cancer just a few months later. When the NCAA sanctioned Penn State and Paterno based on a scathing report by former FBI director Louis Freeh that accused the Hall of Fame coach and other top Penn State officials of burying child sex-abuse allegations against Sandusky to avoid bad publicity, it shattered JoePa's virtuous public image and infuriated those close to him.

"I never thought it was right in the first place," said former Penn State running back Mike Guman, who played for Paterno from 1976-79. "All those things that were put forth upon him and the blame that was placed on him for something that an

individual did?"

Guman said the restoration of the 111 victories Paterno accumulated from 1998-2011 was warranted and meaningful.

"Is it complete vindication? No, but a step in the right direction," he said. Guman added Paterno's legacy "will never be what it was before."

Florida State coach Bobby Bowden said time is on Paterno's side.

"The longer it goes I think people will look back on Joe for what he accomplished and not those last few days," said Bowden, who is now again No. 2 on the career victories list to Paterno.

NCAA President Mark Emmert said Friday the decision to settle with Penn State was made to ensure the distribution of \$60 million in fines the school has paid over the last three years to help victims of child abuse. The funds had been locked in the legal battle.

Regardless, some say anything that could be viewed as Paterno being absolved sends a terrible message.

"To completely restore, in a sense, Joe Paterno's heretofore pristine reputation, I regret that," said Michael Boni, a lawyer for one of the victims who testified at Sandusky's trial. "He

did a world of good, but he made a huge, huge error in judgment in helping cover up Sandusky's pedophilia, and even posthumously I think that has to be recognized."

Sandusky was convicted of 45 counts and is now serving a 30- to 60-year prison sentence.

Friday's settlement prompted calls by Paterno supporters to bring back to campus the 7-foot bronze statue of the coach that was taken down in 2012. University President Eric Barron says "there will be a time and place" to decide what to do about the statue.

Chris Bevilacqua, a sports media consultant and former All-America wrestler for Penn State, is a longtime friend of the Paterno family. He said Paterno's legacy is personal.

"I think it's fair criticism of Joe to say he should have known more (about Sandusky)," Bevilacqua said. "That was good enough. Here we are trying to put it all back together. Joe Paterno was a principled coach and educator, none of that has ever changed. He was who he was. He will always be that in my eyes. Whether there is a statue or 409 written on a piece of paper somewhere, that won't change my point of view."



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# Westbrook, Thunder outlast Warriors

*The Associated Press*

OKLAHOMA CITY — Russell Westbrook had little to say about one of the best performances of his career.

He felt his play said it all.

Westbrook scored 17 points, had a career-high 17 assists and matched a career best with 15 rebounds to help the Oklahoma City Thunder beat the Golden State Warriors 127-115 on Friday night. It was Westbrook's first triple-double of the season and the ninth of his career.

Westbrook, who has become increasingly short with the media, delivered mostly one-line answers about his effort, focusing on the team's good execution.

Kevin Durant, who scored 36 points on 14-for-18 shooting, didn't get too worked up about it, either.

"I don't want to downplay his performance, but Russ can do that whenever," Durant said. "He doesn't really get too excited over great games because he has so many of them. It was a tremendous game, I think, as far as controlling it, playing defense, rebounding."

Thunder coach Scott Brooks was impressed with his point guard, who had eight assists and six rebounds in the fourth quarter to help the Thunder pull away.

"I thought Russell was all over the floor," Brooks said. "I thought there was two of him out there, the way he was rebounding and moving our offense forward."

Serge Ibaka matched his career high with 27 points on 12-for-18 shooting and Dion Waiters added 21 for the Thunder. Oklahoma City had lost three of four, but bounced back by shooting 53 percent from the floor.

The Thunder ended NBA-leading Golden State's winning streak at eight games.

Klay Thompson scored 32 points, Marreese Speights had 20 and Stephen Curry added 19 for the Warriors. They allowed

their highest point total of the season.

Oklahoma City trailed for most of the first half. Late in the second quarter, Westbrook went for a hard dunk, but the ball bounced straight up in the air and in to give the Thunder a 53-51 lead. They scored the next five points to push their advantage to seven.

"Mid-second quarter, we lost our focus and the game changed," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said.

Oklahoma City inbounded the ball with 0.1 seconds left in the first half, and Steven Adams was fouled by Justin Holiday on a tip attempt. Adams made the first free throw and missed the second, but Westbrook flew in and tipped the ball at the buzzer to give the Thunder a 69-60 lead.

**Hawks 110, Raptors 89:** Al Horford scored 22 points and Eastern Conference-leading Atlanta extended its winning streak to 11 games, beating host Toronto.

The Eastern Conference-leading Hawks have won 25 of 27 to improve to 32-8. The winning streak is their longest winning streak since also winning 11 in a row to begin the 1997-98 season. The Hawks also extended their franchise-record road winning streak to 11 games.

**Cavaliers 126, Clippers**

**121:** Kyrie Irving scored 37 points, LeBron James added 32 and Cleveland held off host Los Angeles.

Tristan Thompson had a season-high 24 points and grabbed 12 rebounds starting in place of Kevin Love, who sat out after hurting his back in Thursday's win over the Lakers.

**Nets 102, Wizards 80:** Brook Lopez and Jarrett Jack each scored 26 points to help visiting Brooklyn beat Washington to snap a seven-game losing streak.

Lopez, the subject of numerous

trade rumors, scored 11 points in just over 2½ minutes in the third quarter. He scored Brooklyn's first eight points of the fourth quarter, too, and had 25 of his 26 points in the second half. Jack had 19 of his 26 points in the final two quarters.

**Suns 110, Timberwolves**

**99:** Goran Dragic scored 21 points, Gerald Green added 19 and host Phoenix sent Minnesota back to its losing ways.

Mo Williams, after scoring a franchise-record 52 on Tuesday night when the Timberwolves beat Indiana to snap a 15-game losing streak, scored 26 points on 10-for-22 shooting against Phoenix.

**Spurs 110, Trail Blazers**

**96:** Kawhi Leonard scored 20 points in his return from a 15-game absence and San Antonio rolled past visiting Portland.

After missing 17 games total due to a torn ligament in his right hand, Leonard's presence energized San Antonio. Tony Parker scored 19 points and Patty Mills added 18 for San Antonio.

**Jazz 94, Lakers 85:** Gordon Hayward scored 31 points on 12-for-18 shooting and added seven assists to lead host Utah past Los Angeles.

Derrick Favors added in 18 points and 10 rebounds, and Trey Burke had 20 points for the Jazz.

**Grizzlies 106, Magic 96:** Newcomer Jeff Green scored 12 of his 21 points in the fourth quarter as Memphis beat host Orlando.

Green played his second game for Memphis after being acquired from Boston on Monday in a three-team trade.

**Bulls 119, Celtics 103:** Derrick Rose scored 20 of his 29 points in

the second half and hit three of visiting Chicago's seven three-pointers in the fourth quarter.

Rose also had 10 assists. Jimmy Butler scored 22 points and Pau Gasol had 20 points and 11 rebounds for Chicago. The Bulls were 27 for 41 in the second half and outscored Boston 31-17 in the fourth quarter.

**Mavericks 97, Nuggets 89:** Dirk Nowitzki scored 25 points after missing a game in Denver to rest, and Dallas split a home-and-home set against the Nuggets.

Tyson Chandler and Rajon Rondo were the other two Dallas starters who sat out the second night of a back-to-back on Wednesday night, and their return helped as well.

**76ers 96, Pelicans 81:** Nerlens Noel had 17 points and 11 boards, and Michael Carter-Williams scored 22 points to lead Philadelphia past visiting New Orleans.

The Sixers never trailed in only their third home win of the season. They put away the short-handed Pelicans in a hurry, making 10 of their first 14 shots and racing to a 16-point lead in the first quarter.

**Heat 95, Kings 83:** Chris Bosh scored 30 points and Luol Deng had 25 for visiting Miami.

Miami scoring leader Dwyane Wade missed his second straight game with a hamstring strain.

**Pistons 98, Pacers 96:** Brandon Jennings scored a season-high 37 points and Andre Drummond tipped in the winner with 0.3 seconds left in Detroit's victory over host Indiana.

With 23.9 seconds left, Detroit called a timeout. Jennings took the inbounds pass and held for the last second shot. He drove to the bucket and missed the layup, but Drummond was there for the tip-in.

# Okposo's four goals lift Islanders over Penguins

*The Associated Press*

UNIONDALE, N.Y. — Kyle Okposo called former Islanders star Bryan Trottier a mentor. He made his teacher proud on a night New York's career-leading scorer was honored on Long Island.

Okposo scored three of his career-high four goals in a wild third period, and the Islanders rallied to beat the Pittsburgh Penguins 6-3 and move back on top of the Eastern Conference on Friday night.

"When I came into the league, my first rookie camp (Trottier) was there," Okposo said. "I just kind of picked his brain. The way that he carried himself and still carries himself is something that I really look up to and try to emulate."

Trottier won the Stanley Cup four times with the Islanders and twice with the Penguins. He tops New York's career scoring list with 1,353 points.

Okposo seemed to be trying to catch him in one night.

He netted New York's first goal, got the tying tally in the third, put his team ahead moments later, and then punctuated the Islanders' fourth straight win with goal No. 4 inside an electric Nassau Coliseum.

"To score four is pretty special," said Okposo, who has 13 overall this season and a career-best 13 against the Penguins. "The atmosphere — it was awesome out there. I haven't really heard it that loud since we played these guys in the (2013) playoffs."

The Penguins seemed poised to overtake the Islanders atop the Metropolitan Division and tie Tampa Bay for first in the East, but they failed to hold leads of 2-0 and 3-2.

Pittsburgh captain Sidney Crosby had two goals and an assist in a losing cause.

"We just didn't raise our level enough in the third. We didn't make smart plays," Crosby said. "They are a good team. You give them chances like that, they are going to put them in."

Okposo cut New York's deficit to 2-1 in the first period, tied it 3-3 at 6:42 of the third, and put the Islanders ahead with 8:09 remaining. He added an insurance power-play goal with 2:39 remaining, and Michael Grabner scored an empty-net goal with 1:13 left.

"They took the momentum with the tying goal. Had a real surge," Penguins coach Mike Johnston said. "They took over the game."

Okposo had help from his linemates, captain John Tavares and Josh Bailey, who both had three assists. Bailey sent a perfect feed to Okposo in the slot for the go-ahead goal.

"I seem to have some puck luck against them," Okposo said. "They have been such a good team for a long time. They did a really good job of limiting our opportunities. They frustrated us."

Crosby gave the Penguins the lead in the first with a power-play goal and then assisted on David Perron's man-advantage tally. He scored again with

4.4 seconds left in the second period to break a 2-2 tie.

Crosby's three points gave him 50 this season, tying him for the team lead with Evgeni Malkin, who had one assist. The Islanders (30-13-1) lead Pittsburgh (26-11-6) by three points.

New York, which returned from a 5-2 trip, has won four straight. The Islanders are 3-1 against Pittsburgh this season with one meeting remaining.

"Our division is heating up and there are some really good teams that are chasing us now," Okposo said. "We just want to keep getting better."

Jaroslav Halak made 21 saves and outdueled fellow All-Star Marc-Andre Fleury, who stopped 29 shots and heard taunting chants of his name.

Ryan Strome added a goal for New York, and Tavares notched his 200th NHL assist.

"We're in first place now, but that can change real quick," Tavares said. "All these wins are big wins, but you've got to go out there and continue that."

**Canucks 3, Hurricanes 0:** Ryan Miller stopped 27 shots in his second straight shutout and visiting Vancouver beat Carolina.

Derek Dorsett, Shawn Matthias and Alexandre Burrows scored the Canucks' three goals in a span of 10 minutes, 31 seconds of the second period.

**Ducks 5, Devils 1:** Hampus Lindholm and Jacob Silfverberg scored 1:52 apart to break open a tie

game, and Corey Perry got his team-high 19th goal to lead host Anaheim.

Patrick Maroon and Silfverberg scored in the final 3:33, helping the Ducks remain tied with Nashville atop the overall NHL standings following the Predators' 4-3 win over Washington.

**Jets 4, Blackhawks 2:** Bryan Little and Chris Thorburn scored 28 seconds apart midway through the third period to snap a tie, and visiting Winnipeg won its third straight.

Zach Bogosian and Andrew Ladd each had a goal and an assist for the Jets, who — along with rookie goalie Michael Hutchinson — beat the Blackhawks for the third time this season, all in Chicago.

**Predators 4, Capitals 3:** James Neal scored twice and surging Nashville spoiled coach Barry Trotz's return, beating Washington for its fifth straight victory.

Seth Jones and Mattias Ekholm had the other goals for the Predators, who fired Trotz at the end of last season. Trotz was the team's inaugural coach, leading Nashville through its first 15 NHL seasons before taking the job in Washington.

**Rangers 2, Blue Jackets 1:** Marc Staal and Chris Kreider both scored and Henrik Lundqvist made 35 saves to lead visiting New York.

Derek Stepan, who was a game-time decision to play due to an upper-body injury, had two assists.