

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

## 2 US contractors killed in Kabul ID'd

*The (Myrtle Beach, S.C.)  
Sun News*

Two out of three U.S. contractors killed in Afghanistan Thursday have been identified by local media sources.

Walt Fisher, 49, a Praetorian Standard Inc. employee from North Myrtle Beach, S.C., was killed when a gunman dressed as an Afghan soldier opened fire at a base attached to Kabul's international airport, according to information from the military officials and the man's family.

The Idaho State Journal reported that one of the other victims was Jason D. Landphair,

formerly of Chubbuck, Idaho.

Wounded during his first tour in Iraq, Landphair was killed during his fourth stint in Afghanistan — three of them as a medic for the Army Special Forces, the newspaper said.

The third American victim has not been identified.

Dre Fisher said her husband was training Afghan soldiers there and had been in the country for 30 days. He was scheduled to come home March 17.

"He was such a loving son, brother, friend to everybody," she said, "and such a wonderful husband to me."

The military reported Friday that three contractors were killed and a fourth was injured when a man wearing an Afghan National Security Forces uniform began shooting at a group of contractors in the northern section of Hamid Karzai International Airport. The gunman also died during the attack.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the killings.

Maj. Brad Avots, a U.S. Department of Defense spokesman, said he did not have any information about the contractors. He did, however, provide a statement from the company:

"We can confirm that on January 29, 2015, three employees of Praetorian Standard, Inc. were killed and one was wounded in Afghanistan while supporting the efforts of the U.S. Government. This was a terrible day for the families involved, our company and the United States. We are shocked by the tragic nature of these deaths and offer our deepest condolences to the families of these brave men."

PSI has offices in North Carolina, Virginia and Maryland as well as an international office in Kabul.

## Civilians bear brunt of attacks on Kabul road

**BY JAD SLEIMAN**  
*Stars and Stripes*

KABUL, Afghanistan — From his modest grocery, Sameem can see the crudely paved-over crater left behind after a massive suicide bomb killed five people and wounded 20 late last year.

"There was a huge blast, so powerful we thought it was next door," he said. "We ran out and some people said it was on the road. My brother was injured."

Sameem's grocery is one of dozens of ramshackle shops that stand beside foreign-run fortresses on Kabul's Jalalabad Road — the most dangerous street in one of the world's most dangerous cities.

For years, the 20-mile stretch of road from Afghan National Police District 9 to the Afghan Army's Camp Phoenix has been a frequent target of Taliban attacks, presumably because of the heavy convoy traffic to and from the major installations that line the highway.

Mohammed Salim Almas, head of the ANP's 9th district,

said the Jalalabad Road has seen more attacks than any other part of the city, although he had no precise figures.

More often than not, when the dust and smoke clear, it's the Afghans who work in plywood shops and drive civilian Toyota Corollas that lay dead or injured rather than the Taliban's true targets, who generally work behind heavy blast walls and ride around in armored vehicles.

In the past three months, there have been at least six attacks along the highway, claiming more than 10 lives, including one British national, and injuring dozens more Afghan civilians.

"We are the real witnesses and victims of these explosion because we are so near," said construction supply store owner Shafiq, who like many Afghans goes by only one name. "A few weeks ago, I was sitting in my shop like today and suddenly there was a huge blast and smoke. There were bicycle riders and shopkeepers dead."

He was referring to the Jan. 5 suicide car bombing against

a European police training mission convoy, the first attack against foreigners in Kabul claimed by the Taliban this year. Officials reported one Afghan civilian killed and five injured while the occupants of the target vehicle escaped unharmed.

At a time when coalition fatalities are at 10-year lows — NATO deaths fell for the fifth straight year in 2014 — the United Nations counted 3,188 Afghan civilians killed and 6,429 injured nationwide last year, a record high.

And people like Safiq, who has owned his business on Jalalabad Road for eight years, suspect the count is much higher.

"On TV, they'll say that just one person was killed (in an attack), but I'll see 12," he said.

Life is slightly less dangerous for the foreigners on the road. Most of their compounds are protected by concrete barriers topped with concertina wire.

A few weeks ago, Taliban militants attempted to storm the nearby Green Village complex following four suicide bomb attacks. Afghan forces killed

the attackers after an hourlong firefight. A Nepalese guard was wounded, but no other foreigners were killed or injured.

International security forces in Kabul are mindful of the risks to the Afghans created by their proximity to the local shops.

Almas said the concentration of foreigners and Afghan military make the street a prime target for the Taliban. The enormous volume of travelers from four eastern provinces of Nangarhar, Kunar, Laghman and Nuristan also complicates defense efforts.

Thanks to stepped-up patrols and an increased number of checkpoints, however, "we were able to reduce such attacks in the last couple of weeks" he said.

It's unclear whether the reduction is mostly due to effective Afghan security forces or winter weather. Fighting in Afghanistan is typically seasonal, slowing to a crawl as snow clogs mountain passes and dirt roads, and picking up again in the spring and summer months.

# NATO units to deploy to Eastern Europe

*The Associated Press*

BRUSSELS — NATO will deploy small units in six Eastern European nations to help coordinate a spearhead force set up in response to Russia's actions in Ukraine, the alliance's secretary-general said Friday.

Jens Stoltenberg said the units in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Bulgaria and Romania will be the first of their kind there.

Defense ministers from the 28-nation military alliance will discuss the full force, which can react quickly to any hot spots in Europe, when they meet on Thursday.

Stoltenberg said countries responsible for providing the several thousand troops to the force should be known next week.

The forward units will comprise a few dozen personnel only. They will plan and organize military exercises, and will provide command and control for any reinforcements the force

might require.

"They're going to plan, they're going to organize exercises, to provide ... some key command elements for reinforcements," Stoltenberg said.

France, meanwhile, is pledging tanks and armored vehicles to bolster NATO forces in Poland, where leaders are increasingly uneasy about Russia.

The French military equipment is expected to remain in Poland for two months.

As tensions increased in 2014, NATO forces conducted about 200 military exercises, and Stoltenberg vowed this would continue as the alliance adapts to the increased presence of Russian warplanes in European skies. NATO intercepted Russian aircraft more than 400 times last year.

Stoltenberg also warned that Russia has continued to build up its military as European NATO allies cut budgets again last year.

# Pilots of helium balloon land safely off Mexico

*The Associated Press*

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — A helium-filled balloon piloted by an American and a Russian landed safely off the coast of Mexico early Saturday after an audacious trip across the Pacific Ocean that shattered two long-standing records for ballooning.

The pilots landed 4 miles offshore in Baja California, about 300 miles north of the popular beach destination of Cabo San Lucas, greeted by a team of balloon enthusiasts who assisted with the landing. The pilots came in low and dropped thick trailing ropes into the ocean to help slow the balloon before setting down in a controlled water landing.

Mission Control in Albuquerque was packed with balloon team members and the pilots' families, as all eyes focused on a giant screen showing a map of the coast and the balloon's location as it descended. They exchanged hugs and smiled with relief after it touched down.

"We're really pleased with the distance numbers we have here and very pleased with the duration numbers," said Steve Shope, mission control director. "These are significant improvements over the existing records. We didn't break them by just a little bit. They were broken by a significant amount."

Troy Bradley of Albuquerque and Leonid Tiukhtyaev of Moscow lifted off from Japan on Sunday morning.

# Rivalries hinder Kurds in northern Iraq fight

*The Associated Press*

SINJAR, Iraq — Kurdish forces in recent weeks have retaken parts of the strategic Iraqi town of Sinjar, whose Yazidi population was driven out in a humanitarian disaster last year that triggered U.S. intervention. But sniping among Kurdish factions makes the hold on the town seem shaky and is threatening the wider fight against Islamic State militants.

Overlooking the strategic northern Iraq town of Sinjar, peshmerga fighters representing the recognized authorities of Iraqi Kurdistan fume against what they see as the recklessness of their supposed allies in militias drawn from neighboring Syria and Turkey.

Within the bomb-scarred warrens of the town below, foot soldiers in those militias complain that the much more heavily armed peshmerga have done too little during the fight against Islamic State fighters holed up within easy range of a sniper's bullet.

The immediate issue is ownership of Sinjar, the town that once was home to many of Iraq's Yazidi religious minority. Tens of thousands fled to the nearby mountains, creating a humanitarian disaster, when Islamic State militants seized the town in August and unleashed a wave of terror involving killings, imposed conversions and forced marriages.

But there is a wider concern as well: The Kurds, in their various forces, have provided the most effective ground resistance to date against the jihadis who have taken large swaths of Iraq and Syria — and so the outside world has a stake in their ability to continue that struggle.

Since December, the peshmerga and their Kurdish comrades in arms have regained the mountains in this area thanks in part to increased weapons supplies and airstrikes from coalition warplanes.

## Militants admit defeat in Kobani

BEIRUT — Members of the Islamic State group have acknowledged for the first time that they were defeated in the Syrian town of Kobani. In a video released by the pro-Islamic State Aamaq News Agency late Friday, two fighters said airstrikes by the U.S.-led coalition were the main reason why they were forced to withdraw from Kobani.

From The Associated Press

But the fight has bogged down around Sinjar, itself, inflaming intra-Kurdish tensions just as their fight was gaining momentum.

Today's divisions reflect decades of conflict between peshmerga supporters of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), headed by Iraqi Kurdish President Massoud Barzani, and the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) of Abdullah Ocalan in Turkey. The two groups were opponents in 1990s civil warfare, which ended in an accord that allowed PKK fighters to remain on the KDP's Iraqi turf. The U.S. State Department regards the PKK as a terrorist organization because of its history of violence in Turkey.

The commander of peshmerga forces around Sinjar, Brig. Gen. Salam Warti, described the PKK and other militias as loose cannons unwilling to stick to an agreed strategic plan.

"We had planned to take the surrounding areas first and then take the town," Warti told the Associated Press. "But they (allied militias) decided to show off and take a section of the town, and now we're paying for it with many casualties. Militarily, it was a bad move."



# Kam vs. Gronk a super matchup

*The Associated Press*

PHOENIX — At some point Sunday, it will happen. At least everyone hopes it happens.

The biggest, most athletic tight end in football will be running downfield and will be met in a full-speed collision with the hardest-hitting strong safety in the game today.

What will happen when the NFL's version of Thunderdome comes to the Super Bowl, featuring Rob Gronkowski in one corner and Kam Chancellor in the other?

"I don't know. I'll be sitting there with popcorn," Seattle's Richard Sherman said. "It'll be good football."

There are a bevy of important individual matchups when New England and Seattle meet on Sunday. Will Tom Brady throw at Sherman? Can the Patriots' defensive front slow down Marshawn Lynch? What about LeGarrette Blount trying to run against the best defense in the NFL?

All those factors could matter in the final outcome. Trumping them all might be whether Chancellor and the Seahawks are able to keep Gronkowski under control.

Even the NFL anticipated the potential matchup: Both Gronkowski and Chancellor sat at the same podium on media day.

"I guess it was destiny. It was destiny for us to have the same seat," Chancellor said.

While Seattle nickel cornerback Jeremy Lane said last week that he didn't think Gronkowski was that good, most of the Seahawks have been respectful of his skill.

Rightfully so.

Gronkowski might have been better in 2011, but considering the injuries he's overcome, 2014 could be his most impressive season. He had 51 receptions and eight touchdowns in the final eight games of the regular season and another 10 receptions and two scores already in the playoffs. Only once this season did Gronkowski have fewer than three catches in a game.

"Aw man, Beast Mode. He's an animal, man," New England wide receiver Brandon LaFell said stealing a phrase normally used to describe Lynch. "When you put a corner on him, he's too small. When you put a safety on him, he's too slow, man. You know, when Gronk is out there doing his thing he is demanding a double team and if he's not being double teamed, he's out there making plays for us."

The difference with Seattle is they have Chancellor — a safety with a linebacker build and cornerback speed — who can match up with Gronkowski. Many felt it was Chancellor and not Malcolm Smith who should have been Super Bowl MVP a year ago. It was Chancellor's hit on Demaryius Thomas on Denver's second possession that set the tone for Seattle's rout.

"That hit, alone, could have gotten him Super Bowl MVP," Sherman said.

Seattle struggled earlier in the season defending tight ends, breaking from a trend of being able to shut down elite players at that position in the past. San Diego's Antonio Gates caught three touchdowns in Week 2 against Seattle and Oakland's Mychal Rivera had eight catches and two TDs in early November.

Those performances were outliers. Against most elite tight ends, Seattle has

been at its best. In two games last season against New Orleans, Jimmy Graham had a combined four catches for 50 yards against the Seahawks. Vernon Davis hasn't caught more than three passes against Seattle in five games over the past two seasons. Julius Thomas was limited four catches for all of 27 yards in last year's Super Bowl romp.

"They definitely have an image of being physical. They've got an image of coming out and being ready to dominate," Gronkowski said.

Why is Seattle so good at defending tight ends? A lot of credit falls to Chancellor. His size, speed and strength can counter the matchup problems many tight ends create.

But the rest of Seattle's defensive scheme was formulated so Chancellor is not alone. Especially when Seattle is playing zone defense, responsibility is placed on linebackers K.J. Wright and Bobby Wagner to cover those "hook areas" as defensive coordinator Dan Quinn calls it, where tight ends often roam.

"You have to have the speed to play when the quarterback throws it how fast can you close and make the tackle. I think the speed and the length of K.J. in specific, allows him to do that and Bobby, his instincts to know after the ball is thrown, we've all seen the speed that he has to close," Quinn said. "And then when we play man-to-man, both of those guys are able to match up, whether it be on tight ends or backs, again due to their speed and cover ability. I think it's a combination of the way we play zone, their speed to do it, their quarterback keys and the ability for them to play in man-to-man."

# NFL wants truth about 'deflategate'

*The Washington Post*

PHOENIX — NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell, in his first public comments on the controversy surrounding the New England Patriots' use of underinflated footballs during the AFC championship game, said Friday he has a "responsibility to protect the integrity of the game" and pledged that the league will continue to pursue its investigation of the incident vigorously but fairly.

"We want the truth," Goodell said at his annual news conference two days before the Super Bowl. "That's what I think our fans want. That's what our clubs want. And so what we want to do is make sure that we find that truth. If there are violations of the rules, we take them seriously, particularly when they deal with the integrity of the game and the rules."

Goodell conceded it has been "a tough year" for him and the league, beginning with the sharp criticism that Goodell received in September for the NFL's handling of the Ray Rice, Adrian Peterson and Greg Hardy abuse cases. Goodell said he has learned difficult lessons during a humbling experience but reiterated he intends to remain on the job.

Responding to a question about whether he could imagine any set of circumstances that would lead to him resigning or being fired, Goodell said: "No, I can't. Does that surprise you?"

"Listen, it has been a tough year. It's been a tough year on me personally. It's been a year of, what I would say, humility and learning. ... We take that seriously. It's an opportunity for us to get better. It's an opportunity for us, for our organization, to get better. So we've all done a lot of soul-searching, starting with yours truly. And we have taken action."

A season that began amid turmoil for the NFL is ending the same way as Sunday's Super Bowl matchup between the Patriots and Seattle Seahawks arrives. The league has determined that the Patriots used underinflated footballs, in comparison to NFL specifications, in the first half of the AFC title game but has not determined whether that was done deliberately by the team.

"We take seriously anything that potentially impacts the integrity of the game," Goodell said. "We are focusing principally on two questions: Why were some footballs used in the game that were not in compliance with the rules? And was this the result of deliberate action?"

Goodell left open the possibility of tougher penalties being imposed if it is determined that the Patriots willfully violated league rules. In the aftermath of his 2007 ruling, in which Goodell fined Belichick and the Patriots a total of \$750,000 and stripped a first-round draft pick from the team for improperly videotaping opposing coaching signals, Goodell wrote a March 2008 memo to the NFL's competition committee pledging increased penalties for future competitive violations and proposing a lower threshold of proof to establish such violations. The owners endorsed those recommendations.

# Williams tops Sharapova to capture 19th major championship of career

*The Associated Press*

MELBOURNE, Australia — Serena Williams stuck out a fist in mock triumph and mouthed "C'mon," careful not to push her point too far.

The 33-year-old Williams was closing in on her 19th Grand Slam singles title, her 16th straight win over Maria Sharapova and her sixth Australian Open championship when she was docked a point by the chair umpire for hindrance — for yelling in celebration too early when she thought she'd hit a service winner.

She didn't let that, or another early celebration on match point, or a hacking cough that made her sick, become distractions. Instead, Williams maintained her composure to beat Sharapova 6-3, 7-6 (5) on Saturday night to continue her 100 percent record in finals at Melbourne Park and move closer to Steffi Graf's record of 22 major titles in the Open era.

"I got too excited and I hit a great serve ... I didn't expect her to get it back," Williams explained of the hindrance call in the

seventh game of the second set. "I said, 'C'mon,' a little too soon. I guess there's a rule that you can't do it. So I'm fine with it. I moved on very fast to the next point; just tried to stay as focused as I could."

The muted fist pump, she said, was just for fun.

"I'm like, 'C'mon.' It just goes to show you I have more fun on the court. I would have never done that three years ago, four years ago," said Williams. "So I just kind of made a little sarcasm after that."

On her third match point, she let her racket go before hearing a let call on what she thought was an ace.

"I thought, 'Wow this is it, I did it,' only to hear let. I was like, 'OK Serena!' " she said.

So she fell back on her biggest weapon, firing another ace — her 15th of the set and 18th of the match. This time, after checking it was official, she bounced around like a little child.

"I'm so honored to be here and to hold this 19th trophy," Williams said. "I didn't think it would happen this fast, to be hon-

est, but it feels really good."

Williams, at 33 years and 127 days, became the oldest winner of the Australian women's title in the Open era and moved into outright second place on the list of major winners in the Open era, moving clear of Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova on 18.

No. 20 is her next objective, and her next chance is at the French Open.

"When I think about Paris, I don't think about 20. I just think about winning there," said Williams, who didn't reach a quarterfinal in a Grand Slam between her wins at the 2013 and 2014 U.S. Opens.

On the men's side, Fabio Fognini and Simone Bolelli became the first all-Italian team to capture a Grand Slam men's doubles title in more than 50 years after beating French pair Nicolas Mahut and Pierre-Hugues Herbert 6-4, 6-4.

Novak Djokovic has won all four times he's reached the Australian Open final and is aiming to maintain his 100 percent record when he takes on Andy Murray in Sunday's singles final.



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# Hawks stretch streak to 18

The Associated Press

ATLANTA — The Atlanta Hawks keep finding new ways to extend the longest winning streak in franchise history. This time, Kent Bazemore was the surprise star off the bench.

Atlanta overcame 37 points by Portland's LaMarcus Aldridge to win its 18th straight game by overpowering the Trail Blazers in the final period for a 105-99 victory Friday night.

The big lead for each team was only six points. There were four ties in the fourth quarter before the Hawks took the lead for good midway through the period on a basket by Al Horford, who had 17 points.

"We got stops when we needed to and really got into a rhythm offensively," Horford said.

The Hawks overcame a sudden shortage of wing players to keep their streak alive before a sellout crowd.

Atlanta's DeMarre Carroll missed the game with a left Achilles strain. His replacement, Thabo Sefolosha, lasted only two minutes before leaving with a right calf strain.

The Hawks' depth came through again. Bazemore, the team's third option at small forward, didn't miss a beat. Bazemore made his first three shots and finished with 12 points, five rebounds, three assists, two steals and a block.

Bazemore, who usually plays about 12 minutes per game, logged almost 40 minutes.

"With Thabo going down and DeMarre already hurt," Hawks coach Mike Budenholzer said, "for Kent Bazemore to come in and play the way he did and play as many minutes as he did ... it was just a team effort, ev-

erybody contributing."

Another bench player, Mike Scott, added 11 points.

"We're confident in one through 15 here," Horford said. "Guys really put in the time, guys work every day. They just don't get the opportunity because we're so deep."

Portland, which has lost four of five, led after each of the first three quarters but was outscored 36-25 in the final period.

"If I could explain it then it wouldn't happen," said Aldridge of the fourth-quarter letdown. "It's part of the season. We just have to stick with it."

The Hawks have not lost in 2015. The winning streak began after a loss to Milwaukee on Dec. 26.

"They're good," Aldridge said of the Hawks. "We could have played better, but they're good."

"Defensively, they're definitely better than what people think."

Paul Millsap scored 21 points to lead six Atlanta scorers in double figures.

**Cavaliers 101, Kings 90:** Kevin Love had 23 points in host Cleveland's ninth consecutive victory, and LeBron James scored 19 in his return from a one-game absence.

Kyrie Irving finished with 21 points for the Cavaliers in his first game since he scored 55 against Portland on Wednesday.

**Pelicans 108, Clippers 103:** Eric Gordon scored a season-high 28 points, and host New Orleans snapped Los Angeles' six-game winning streak.

With power forward Anthony Davis sitting out because of his sore left groin, the Pelicans benefited from

exceptional shooting from behind the three-point line, hitting 13 of 25, and at the foul line, where they made 23 of 26 free throws, including their last 17.

**Jazz 110, Warriors 100:** Gordon Hayward had 26 points, 15 rebounds and six assists, helping Utah beat visiting Golden State for the first time this season.

**Mavericks 93, Heat 72:**Charlie Villanueva scored 20 points, and visiting Dallas went on an incredible 37-2 run in the second half.

The win was the 600th for Dallas coach Rick Carlisle, and snapped a four-game losing streak. Dallas was down by 16 in the third quarter, down nine with about 3 minutes to go in the third and then turned the game completely around.

**Raptors 127, Nets 122 (OT):** DeMar DeRozan scored 26 points for visiting Toronto, and Amir Johnson made the tiebreaking basket with 41 seconds left in overtime.

**Suns 99, Bulls 93:** Eric Bledsoe scored 23 points and Goran Dragic had 21, leading visiting Phoenix to the win.

**Rockets 93, Celtics 87:** Donatas Motiejunas scored 10 of his 26 points in the fourth quarter, leading visiting Houston to its fourth straight win.

**76ers 103, Timberwolves 94:** Michael Carter-Williams had a triple-double with 17 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists, and host Philadelphia got the win in a matchup of two of the league's worst teams.

# Wildcats roll over Beavers

The Associated Press

TUCSON, Ariz. — T.J. McConnell jumped into passing lanes for steals and reached in to strip unsuspecting players of the ball.

When he wasn't doing that, Arizona's gritty point guard was deflecting passes, hounding every dribble and, of course, diving on the floor for loose balls any chance he had.

With a leader like that, it's no wonder the Wildcats turned their rematch with Oregon State into a rout.

Sparked by McConnell's career-high eight steals, No. 6 Arizona ran its smothering defense to near perfection in a 57-34 win over Oregon State on Friday night.

"You can make the argument that no player we've recruited in our seven or eight recruiting classes has had more of an impact on winning games than T.J.," Arizona coach Sean Miller said. "And he does it in all facets."

Arizona (20-2, 8-1) has been in a good defensive groove since losing to Oregon State earlier this month and held Oregon, the Pac-12's top-scoring team, to 56 points on Wednesday.

The Wildcats were even better against the methodical Beavers.

Arizona played its usual aggressive man-to-man and was better with help defense after struggling against the Beavers in the earlier meeting.

McConnell was the catalyst, helping the Wildcats force Oregon State to commit 17 turnovers — 12 on steals.

Rondae Hollis-Jefferson and Brandon Ashley helped protect the rim, and the Wildcats got out to the Beavers' shooters, holding them to 28 percent from the floor. Arizona also shut down Beavers leading scorer Gary Payton II, holding him to six points on 3-for-13 shooting.

Ashley finished with 12 points and Hollis-Jefferson had 11 for the Wildcats, who have won 34 straight home games.

"Our defense was great tonight," said McConnell, who also had seven points and six assists.

Oregon State (14-7, 5-4) handed Arizona its only conference loss earlier this month by attacking Arizona's defense. The Beavers were the ones on their heels in the rematch, unable to get anything to fall inside or out against the Wildcats' pressure.

Oregon State went 3-for-15 from three-point range and Payton, who averages 13.2 points, never seemed comfortable against Arizona's attacking defense.

Olaf Schaftenaar led the Beavers with eight points.

"They had a lot of possessions and they got a lot of deflections," Oregon State coach Wayne Tinkle said. "I think that caused a lot of frustration for some of our guys."

The Beavers struggled against Arizona's pressure, finishing 8 of 29 in the second half to spoil any chance of a comeback.

"Arizona is really aggressive, which pushed us into taking shots we're not comfortable with," Oregon State guard Malcolm Duvivier said. "We couldn't get the ball in the rim tonight even though we were getting people in positions to score."

# Penguins tie it late, beat Devils in OT

The Associated Press

NEWARK, N.J. — The struggling Pittsburgh Penguins could have given up against the New Jersey Devils.

They trailed by a goal in the third period, and goalie Cory Schneider was stopping everything and getting bailed out by some pings off the posts.

But the Penguins hung in and pulled out a much-needed win.

Defenseman Simon Despres scored 2:21 into overtime, and the Penguins rallied to beat the Devils 2-1 on Friday night.

"The way things have been going lately, we could have just accepted this as a loss, but we all stayed with it," said Chris Kunitz, who forced overtime with a power-play goal with 3:11 left in regulation. "That was the key. We stayed with it, stayed focused, kept the pressure on."

The loss spoiled a magnificent performance by Schneider, who made 41 saves.

The winning goal came after Schneider made a close-in stop on Brandon Sutton. The Penguins kept the puck in the zone, and Despres' shot from inside the blue line beat a screened Schneider.

"I didn't get a great look at it," Schneider said. "I think he came one way and shot it back the other through a screen. It just got a piece of the post and went in. It was a nice shot."

Devils president and general manager Lou Lamoriello said Schneider's performance was one of the best he has seen by a goalie in a while.

"He gave us a chance to win, more than a chance to win," Lamoriello

said. "It's a shame he didn't get the win. Certainly the team would get the win, but he deserved a better fate."

Marc-Andre Fleury made 13 saves for the Penguins, who fell behind 1-0 when Devils forward Steve Bernier scored on a wraparound 6:08 into the third period.

New Jersey failed to tie its season-best, three-game winning streak. Pittsburgh won for the second time in seven games (2-3-2).

"We talked about that, the last couple of days, that most importantly, we had to stay with it," Penguins coach Mike Johnston said. "We were playing our game. We played a good game. We didn't flinch after they scored. We did whatever it took to get the game-tying goal."

Schneider stopped the first 37 Pittsburgh shots and seemed on the verge of his third shutout of the season when Peter Harrold took a high-sticking penalty with 3:29 left in regulation.

**Blues 3, Hurricanes 2 (SO):** Kevin Shattenkirk scored in the shoot-out, and visiting St. Louis topped Carolina for its fourth straight win.

Ryan Reaves and David Backes scored in regulation for the Blues, and Jake Allen made 26 saves before stopping all three Carolina shooters in the tiebreaker.

Defensemen Justin Faulk and Ryan Murphy scored for Carolina, which had its three-game winning streak snapped, but the Hurricanes have earned points in nine of 11 January games.

**Avalanche 3, Predators 0:** Semyon Varlamov made 23 saves for his fourth shutout of the season, and

