

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## Saudi Arabia and its allies reduce ties to Iran

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Allies of Saudi Arabia followed the kingdom's lead and began scaling back diplomatic ties to Iran on Monday after the ransacking of Saudi diplomatic missions in the Islamic Republic, violence sparked by the Saudi execution of a prominent Shiite cleric.

Sudan and the tiny island kingdom of Bahrain said they would sever ties with Iran, as Saudi Arabia did late Sunday. Within hours, the United Arab Emirates announced it would downgrade ties to Tehran to the level of the charge d'affaires and would focus only on economic issues. Kuwait condemned the attacks on the Saudi missions

and expressed support for the kingdom. Somalia also issued a statement criticizing Iran.

The execution Saturday of Shiite cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr and 46 others convicted of terrorism charges laid bare the sectarian divisions gripping the region. Shiite protesters took to the streets from Bahrain to Pakistan, while Arab allies of Sunni-ruled Saudi Arabia lined up behind the kingdom.

Al-Nimr was a central figure in the Arab Spring-inspired protests by Saudi Arabia's Shiite minority until his arrest in 2012. He was convicted of terrorism charges but denied advocating violence.

Bahrain's Sunni monarchy, which quashed mass protests

by the Shiite majority in 2011 with the help of Saudi and Emirati forces, shares Riyadh's view that Shiite Iran is intent on destabilizing the region through its various proxies.

Bahraini officials have accused Iran of training militants and attempting to smuggle arms into the country, which hosts the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet. In October, Bahrain ordered the acting Iranian charge d'affaires to leave within 72 hours and recalled its own ambassador after alleging Iran sponsored "subversion" and "terrorism" and funneled arms to militants.

Sudan's Foreign Ministry announced an "immediate severing of ties" over the diplomatic mission attacks. The statement

carried by its state-run news agency said it made the decision in "solidarity with Saudi Arabia in the face of Iranian schemes."

The UAE, a country of seven emirates, has a long trading history with Iran and is home to many ethnic Iranians. It said it would reduce the number of diplomats in Iran and would recall its ambassador "in the light of Iran's continuous interference in the internal affairs of Gulf and Arab states, which has reached unprecedented levels."

Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir announced the cut in relations late Sunday and gave Iranian diplomatic personnel 48 hours to leave his country.

## Mideast feud sign of underlying sectarian strife

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — The growing diplomatic feud between archrivals Saudi Arabia and Iran serves as a reminder of the volatile sectarian rifts that threaten security in the Middle East, the top U.S. military officer said Monday.

"To the extent that sectarianism is a source of instability, clearly we are concerned about the announcement Saudi Arabia is breaking off relations with Iran," Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, said. "We're looking pretty hard at what the implications are of this decision."

Dunford, who spoke with reporters in Stuttgart after meetings at the headquarters of the U.S. European and Africa commands, said it was too early to draw any military conclusions from the dispute between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Saudi Arabia's execution of

Shiite cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, an advocate for the country's Shiite minority and an anti-government critic, sparked demonstrations across the region. Riyadh cut off diplomatic ties with its longtime regional rival after an attack by an angry mob on its embassy in Iran.

"The challenge in the Middle East that has gotten the most attention has been ISIL," Dunford said, using an acronym for the Islamic State group. "But clearly the sectarian challenges in the Middle East were there before ISIL, and those are the ones highlighted by the announcement of Saudi Arabia breaking off relations with Iran."

For Dunford, who took over as President Barack Obama's top unformed officer in October, the crisis in the Middle East and the battle against the Islamic State group are among a host of complicated security matters confronting the Pentagon.

During meetings with lead-

ers at AFRICOM, the focus was on the spread of the Islamic State group into Libya, as well as other terrorist groups that have drawn closer to the militant juggernaut. For example, the Nigeria-based Boko Haram group has pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group.

With Libya in political disarray, AFRICOM was forced in 2014 to suspend plans for an elaborate training program of government forces.

Dunford said the U.S. is still interested in working with Libyan forces, but doubts persist over whether there is sufficient political stability to launch such a program.

"I'm watching that pretty closely," Dunford said.

In Europe, Russia's aggressive actions in Ukraine have created a new security landscape on a continent that only two years ago was regarded as a place of post-Cold War calm.

On Monday, Moscow released a new military strategy docu-

ment, signed by Russian President Vladimir Putin, which for the first time since the end of the Cold War named the U.S. and NATO as military threats.

Dunford said he does not consider the position a new threat to U.S. forces in Europe, but it serves as a reminder that the U.S. and Russia aren't operating as allies.

"I don't think this indicates to me at all that the Russians have said they will conduct offensive operations in the near term or pose a threat to our forces," he said.

Military leaders say they are closely watching Putin's moves.

"I am not sure what he is thinking, but I can look at what he is doing and derive from that what we should be thinking about on our side," EUCOM chief Gen. Philip Breedlove said during an earlier interview with reporters. "He's building forces."

vandiver.john@stripes.com

## Obama starts new year with gun control push

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama is slated Monday to finalize a set of new executive actions tightening the nation's gun laws, making his first order of business in 2016 a clear signal the president in his final year doesn't intend to go quietly.

At a meeting with Attorney General Loretta Lynch, FBI Director James Comey and other top law enforcement officials, Obama is expected to sign off on a package of proposals aimed at curbing gun violence and cracking down on unregulated gun sales.

At the top of the list is an effort to expand background checks on gun sales by forcing more sellers to register as federally licensed gun dealers.

The changes would be aimed at some unregistered sellers who skirt the background check laws by selling at gun shows, online or in informal settings. Other moves being considered include improving reporting of lost and stolen weapons and beefing up inspections of licensed dealers, according to a person familiar with the plans who would not be named discussing proposals before they are finalized.

The package includes measures this White House has long considered but not completed, mindful of the legal fight sure to follow as well as the potential for political backlash for some fellow Democrats. But Obama appears primed to push further than he has in the past.

## 2 Kabul bombings add to wave of deadly attacks

BY HEATH DRUZIN

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Two suicide bombings struck the same road Monday, the latest in a series of attacks during the past week that have rattled the Afghan capital.

At least two bystanders were killed in the second attack and about 30 were wounded, including 10 children, security and health officials said.

Both attacks occurred near the entrance to a military base attached to Kabul's international airport. The first bomb appeared to have detonated prematurely, killing only the bomber. The second went off at the gate of a heavily fortified compound that houses foreign contractors.

Pentagon spokesman Capt. Jeff Davis said that the attack breached the walls of Camp Sullivan, which houses civilian contractors, and that no coal-

ition troops were hurt. He said U.S. forces were assisting in evacuating the wounded.

The U.S. Embassy in Kabul released a statement saying it is investigating the incident. The embassy did not immediately comment on whether any Americans were among the casualties.

"Our thoughts are with those affected by today's violence," U.S. Ambassador Michael McKinley said in the embassy statement.

In a statement on their website, the Taliban claimed responsibility for the second attack Monday, claiming to have killed and wounded several foreigners. They often exaggerate casualty claims.

Kabul has seen four suicide bombings in little more than a week, a surge of violence that is unusual in the winter months, which traditionally have seen a lull in attacks.

## Poll: Whites, GOP are angriest people in US

The Washington Post

Often, 2015 felt like the year of outrage. The reasons for this were large and small — from police brutality to all manners of microaggressions, from terrorism to the color of a coffee cup. Americans of every race, economic background and political leaning seemed to share a common gift: the ability to get angry.

These fiery sentiments were measured by NBC, Survey Monkey and Esquire over the course of four days in November, in an online poll of 3,257 American adults aptly called the "American Rage Survey."

Now the results are in, and they reveal a landscape of national anger as layered as the population, itself. Americans are angry about a lot of things, apparently, and sometimes even about the same things.

"We, The People are p--," Esquire editors declared Sunday. "The body politic is burning up. And the anger that courses through our headlines and news feeds — about injustice and inequality, about marginalization and disenfranchisement, about what they are doing to us — shows no signs of abating."

The survey found that half of all Americans say they are

angrier today than they were a year ago. Among the groups polled, white Americans and Republicans are the angriest of all.

For the purposes of quantification, the survey "measured and compared anger primarily according to the frequency with which respondents report hearing or reading something that makes them angry." It did not, therefore, account for the intensity of each bout of rage.

In a response to the question, "About how often do you hear or read something in the news that makes you angry?" 73 percent of whites said they get angry at least once per day, in contrast to 66 percent of Hispanics and 56 percent of blacks; 77 percent of Republicans also said they get angry at least once per day, compared with 67 percent of Democrats.

Among household income brackets, "the middle of the middle class" (\$50,000 to \$74,999) reported feeling anger at greater rates than the "very rich" (\$150,000 and up) and the "very poor" (\$15,000 and less). About 53 percent of women say they are angrier this year than last, compared with about 44 percent of men.

### Appeals court reverses tattoo shop ruling

KEY WEST, Fla. — A federal appeals court overturned a ruling barring a Virginia man from opening a tattoo shop in Key West.

In a 14-page decision released last week, the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals found the city lacked evidence that adding tattoo shops would hurt tourism.

The Key West Citizen reported that the judges also found city officials misused tattoo-referencing lyrics in Jimmy

Buffett's song "Margaritaville."

In a deposition and in arguments before the district court, city officials twice referenced the song to support their argument that inebriated tourists would be more likely to get tattoos, and then regret them, if more tattoo shops were open in Key West.

The appeals court ruled that U.S. District Judge Jose E. Martinez erred in his 2014 ruling that the city did not violate Brad Buehrle's First and 14th Amendment rights.

From The Associated Press



# Butler lifts Bulls with 40 in 2nd half

Associated Press

TORONTO — For one half, Jimmy Butler was better than Michael Jordan.

That's all it was, Butler said. One half. Still, it was an amazing run.

Butler broke the Hall of Famer's team record for points in a half, scoring 40 of his 42 after the break to lead the Chicago Bulls over the Toronto Raptors 115-113 on Sunday.

Jordan had 39, also in the second half, in a game against Milwaukee in 1989. Butler shot 14-for-19 in the final two quarters after a 1-for-4 start in the Bulls' fourth straight win.

"Don't compare me to him," Butler said. "I don't want to be compared to him because then people are going to think I got to do what he did. I'm trying, but we're nowhere near the same player."

One of Jordan's teammates was pretty impressed, though.

"What a performance by @JimmyButler. You don't see individual efforts like this too often," Scottie Pippen said in a tweet.

Butler's performance came after he got stitches in his mouth. He was accidentally elbowed by DeMarre Carroll in the second quarter after making a basket. He needed one stitch to close the wound and ready him for the second half.

"I was mad but I just came out and was just aggressive," he said.

He scored 21 points in the third quarter, the most the

Raptors have given up to an opponent in a single quarter this season, shooting 7-for-9 from the floor and making all seven of his free throw attempts.

In the fourth, Butler put the Bulls in front with a three-pointer from the corner with 30.9 seconds to go to give Chicago its first lead since early in the second. A pair of free throws by Butler closed out the victory shortly afterward.

His coach was in awe of Butler's outing.

"I'll say this: It's the best performance I've seen coaching," said Fred Hoiberg.

The Bulls coach was also full of praise for the way his team responded in the second half, commenting that the four-game winning streak that his club is now on closed out "a very important week for us."

Butler's teammates were equally complimentary.

"It's not just that he scored a lot of points, he did it in a very efficient way and he did it in a way that was critical for us to win the ballgame," said Pau Gasol, who registered his 17th double-double of the season with 19 points and 13 rebounds.

While Raptors coach Dwane Casey said he tried everything to slow Butler down, he was also upset about being in front for the majority of the game and failing to close out the victory. The Raptors haven't beaten the Bulls since Dec. 31, 2013.

"We can't give up 34 points in the fourth quarter," he said. "You have to put your foot down, put your foot on their neck and close it out. I thought we had control up to that point, but we just didn't put our stamp on it in the fourth quarter defensively."

**Knicks 111, Hawks 97:** Arron Afflalo scored a season-high 38 points for the host Knicks.

Afflalo was 14-for-17 from the field and 7-for-8 from three-point range, making his first seven attempts and nearing his career best of 43 points.

The Knicks improved to 8-2 when Afflalo scores 15 or more points.

**Heat 97, Wizards 75:** Chris Bosh scored 23 points, Goran Dragic had 18 and the visiting Heat dominated the undermanned Wizards.

With just nine healthy players, Washington was outscored in the second quarter 25-7. The Wizards missed 20 of their 22 field goal attempts as the Heat took a 50-31 halftime lead.

**Trail Blazers 112, Nuggets 106:** CJ McCollum had 25 points and seven assists, leading the Trail Blazers to a victory over host Denver.

Gerald Henderson scored 19 points and Al-Farouq Aminu had 14 for Portland, which has won four of its last five.

**Lakers 97, Suns 77:** Lou Williams scored a season-high 30 points, and the host Lakers sent Phoenix to its ninth straight loss.

Los Angeles, coming off victories over Boston and Philadelphia, has won three in a row for the first time since Feb. 22-27. Rookie Larry Nance Jr. had 15 points and tied a season high with his second straight 14-rebound game.

## California hands No. 21 Utah second straight loss

Associated Press

BERKELEY, Calif. — Utah's second straight loss is almost certain to knock the Utes out of the Top 25.

That's certainly not the direction coach Larry Krystkowiak expected his high-scoring team to be headed going into the weekend, not after putting up a pair of 100-point games in its final two nonconference games.

Ivan Rabb scored 11 of his season-high 19 points in the final 6:45 and Jordan Mathews made two late three-pointers to help California beat No. 21 Utah 71-58 on Sunday night.

"It was an effort," Krystkowiak said. "The guys hung in there I thought and managed to keep it in striking distance. I thought the end of the first half and a nice little stretch up until the end of the game when it got away from us was decent. We were persistent and hung in there."

That's about all that Utah will want to remember from its lost weekend out West.

Jakob Poeltl led Utah (11-4, 0-2) with 19 points and 10 rebounds, and Kevin Taylor added 15 points.

Coming off an overtime loss to Stanford on Friday night, the Utes were held to 22 points in the first 20 minutes and didn't make their best run until midway through the second half after falling behind by 12.

**No. 8 Arizona 94, Arizona State 82:** Gabe York scored 22 points, Allonzo Trier added 20 as visiting Arizona won in both

teams' Pac-12 opener.

Arizona (13-1) dominated inside in the first half and built a 16-point lead in the second. The Wildcats shot 55 percent overall and made 7-for-12 from three-point range, including 5-for-8 in the second half.

The Sun Devils (10-4) cut Arizona's lead to six with 3 minutes left but couldn't climb all the way back. York hit three three-pointers during a big second-half run and made eight free throws in the final 1:18, including four on a pair of technical fouls against Arizona State coach Bobby Hurley.

**No. 18 Louisville 65, Wake Forest 57:** Freshman Donovan Mitchell had season highs with 18 points and eight rebounds in his first start and host Louisville held off Wake Forest.

Chinanu Onuaku added 12 points, a career-high 15 rebounds and blocked four shots for Louisville (12-2) in the Atlantic Coast Conference opener for both teams.

**Washington State 85, No. 25 UCLA 78:** Josh Hawkinson had 20 points and 10 rebounds and host Washington State beat UCLA.

Que Johnson and Renard Suggs each scored 14 points for Washington State (9-5, 1-1 Pac-12). The Cougars lost to Southern California in the conference opener Friday night.

Isaac Hamilton scored 27 points for UCLA (9-6, 0-2), which was coming off a double-overtime loss at Washington. Bryce Alford was held to nine points.

## Jagr scores twice as Panthers edge Wild

Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. — Jaromir Jagr scored two goals, including the game-winner in the third period, and Al Montoya made 38 saves as the streaking Florida Panthers beat the Minnesota Wild 2-1 on Sunday.

The victory was the ninth in a row for Florida and seventh straight at home, both franchise records. The nine-game winning streak ties Montreal, Washington and the New York Rangers for the longest in the NHL this season.

With the game tied 1-all in the third, Jagr took a long diagonal pass along the right boards from Brandon Pirri after Minnesota was caught with three players behind the Florida net.

Jagr kept control of the puck, weaved to the high slot and whistled a shot past goalie Devan Dubnyk for his team-leading 13th goal at 8:52.

"Sometimes you don't have your best game, but you just have to find a way to do it," Jagr said after scoring his NHL-record 132nd game-winning goal. "I didn't feel good about my game (last night). I just wanted to make sure it went better today."

The 43-year-old Jagr has 735 goals, six behind Brett Hull for third on the league's career list.

Jason Zucker scored for Minnesota and Dubnyk made 26 saves.

**Blackhawks 3, Senators 0:** Corey

Crawford made 26 saves in his NHL-leading sixth shutout this season to lead host Chicago past Ottawa for its third straight win.

Crawford wasn't tested consistently, but he was sharp when needed in earning his 18th career shutout in his 300th game.

Ottawa's Craig Anderson stopped 27 shots, but the Senators lost their third straight and fifth in their last six.

**Islanders 6, Stars 5:** Kyle Okposo had two goals and an assist, Cal Clutterbuck scored twice and host New York beat the NHL-best Dallas Stars.

Anders Lee had a goal and an assist, and Mikhail Grabovski also scored to help the Islanders win for the fourth time in six games. Thomas Greiss finished with 36 saves.

The Stars, coming off an overtime defeat at New Jersey the previous night, lost consecutive games for the first time this season. Dallas was the last remaining NHL team without back-to-back losses.

**Ducks 4, Jets 1:** Kevin Bieksa and Ryan Kesler each scored a power-play goal, and host Anaheim earned at least one point for the sixth consecutive game by defeating Winnipeg.

Rickard Rakell and Corey Perry also scored, and John Gibson made 19 saves for the Ducks as they opened an eight-game homestand vital to their playoff hopes in the jumbled Pacific Division.



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# Broncos, Panthers nab top seeds

Associated Press

Carolina closed out its remarkable season by wrapping up home-field advantage in the NFC. Denver turned to Peyton Manning to take advantage of New England's slip-up in the AFC. And Rex Ryan made certain to continue the New York Jets' playoff drought.

Carolina and Denver wrapped up the No. 1 playoff seeds in each conference by winning at home on the final day of the regular season on Sunday. Carolina routed Tampa Bay 38-10, while Denver edged San Diego 27-20 to win the AFC West title.

"We find our edge playing in front of the home crowd," Carolina QB Cam Newton said. "Everything here feels just right. We don't have travel to a hostile environment. This is our house — and it's hostile."

New England will be the No. 2 seed in the AFC after losing at Miami, while Arizona will have the other bye in the NFC despite getting routed 36-6 by Seattle.

The highlight of the day was Ryan and the Buffalo Bills stopping the Jets from making the playoffs and gave the Steelers the final playoff spot in the AFC. The Bills beat the Jets 22-17, while Pittsburgh knocked off Cleveland 28-12, the only results that would have gotten the Steelers into the postseason. The Jets have not made the playoffs since 2010.

"I've got a lot of friends over there, and I want them to be successful, but not at my expense," Ryan said.

Ryan has plenty of friends in the Steel

City now.

"A lot of thanks to coach Ryan and the rest of the Bills and everybody in Buffalo," Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger said. "I know they're excited about 8-8 and we're excited they got us in."

New England had a chance at home field in the AFC, but flopped in Miami, getting beat 20-10. Denver struggled in the first half against San Diego before inserting Manning in place of Brock Osweiler at quarterback and holding on late for the seven-point victory.

"Wherever we play, we play," Patriots coach Bill Belichick said.

In case you missed it, here are the other top topics after the NFL regular season's 17th and final Sunday:

**Playoff matchups:** Here's the schedule for next weekend's wild-card round: Saturday will be the AFC day, with Kansas City at Houston at 4:35 p.m. ET on ABC/ESPN, and Pittsburgh at Cincinnati at 8:15 p.m. ET on CBS; Sunday has the NFC games, with Seattle at Minnesota at 1:05 p.m. ET on NBC, and Green Bay at Washington at 4:40 p.m. ET on Fox. The top seeds in the AFC, with opening-round byes, are No. 1 Denver and No. 2 New England, while in the NFC, it'll be No. 1 Carolina and No. 2 Arizona.

**Black Sunday:** It's come to be known as "Black Monday" — coach and GM firings announced the day after the regular season ends — but this time, the moves started coming Sunday. Mike Pettine

and Ray Farmer out in Cleveland. Jim Tomsula out in San Francisco after just one season.

**Champs or Chumps?** The defending Super Bowl champion New England Patriots are hardly playing like the team to beat right now. A 20-10 loss to Miami means the Pats have lost four of their final six games after starting 10-0. For the first time all season, Tom Brady didn't throw a TD pass. The offensive line is a sieve. All the injuries to skill-position players have added up. Still, Brady insisted: "Nothing over the last six weeks is going to matter."

**Oh, Fitz:** The Jets had a win-and-in scenario Sunday, but they blew the chance to clinch a playoff berth by losing 22-17 to old pal Rex Ryan's Buffalo Bills. New York was done in by QB Ryan Fitzpatrick's return-to-reality moment: Its last three possessions each ended with an interception. "It's the hardest and most difficult end to a season I have ever had," said the Harvard-educated Fitzpatrick, who never has reached the playoffs in 10 years in the league.

**We're No. 1!** The close of the regular season isn't only about playoff berths; it's also about draft order. The Titans "earned" the No. 1 overall pick by finishing 3-13 and closing with a four-game losing skid (Cleveland, also 3-13, gets the second pick). A year after taking Marcus Mariota with the No. 2 choice, the Titans wound up one spot worse. Or better, depending how you look at it.

# Browns, Niners fire coaches

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — The Cleveland Browns fired Mike Pettine and the San Francisco 49ers dismissed Jim Tomsula as their head coaches on Sunday, paying the price for disappointing seasons.

Pettine went 10-22 in two years, dropping 18 of his final 21 games after a promising 7-4 start in 2014. Owner Jimmy Haslam also announced the firing of Ray Farmer as general manager.

Pettine was the team's seventh full-time coach since 1999, and the team has changed coaches and GMs five times since 2008.

"We've made this decision because we don't believe our football team was positioned well for the future," Haslam said. "We are all disappointed with where we are and we take full responsibility."

Following Sunday's loss to Pittsburgh, just before the decision was made, the 50-year-old Pettine said he understood change was inevitable.

"It is a bottom-line business and you guys don't have a column in the newspaper for moral victories," Pettine said. "Our record is that we have won three of our last 21 games. That is just not good enough."

One of Farmer's biggest mistakes over the past two years appears to be the drafting of quarterback Johnny Manziel. The former college star hasn't lived up to expectations on the field and continues to be a headache off it.

He spent 73 days in a rehab facility during the offseason, got benched by Pettine for two games during the year for misbehavior and missed Sunday's game with a concussion. While his teammates finished the season, Manziel was reportedly in Las Vegas.

According to several players, Manziel was in attendance Monday as Cleveland's players were addressed by owner Jimmy Haslam and Sashi Brown, the team's newly appointed head of football operations.

Manziel was not required to be at the season finale because he was recovering from a concussion and following the NFL's protocol on head injuries. Haslam said the quarterback missed a medical treatment at the team's facility.

Tomsula was dismissed just two hours after the 49ers ended the regular season with an overtime victory over St. Louis.

In his one season after being elevated from defensive line coach, Tomsula led his team to a 5-11 record as the Niners missed the playoffs for the second straight season. They were 8-8 a year ago in then-coach Jim Harbaugh's fourth season before his "mutual" parting with the franchise.

Tomsula demoted struggling quarterback Colin Kaepernick — now injured and recovering from shoulder surgery — in favor of Blaine Gabbert in November.

Unlike the Browns, the 49ers elected to keep Trent Baalke as general manager.

Also Monday, the Tennessee Titans announced general manager Ruston Webster is out, and interim coach Mike Mularkey will be a candidate as the team starts its coaching search.

The Titans also announced that Steve Underwood will oversee the searches as president and chief executive officer, with his interim tag removed.

# Vikings top Pack to win NFC North

Associated Press

GREEN BAY, Wis. — The Minnesota Vikings won the NFC North by holding on for a 20-13 win Sunday night over the Green Bay Packers.

Adrian Peterson ran for a touchdown, cornerback Captain Munnerlyn returned a fumble 55 yards for a score, and Minnesota (11-5) claimed its first division title since 2009.

The Vikings will host the Seattle Seahawks for a wild-card playoff game next weekend. The Packers (10-6) will travel to Washington after watching their four-year reign atop the NFC North end.

Packers kicker Mason Crosby forced a fumble on Cordarrelle Patterson's potentially field-flipping 70-yard kickoff return with 5:21 left. But the Packers' next drive ended with Aaron Rodgers' pass being intercepted in the end zone by Xavier Rhodes.

**Broncos 27, Chargers 20:** Peyton Manning replaced Brock Osweiler in the third quarter and led host Denver to a victory over San Diego that wrapped up the top seed in the AFC playoffs for the Broncos.

Combined with New England's loss at Miami, the Broncos (12-4) secured the No. 1 seed even as they head into the playoffs with a quarterback quandary.

**Bills 22, Jets 17:** Ryan Fitzpatrick threw interceptions on each of New York's final three drives and the visiting Jets' playoff hopes were dashed.

The Jets (10-6) would have made the postseason for the first time since 2010 with a win, but the defeat combined with Pittsburgh's win at Cleveland ended those hopes.

**Steelers 28, Browns 12:** Ben Roethlisberger threw three touchdown passes, Pittsburgh's defense dominated and the Steelers slipped into the AFC playoffs with the win over host Cleveland, which fired coach Mike Pettine and GM Ray Farmer after the game.

**Dolphins 20, Patriots 10:** Tom Brady was sacked twice and knocked down at least half a dozen times, and visiting New England missed a chance to clinch the No. 1 seed in the AFC playoffs.

New England (12-4) ends up as a No. 2 seed after Denver defeated San Diego to earn the top seed.

**Texans 30, Jaguars 6:** J.J. Watt and Whitney Mercilus led the defense and Jonathan Grimes scored twice to help the host Houston clinch the AFC South.

Houston will host Kansas City next weekend in the a wild-card game.

**Bengals 24, Ravens 16:** AJ McCarron overcame a rough start and threw a pair of touchdown passes for host Cincinnati.

The Bengals (12-4) matched the best record in franchise history — they also won 12 games during the 1981 and 1988 seasons when they reached the Super Bowl.

**Panthers 38, Buccaneers 10:** Cam Newton ran for two touchdowns and threw for two more, and host Carolina captured the NFC's No. 1 seed for the first time.

Newton tied Steve Young's NFL record for most career TDs rushing by a quarterback with 43. Young took 15 seasons to reach that plateau; Newton did it in five.

**Chiefs 23, Raiders 17:** Alex Smith threw two touchdown passes, host Kansas City sacked Derek Carr six times, and the Chiefs collected a franchise-best 10th straight win.

The Chiefs are headed to Houston for a wild-card game next weekend after Denver won the AFC West with its win over San Diego.

**Seahawks 36, Cardinals 6:** Russell Wilson threw three touchdown passes in a second-quarter outburst and Seattle snapped host Arizona's nine-game winning streak.

It was a sour end to the regular season for the NFC West champion Cardinals (13-3), who already had clinched the NFC's No. 2 seed and a first-round playoff bye.

**Eagles 35, Giants 30:** Former Giant

Walter Thurmond scored on an 83-yard fumble return in the third quarter and visiting Philadelphia added to New York coach Tom Coughlin's season-long frustrations.

**Redskins 34, Cowboys 23:** Kirk Cousins threw for three touchdowns before leaving late in the first half of a play-off tuneup.

Cousins broke Jay Shroeder's franchise record for yards passing in a season, finishing with 4,166.

**Colts 30, Titans 24:** Recently signed Josh Freeman and Ryan Lindley each threw a touchdown pass in the first half and Jerrell Freeman scored on a 23-yard interception in the second for host Indianapolis.

The Colts (8-8) won their last two games to avoid the first losing season since 2011, but didn't get the help they needed — a Houston loss and seven other games to go the right way — to make the postseason.

**Saints 20, Falcons 17:** Jamarca Sanford's interception at the Atlanta 25 with less than two minutes remaining set up Kai Forbath's 30-yard field goal as time expired.

It was visiting New Orleans' sixth sweep of the season series with the Falcons in 10 years under coach Sean Payton.

**Lions 24, Bears 20:** Matthew Stafford threw for 298 yards and three touchdowns and Calvin Johnson had 137 yards receiving for visiting Detroit.

Detroit (7-9) avoided a last-place finish in the NFC North with its sixth win in eight games. The Lions intercepted Jay Cutler three times.

**49ers 19, Rams 16 (OT):** Phil Dawson kicked a 23-yard field goal 11:33 into overtime for his fourth of the game to lift host San Francisco in Jim Tomsula's last game as coach.

Tomsula was fired after the game.

Blaine Gabbert passed for 354 yards and a 33-yard touchdown for the 49ers (5-11), who avoided their worst finish since 4-12 in 2005.