

# STARS AND STRIPES<sup>®</sup>

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## Pentagon could upgrade many medals

By TARA COPP

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — More than 1,000 Distinguished Service Cross, Navy Cross, Air Force Cross and Silver Star recommendations will be reviewed by the Department of Defense to determine whether the medals should be upgraded to a Medal of Honor, the Pentagon announced Wednesday.

“Although there is no indication that members were inappropriately recognized, the secretary determined that unusual Medal of Honor awards trends reported by the recent Military Decorations and Awards Review justified a review,” the Pentagon said in a prepared statement. “The secretary directed the review as a cautionary measure on behalf of the servicemembers who have performed heroically in

combat.”

Only awards given after Sept. 11, 2001, are under review, according to the Pentagon. There are approximately 1,000 Silver Stars and approximately 100 service crosses under review, but no medals are at risk of being downgraded. Instead, the review will look at two things: recommendations that did not result in a medal to determine whether one was merited and medals awarded to determine whether the honors should be upgraded.

In the case of a Silver Star, the honor could be upgraded, if warranted, to the next highest award, a service cross, and not a Medal of Honor, officials said. The review was implemented, in part, because the first seven Medal of Honor recipients from Iraq and Afghanistan were deceased and each honoree since

has been a living recipient. The Pentagon also said it noticed “an increased willingness” of commanders to upgrade recommendations submitted from subordinate commands as the wars progressed.

The review of the 1,100 medals is part of a yearlong effort by the Pentagon to overhaul the criteria for military medals and make each service’s honors more uniform, particularly with combat awards.

As a result of the review, Secretary of Defense Ash Carter made 37 recommendations and created two new awards. Under the changes, servicemembers who operate drones or directly contribute to combat from remote locations will be eligible for a “R” device to be worn on battle ribbons similar to the way the one-fourth-inch gold “V” device is displayed.

The Pentagon is also introducing a “C” device for “meritorious service under combat.”

As part of the review, the DOD established a uniform definition for combat that all services will be required to use: “The definition will encompass meritorious service while personally exposed to hostile action or while under significant risk of hostile action.”

The new uniform combat definition is meant to tighten how combat awards are distributed. Its most direct impact will be on the Bronze Star for Meritorious Service, which now will be awarded only “to individuals meeting the definition of ‘Meritorious Service Under Combat,’” according to a statement released by the department.

The services will have one year to implement the changes.

## Mabus calls for coed Marine training

By COREY DICKSTEIN

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus has instructed the Marine Corps to end gender-segregated initial training by April to comply with Defense Secretary Ash Carter’s decision to open all military jobs to women.

In a memo dated Jan. 1 to the Corps’ Commandant Gen. Robert Neller, Mabus ordered the top Marine to submit a gender implementation plan by Jan. 15 to integrate enlisted basic training and officer candidate school and to provide him a “subject matter expert point of contact.”

“In this submission, identify specifically where, if anywhere, this training is already

integrated, where it is separate, and specific steps that you will take to fully integrate these trainings,” Mabus wrote.

Marine Corps spokesman Capt. Philip Kulczewski confirmed the commandant had received Mabus’ memo, but he declined to discuss the issue further.

The Marines — as well as the Army, the Navy and the Air Force — recently submitted a gender integration plan to Carter detailing how they intended to open all previously male-only jobs to female troops. The plans are being reviewed by the Pentagon’s implementation working group, co-chaired by Deputy Defense Secretary Bob Work and Air Force Gen. Paul Selva, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The Marines’ submission focused primarily on integrating women into the 22 previously restricted occupations and did not address entry training, a Marine Corps official said. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly, called the 15-day timeline to submit the plan “aggressive,” but said the service would comply.

The Marine Corps is the only military branch that segregates its entry training. While the service has two enlisted boot camp locations, women attend only Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, S.C., where they spend the 12-week training cycle entirely segregated from their male counterparts. Female Marine

officer candidates do train alongside males at Officer Candidate School in Quantico, Va., but they live separately and are assigned to segregated companies.

It was not immediately clear whether the Marine Corps would integrate Parris Island and Recruit Depot San Diego nor what changes it would need to make to officer candidate school.

In a second memo sent to Neller on Jan. 1, Mabus also instructed the Marines to review the titles of their jobs to make them gender-neutral.

The Navy secretary instructed Neller to provide a report on the changes by April 1.

dickstein.corey@stripes.com  
Twitter: @CDicksteinDC

## USS Lassen leaves Japan for new home in Florida

BY AARON KIDD

*Stars and Stripes*

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — The USS Lassen steamed away from Japan on Wednesday after spending nearly a decade aiding the Asia-Pacific region out of its homeport at Yokosuka Naval Base.

The guided-missile destroyer — named after Medal of Honor recipient Clyde Everett Lassen, who rescued two naval aviators during the Vietnam War — will conduct one last patrol of the western Pacific before heading to its new home at Naval Station Mayport near Jacksonville, Fla.

“Lassen’s performance in the 7th Fleet was beyond expectations,” Capt. Christopher J. Sweeney, commander of Destroyer Squadron 15, said in a statement. “[Its] ability to support the mission improved our relationships with key allies and became an integral part of DESRON’s presence in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region.”

In October, Lassen made headlines worldwide when it challenged China’s territorial

claims in the South China Sea by sailing within 12 nautical miles of Subi Reef, one of several artificial islands Beijing has been building up with runways and fortifications. The freedom-of-navigation exercise drew strong protests from Beijing.

Other highlights of the Lassen’s service include helping with the recovery of the Cheonan, a South Korean warship that North Korea sank in 2010, killing 46 sailors. Also, after Typhoon Haiyan devastated the Philippines in 2013, the Lassen served as a fueling station for helicopter squadrons that aided rural villages.

“Lassen has provided support for DESRON and Carrier Strike Group 5 for a long time,” Cmdr. Robert Francis, Lassen’s commanding officer, said in the statement.

Lassen will be replaced by the USS Barry, a guided-missile destroyer equipped with the latest Aegis combat system and capable of firing all Vertical Launch System ordnance, including the latest missiles, the statement said.

## Navy: Base in Bahrain not affected by protests

BY CHRIS CHURCH

*Stars and Stripes*

MANAMA, Bahrain — Protests that flared here in response to Saudi Arabia’s execution of a prominent Shiite cleric have not affected the U.S. naval base here, home to the 5th Fleet.

“We have re-emphasized the importance of individual force protection practices to all our personnel including a review of off-limits areas,” Capt. Cory Howes, the commanding officer of Naval Support Activity Bahrain, said in emailed comments. “We have not implemented any additional restrictions.”

While the most volatile pro-

tests by members of the Sunni monarchy’s Shiite majority have occurred mostly outside the center of Manama and away from the base in areas normally off limits for U.S. government workers, there have been debris and tire fires on main roads personnel use to travel to and from the Bahrain School and the base.

As with similar incidents in the past, the base sends text alerts informing personnel of such incidents and asking them to avoid those locations.

In the wake of this week’s protests, there has been a stronger police presence in town and around the base and the school.

## Air Force civilians could face job cuts

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN

*Stars and Stripes*

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — Some Air Force civilians could lose their jobs in the next several months as the service begins to use involuntary measures to eliminate about 1,000 unfunded positions, officials said Wednesday.

Some installations will be given civilian reduction-in-force authority through April 4 to meet Defense Department funding targets and to adjust their civilian workforce, the Air Force said.

More than 1,000 unfunded civilian positions were identified at 48 Air Force installations during a major command needs assessment in early August, officials said in a statement. The Air Force did not say whether all of those positions are currently filled.

The Air Force is seeking to take unfunded positions off the books, Rose Richeson, an Air Force spokeswoman at the Pentagon, told Stars and Stripes on Thursday.

A reduction-in-force gives units “latitude and options” on

how to place and move affected employees into funded positions and to “clear off any positions that are unfunded,” she said.

The goal, the service said, will be to place most of the remaining civilians into funded positions whenever possible.

To make a job placement easier, an employee’s job grade can be reduced, pay and grade protections can be retained, and certain qualifications can be waived, officials said.

A reduction-in-force typically targets employees who have the least amount of time in their jobs.

Those who can’t be immediately reassigned will be offered registration in the Defense Department’s Priority Placement Program and receive consideration for future vacancies according to their registration, the Air Force said.

The Air Force will use “every possible measure to minimize personal financial hardship for our civilian workforce and their families,” Lt. Gen. Gina Grosso, the deputy chief of staff for manpower, personnel and services, said in a statement.

## Man with fake bomb vest, knife slain by Paris police

*Associated Press*

PARIS — Officers shot and killed a knife-wielding man wearing a fake explosive vest at a police station in northern Paris on Thursday, French officials said, a year to the day after an attack on the French satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo launched a bloody year in the French capital.

Luc Poignant, a police union official, said the man cried out “Allahu akbar,” Arabic for “God is great.”

The man was wearing what looked like an explosive vest, but it was fake, according to two French police officials who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the ongoing investigation. They said the man has not yet been identified.

Just a few minutes earlier, elsewhere in the city, French President Francois Hollande had finished paying homage to police officers killed in the line of duty, including three shot to death in attacks last January.

# Griffey elected to Hall with record 99.3 percent of vote

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Ken Griffey Jr. was considered Mr. Clean during 22 years in Major League Baseball, untainted by accusations of drug use as he climbed the home-run list during the height of the Steroids Era.

He nearly made a clean sweep in the Baseball Hall of Fame voting, too.

Griffey received 437 of 440 votes in his first appearance on the Baseball Writers' Association of America ballot, a record 99.3 percent.

"It's real simple," he explained after Wednesday's announcement. "I've always said that I've got to look my kids in the eyes and you want to play fair."

Mike Piazza, the top offensive catcher in MLB history, was elected, too, and will be inducted along with Griffey in Cooperstown, N.Y., on July 24. Among the many muscled sluggers whose accomplishments were questioned during a time when chemists preyed on clubhouses, Piazza was made to wait to be inducted until his fourth appearance on the ballot. After falling 28 votes shy last year, he was selected on 365 votes.

He wouldn't say whether he was upset

about being sullied by suspicions.

"That's the freedom we have," Piazza said. "You can say these things, and that's the country we live in."

Griffey topped the previous high voting percentage of 98.84, set when Tom Seaver appeared on 425 of 430 ballots in 1992.

A player needs to appear on 75 percent of ballots to gain election. Jeff Bagwell missed by 15 votes and Tim Lincecum by 23. Trevor Hoffman, second on the career saves list and appearing on the ballot for the first time, was 34 short.

Total ballots dropped by 109 from last year after writers who have not been active for 10 years were eliminated under a rules change by the Hall's board of directors. With a younger average electorate, Roger Clemens rose to 45 percent and Barry Bonds to 44 percent, both up from about 37 percent last year. Clemens has denied using performance-enhancing drugs, and Bonds said he never knowingly took any banned substances.

"They were Hall of Famers before all this stuff started," Griffey said.

Mark McGwire, who admitted using steroids, received 12 percent in his 10th and final ballot appearance.

Half of MLB's top 10 home-run hitters are not in the Hall of Fame: Bonds (762), Alex

Rodriguez (654), Jim Thome (612), Sammy Sosa (609) and McGwire (583). Rodriguez, who served a yearlong drug suspension in 2014, remains active. Thome's first appearance on the ballot will be in 2018.

Griffey and Piazza had contrasting paths to stardom. Griffey was selected first in the 1987 amateur baseball draft and became the first No. 1 to make the Hall. Piazza was taken by the Los Angeles Dodgers with the 1,390th pick, in the 62nd round, in 1988; since the MLB draft started in 1965, the lowest draft pick elected to the Hall had been John Smoltz, taken with selection 574 on the 22nd round in 1985.

"It crystalizes how special this game is," Piazza said. "Athletic talent definitely helps, but it's not the only thing that can make you successful."

Griffey was known simply as "Junior" by many as a contrast to his father, three-time All-Star outfielder Ken Griffey, who played alongside him in Seattle during 1990 and '91. The younger Griffey became a 13-time All-Star outfielder and finished with 630 homers, sixth on the career list.

Wanting to play closer to his home in Florida, he pushed for a trade to Cincinnati after the 1999 season. But slowed by injuries, he never reached 100 RBIs again after his first season with the Reds.

# Bucs fire Smith after two losing seasons

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — The Tampa Bay Buccaneers tripled their victory total from the previous year, and new quarterback Jameis Winston had a strong rookie season. Still, it wasn't enough to save coach Lovie Smith's job.

Smith was fired Wednesday after going 6-10 this season and 8-24 overall in two years running a team that has missed the NFL playoffs eight consecutive years.

The late-night announcement came as a surprise because Smith's job was not considered to be in danger after the Bucs improved from two wins last season and briefly contended for a wild-card playoff berth with Winston, the No. 1 overall pick in the draft, starting every game.

"This decision was difficult on a variety of levels," Buccaneers co-chairman Joel Glazer said in a statement. "I am disappointed that we were not more successful these past few seasons, but we are committed to doing what is necessary to give our fans the winning team they deserve."

## Broncos name Manning starting QB for playoffs

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. — Peyton Manning has won back his starting job after recovering from a left foot injury and rescuing the Denver Broncos.

Brock Osweiler is back on the bench. Coach Gary Kubiak informed his quarterbacks of his QB decision and then his team Thursday morning when players returned from a three-day furlough.

Manning missed seven starts with a torn plantar fascia. He returned to action Sunday when he relieved Osweiler in the second half and led the Broncos to a 27-20 win over San Diego that secured the AFC's top seed.

## Lions' Johnson weighs options for future

ALLEN PARK, Mich. — Calvin Johnson has drawn comparisons to Barry Sanders in Detroit.

Both made spectacular plays for the Lions. Off the field, they were quiet and humble.

The superstar receiver and Hall of Fame running back might have one more thing in common this offseason.

"Like many players at this stage of their career, I am currently evaluating options for my future," Johnson said Wednesday. "I would expect to have a decision regarding this matter in the not-too-distant future."

Johnson has declined to say if he will restructure his contract, which calls for him to count \$24 million against the salary cap next season.

# Tide rolls behind dominant defense

Associated Press

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. — Run up the middle against Alabama and you're likely to be greeted by powerful big men such as A'Shawn Robinson and Jarran Reed. Drop back to pass, and there's a fair chance explosive pass rushers such as Jonathan Allen and Tim Williams will be in hot pursuit.

The most impressive part of the second-ranked Crimson Tide's formidable defense has been a front line that is both deep and diverse, even by Bama standards.

The line thoroughly controlled Michigan State in a 38-0 semifinal thrashing, smothering quarterback Connor Cook and clamping down on the run. Doing the same against Clemson and dual-threat quarterback Deshaun Watson in the national championship game Monday night in Glendale, Ariz., will be easily the biggest test of all for that group.

However, Watson & Co. haven't faced a bigger challenge either.

"They're by far, clearly, the best that we've seen," Tigers coach Dabo Swinney said. "I mean, they're as good as it gets in the country, No. 1 in about everything defensively, but the biggest thing is they just have great depth in their defensive line. I mean, they roll them guys in there, play a lot of guys, a bunch of subs, and they all play at a really, really high level. That's why they're a great team."

Sure, the Tide offense has quarterback Jake Coker, Heisman Trophy winner Derrick Henry and wide receiver Calvin Ridley. Defensive backs Eddie Jackson and Cyrus Jones also have had terrific seasons.

No part of the team has been more pivotal to the Tide's success than a front seven that starts with Robinson and Reed, backed up by linebackers Reggie Ragland, Reuben Foster and Williams.

"We've never had one this deep," Alabama defensive coordinator Kirby Smart said of the front line. "This group is pretty deep. They can roll in and out and not drop off a lot. They take pride in that."

Alabama leads the nation in run and scoring defense and sacks, and is second in total defense.

No Nick Saban defense has averaged this many sacks (3.57 a game) since his 1999 Michigan State team anchored by Julian Peterson (3.73 per game).

This one has done it with an array of stars, personalities and diverse talents:

**The run stoppers:** Reed and Robinson are both 6 feet 4 and listed at a shade under 315 pounds. Reed has 56 tackles, almost all against the run. Robinson is a consensus All-American and Outland Trophy finalist who also is a strong pass rusher. Teammates say he's a freakish athlete, as evidenced by his hurdle of LSU's line to block an extra point attempt.

**The pass rushers:** Allen and Williams

are the headliners. Allen has 12 sacks, including two against Michigan State. Williams is listed as a linebacker but his primary job this season is clear: Get the quarterback.

Williams has 19 tackles — and 10½ sacks.

"Tim's probably one of the most unique guys on the team," Alabama tight end O.J. Howard said. "His pass rushing skills are probably, I think, the best out of everybody. Fast, hard to block, so quick, kind of small but I mean he's just very different from a lot of people, man."

**The backups:** This group includes former five-star signee Daron Payne and Da'Shawn Hand, along with guys like Dalvin Tomlinson and D.J. Pettway.

The makeup of the defensive line has changed since Barrett Jones was playing offensive line for the Tide, practicing against the likes of Marcel Dareus and big Terrence Cody earlier in the Saban era.

It's built just fine to stop runners like LSU's Leonard Fournette (19 carries, 31 yards) and passers like Cook, adapting to the increasingly prevalent spread offenses without sacrificing too much beef.

"It's a testament to coach Saban of how he's understood that he needs to adapt, and the times of being 360-pound noseguards, those guys aren't going to play as much because of the kind of spread that teams are playing," said Jones. "You need those pass rusher guys. He's adapted, and this is a great example of that."



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# Thunder cruise past Grizzlies

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Kevin Durant started slow, then took charge in his return.

Oklahoma City's star forward had 26 points and a season-high 17 rebounds after missing the previous game with a sprained right big toe, and the Thunder beat the Memphis Grizzlies 112-94 on Wednesday night.

Durant, who began the day as the NBA's No. 3 scorer, shot 2-for-10 from the field in the first half, but broke loose for 17 points in the second half on 7-for-8 shooting.

"I missed some good shots in the first half," he said. "I came back in the second half and I told myself every shot has to be — just — I have to focus on every shot now because I missed so many early on. It could have been a 2-for-17 night for me, so I tried to turn it into something good in the second half."

He played 33 minutes and appeared to have no problems with mobility.

Russell Westbrook added 20 points, seven rebounds and seven assists for the Thunder, who bounced back from Monday's loss to Sacramento without Durant.

Grizzlies point guard Mike Conley sat out with a sore left Achilles. Memphis coach Dave Joergel said before the game he didn't know how long Conley, the team's No. 2 scorer, would be out.

Courtney Lee, who started at point guard in Conley's place, suffered a hip injury and only played three minutes in the second half.

Mario Chalmers led the Grizzlies with 23 points, and had season highs of nine assists and eight rebounds. Matt Barnes scored 13 points and Zach Randolph added 12 for Memphis, which shot just 39 percent. Marc Gasol, the team's leading scorer for the season, finished with eight points on 2-for-11 shooting.

**Cavaliers 121, Wizards 115:** LeBron James scored 34 points, Kyrie Irving took over in the fourth quarter and visiting Cleveland beat injury-ravaged Washington for its fifth straight victory.

Irving scored 21 of his 32 points in the fourth quarter, including a run of 10 straight that put the game away.

**Knicks 98, Heat 90:** Carmelo Anthony scored 25 points and New York shot 56 percent to end a streak of eight consecutive losses to host Miami.

**Mavericks 100, Pelicans 91:** Raymond Felton scored 22 points in a game Dallas chose to rest four starters, and the visiting Mavericks defeated New Orleans.

**Clippers 109, Trail Blazers 98:** Chris Paul had 21 points and 19 assists to lead visiting Los Angeles past Portland.

The Trail Blazers were without guard CJ

McCollum because of a "clerical error." McCollum was mistakenly left off the team's active roster that is turned in before the game.

**Spurs 123, Jazz 98:** Tim Duncan scored a season-high 18 points and San Antonio had eight other players in double figures to beat Utah and remain unbeaten at home.

**Pacers 95, Magic 86:** Paul George had 20 points and Monta Ellis scored nine of his 19 in the fourth quarter, leading host Indiana over Orlando.

**Raptors 91, Nets 74:** Jonas Valanciunas had 22 points and 11 rebounds, and Toronto handed Brooklyn its eighth straight home loss.

**Pistons 99, Celtics 94:** Reggie Jackson 24 points, Kentavious Caldwell-Pope finished with 20 and Detroit beat host Boston.

**Suns 111, Hornets 102:** Mirza Teletovic made five of the Suns' season-high 19 three-pointers as host Phoenix ended a nine-game skid by beating Charlotte.

**Nuggets 78, Timberwolves 74:** Danilo Gallinari had 20 points, seven rebounds and four assists to help Denver end a six-game losing streak with a victory over host Minnesota.

# Maryland hammers Rutgers

Associated Press

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — Jake Layman scored 18 points, Diamond Stone had 15 points and 10 rebounds, and No. 3 Maryland took control early in an 88-63 rout of Rutgers on Wednesday night.

The Terrapins (14-1, 3-0 Big Ten) never trailed in their eighth straight victory. Using runs of 10-0 and 12-2, Maryland built a 46-18 halftime lead and coasted to its ninth consecutive conference victory.

Rutgers (6-10, 0-3) made six field goals and had only one offensive rebound in the first half.

The second half wasn't much different than the first. After Rutgers closed to 56-34, the Terps reeled off 18 straight points to go up by 40.

Maryland's leading scorer, sophomore Melo Trimble, sat out the second half with tightness in his hamstring. He finished with four points — all at the free throw line.

Corey Sanders scored 16 points for the Scarlet Knights. They are 2-19 in conference play since joining the Big Ten last season.

**No. 10 Xavier 74, St. John's 66:** Myles Davis scored 19 points, Trevon Bluiett added 18 and Xavier went down to the final minute before securing a victory over host St. John's, the Red Storm's sixth straight loss.

**No. 11 Villanova 72, Seton Hall 63:** Daniel Ochefu had 20 points and 18 rebounds in one of the best games for a Villanova big man in years, leading the Wildcats past visiting Seton Hall.

**No. 13 Iowa State 76, Texas Tech 69:** Matt Thomas scored 22 points, Jameel McKay had 19 points and 14 rebounds and host Iowa State held off Texas Tech for its first Big 12 win.

**No. 14 Duke 91, Wake Forest 75:** Grayson Allen scored 24 points and visiting Duke pulled away to beat Wake Forest.

**No. 21 Texas A&M 61, Mississippi State 60:** Jalen Jones scored 11 points, including the go-ahead dunk with 20 seconds left, to lead Texas A&M over host Mississippi State.

**No. 24 Pittsburgh 89, Georgia Tech 84:** James Robinson and Jamel Artis scored 18 points apiece and host Pittsburgh held off Georgia Tech.

**No. 25 Dayton 93, Massachusetts 63:** Charles Cooke scored 18 points and Dayton had 26 points off turnovers in a victory over visiting Massachusetts.

**Navy 83, Boston University 67:** Will Kelly, Shawn Anderson and Tilman Dunbar scored 16 points apiece and Navy beat host Boston University.

Jace Hogan added 13 points and Tim Abruzzo 11 for the Midshipmen (11-5, 2-1 Patriot), who made 21 of 26 free throws. Kelly also blocked two shots to tie for third at 151 on Navy's all-time list.

**Lafayette 76, Army 73:** Paulius Zalys had 17 points and seven rebounds on Wednesday night and Lafayette got its first Patriot League win of the season over host Army.

Nick Lindner made four of four free throws in the final 16 seconds to seal the win for Lafayette.

**Wyoming 64, Air Force 52:** Josh Adams had 20 points and 10 rebounds and host Wyoming made 11 three-pointers in a win over Air Force.

Trevor Lyons led Air Force with 14 points. Hayden Graham added 13 points, Zach Kocur scored 11 and Joe Tuss had 10.

# Avalanche rally to top Blues in overtime

Associated Press

DENVER — Nathan MacKinnon got the Colorado Avalanche to overtime, where Gabriel Landeskog finished off a big win.

Landeskog scored at 4:44 of overtime and the Avalanche rallied late Wednesday night to beat the St. Louis Blues 4-3.

It was a valuable two points for Colorado, which has overcome a slow start to move within two points of the second wild card in the Western Conference at the halfway point of the season.

The Avalanche trail Nashville for the last playoff spot with the Predators in town Friday night.

"It should be exciting to catch Nashville," Avalanche coach Patrick Roy said. "When you look 10, 15 games ago, we were 10 points behind. It's pretty good what our guys have been doing lately."

Matt Duchene and Mikhail Grigorenko also scored for the Avalanche, who handed the Blues their fourth straight loss.

Landeskog got the winner when St. Louis goalie Jake Allen lost a race to the puck near the right circle. John Mitchell got there just ahead of the diving Allen and sent it across to Landeskog, who put it in the empty net.

It was his ninth of the season and first since Dec. 15.

"That's all Mitchie," Landeskog said. "He hustled and he beat Allen to the puck and turned around. I was yelling and screaming pretty loud. He slid it over and I was just hoping and praying that it wouldn't hop over my stick."

Vladimir Tarasenko, David Backes and Patrik Berglund scored for the Blues. Allen finished with 29 saves.

St. Louis was poised to get a key Central Division win before Colorado rallied. The Avalanche pulled goalie Semyon Varlamov for an extra skater with 2:10 left and MacKinnon scored at 18:31 with a sharp-angle shot that went off Allen.

It was his 14th of the season.

"It hit (Allen's) foot," MacKinnon said. "I don't know if he was looking back door.

I didn't expect it to go in, just wanted to create a battle in front. It was a lucky goal for sure, but that's how goals are scored today in the NHL."

Varlamov had 35 saves.

Colorado took a 1-0 lead on Duchene's 19th goal of the season just 4:48 into the game. St. Louis responded with three goals in a span of 4:08.

Tarasenko tied it at 16:24 of the first when he muscled past defenseman Francois Beauchemin and lifted the puck over Varlamov's right shoulder for his 24th of the season.

Backes gave the Blues a 2-1 lead on the power play when he scored his 11th at 19:02. Berglund made it 3-1 just 50 seconds into the second period when he scored an unassisted goal. It was his first of the year.

"I just kind of think we let them in the game," Berglund said. "We started off good in the first period, we did forecheck, had a lot of pressure on them and got the lead again and I think we just kind of backed off and here they come full speed."

**Blackhawks 3, Penguins 1:** Rookie Artemi Panarin scored two goals for the second straight night, and host Chicago beat Pittsburgh for the second time in two days.

Panarin broke a 1-1 tie when he jumped on a loose puck after a faceoff and whipped it over the glove of goaltender Marc-Andre Fleury at 8:56 of the third. Teuvo Teravainen added an empty-net goal as Chicago earned its season-high fifth straight win in the opener of a four-game homestand.

Scott Darling, filling in for starter Corey Crawford, made 17 saves.

Evgeni Malkin scored for Pittsburgh, and Fleury finished with 34 stops.

**Canadiens 2, Devils 1:** Torrey Mitchell scored a short-handed goal in the second period to lift host Montreal to a victory over New Jersey.

Captain Max Pacioretty also scored for

Montreal (23-16-3), which was playing its first home game in nearly three weeks. Mike Condon made 19 saves for the win.

Adam Henrique responded for the Devils (20-16-5), who got 23 saves from Cory Schneider.

Mitchell scored the winner shortly after Canadiens forward David Desharnais missed a penalty shot high and wide late in the second period.

**Maple Leafs 4, Ducks 0:** Jonathan Bernier made 38 saves in his 11th career shutout, and P.A. Parenteau scored two goals in Toronto's win over host Anaheim.

Nazem Kadri and Brad Boyes also scored for the Leafs, who opened their three-game California road trip with their fourth win in five games overall.

John Gibson stopped 22 shots, but the Ducks' All-Star rookie goalie was forced to leave early in the third following a collision with the Leafs' Nazem Kadri.

Bernier did his toughest work while making 18 saves in the first period of his second shutout of a Southern California team this season. He also scuffled with Corey Perry during the third period when the Ducks' All-Star forward responded to a slash on his legs by cross-checking the Toronto goalie.

**Canucks 3, Hurricanes 2:** Bo Horvat scored his second goal of the game with 1:06 left to give host Vancouver the victory.

Sven Baertschi added a goal and an assist for the Canucks, and Jacob Markstrom stopped 26 shots in his sixth straight start with Ryan Miller out injured.

Jordan Staal had a goal and an assist, and John-Michael Liles also scored for Carolina. Eddie Lack made 18 saves for the Hurricanes in his return to Vancouver.

Horvat, who had gone 27 games without a goal before scoring Monday night in a home loss to Arizona, took a pass from Baertschi on a late power play after Carolina defenseman Jaccob Slavin was whistled for delay of game.