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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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7th Fleet chief urges China transparency

BY JAMES KIMBER
AND COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA, Japan — U.S. forces in the Pacific are “very closely monitoring” China’s recent acts of assertiveness, including the landing of three civilian airplanes on a man-made island in the disputed South China Sea, the commander of the U.S. Navy’s 7th Fleet said Thursday.

Vice Adm. Joseph Aucoin, speaking with reporters aboard the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan in port at Yokosuka, urged China to be more transparent with neighboring southeast Asian nations about its intentions in the South China Sea, saying its actions are causing “angst” in the region.

On Thursday, Pentagon

press secretary Peter Cook said the U.S. was “concerned” after China landed three civilian planes on a newly built runway on a man-made island it claims in the South China Sea. Fiery Cross Reef, the site of the runway, is part of the Spratly Islands, which are also claimed by other nations, including Vietnam and the Philippines.

China landed two commercial jets on Fiery Cross Reef on Wednesday, just days after having landed an airplane there for the first time since the runway was completed in September, according to China’s state-run news agency Xinhua.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying described the latest moves to The Associated Press as tests of the airfield for “civil aviation” purposes.

“We would like China to help with the security and stability of the region by being clear with what they’re doing,” Aucoin said in his first meeting with reporters since he took command in September. “U.S. Navy ships sail where we want to in international waters. But merchant vessels are already feeling this. They need to operate in these international waters, so it would be very helpful for China to abide to these international standards and norms.”

On Friday, Hanoi filed its second formal protest with Beijing in a week for moves that violate “Vietnam’s sovereignty and threaten peace and stability in the region.”

“There is angst associated with this,” Aucoin said. “It would be very nice for all countries, not just China, but

all of the countries to stop this reclamation and resolve this peacefully and not let this angst cause this destabilizing factor to continue.”

On Thursday, Cook told reporters at the Pentagon that the U.S. was concerned about China’s activities on the disputed islands in “a very important part of the world to the United States and others.”

“We don’t pick sides in these disputes,” Cook said. “Anything being done by any country to try to raise tensions over these disputed islands, to try to militarize or to engage in reclamation activities on these islands, we think only adds to instability in the South China Sea.”

Corey Dickstein reported from Washington.
kimber.james@stripes.com
dickstein.corey@stripes.com

Congressman: Were Special Forces denied support?

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Rep. Ryan Zinke, R-Mont., who previously served as a Navy SEAL commander, said Thursday that bureaucratic red tape might have delayed a rescue force and prevented close-air support from adequately helping an Army Special Forces team during a firefight in southern Afghanistan this week in which one American was killed.

Zinke questioned if the rules of engagement in Afghanistan played a role in limiting the support troops on the ground received. They remain “so restrictive that when a unit is pinned down, available assets are not given the latitude to respond in a timely manner, and it appears in this case that it cost lives,” Zinke said in an interview.

Army Staff Sgt. Matthew McClintock, 30, of Des Moines, Wash., was killed Tuesday when his team, along with a detachment of Afghan commandos, came under small-arms fire. In the ensuing battle, an Army HH-60 helicopter was damaged, forcing it to the ground, while another was waved off because of heavy enemy fire. Two other U.S. soldiers were wounded, as were an unknown number of Afghan troops.

Zinke, who said he has been in touch with special forces soldiers close to the operation, said the quick-reaction force was delayed by hours along with close-air support sent to help the beleaguered troops. He said an AC-130 gunship was deployed to support the special forces troops but was not allowed to fire on the enemy because of concerns of collateral damage. Instead,

he said, the aircraft was allowed to fire only into a field.

In light of these reports, Zinke has called for a hearing for the Pentagon to explain the exact circumstances of what happened on the ground in Marjah. “There is every indication,” he said, that air support and rescue efforts were “arbitrarily delayed.”

A U.S. military official in Afghanistan disputed that the quick-reaction force was delayed. It “responded quickly to facilitate casualty evacuation and to prepare the aircraft for recovery,” and included both U.S. and Afghan forces, said Army Col. Michael Lawhorn, a spokesman for Operation Resolute Support, the main U.S. mission in Afghanistan.

“We conducted 12 airstrikes in all to support forces in contact — would not characterize

the SF advisers and Afghan SOF as ‘pinned down,’” he said.

The HH-60 helicopter was damaged when its main rotor hit a wall. That aircraft is operated by Air Force pararescue forces, prompting confusion initially in the media that elite Air Force medics were involved in the operation. Actually, the HH-60 was an Army aircraft used for medical evacuation, Lawhorn said.

The Afghan military’s mission to clear areas around Sangin and Marjah continues, and so does the U.S. Special Operations mission to train and advise Afghan commandos. While conventional American units now only advise Afghan troops, U.S. Special Operations troops still advise commandos on a tactical level, meaning they are still out in the field on operations and face enemy fire.

DOD: Medal of Honor paucity spurred review

By TARA COPP
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — In eight years of conflict in Iraq, the Department of Defense and White House only identified four servicemembers deserving of the Medal of Honor, all posthumously awarded.

In the 15 years of fighting in Afghanistan, only 13 servicemembers have been recognized with the Medal of Honor.

The low number of recipients is one of the factors that prompted the DOD to review approximately 1,100 medals earned by U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001, and to determine whether higher honors might be merited.

Pentagon press secretary Peter Cook said the review also reflects input from veterans' groups.

"There have been some concerns expressed that perhaps there needs to be greater recognition," Cook said. "This is in part a response to that ... to determine if indeed certain

servicemembers deserved different recognition than perhaps they received initially."

DOD spokesman Matthew Allen said the review would be initiated by each service. The Medal of Honor and each of the service crosses — the Army's Distinguished Service Cross, the Navy Cross and the Air Force Cross — must be awarded within five years of the military action being recognized. In cases where more than five years has passed, which is the case for all of the Iraq medals, the service has to request a time waiver from Congress, he said.

The services have until Sept. 30, 2017, to review all of the medals.

"The sheer number that are being reviewed here, more than 1,000, would indicate that there's the possibility" that additional Medal of Honor recipients would be identified, Cook said.

The Pentagon announced it would review the honors and establish new guidelines for awarding medals.

Two men with suspected militant ties arrested in US

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Authorities said Thursday that two people with ties to the Islamic State group have been arrested on terrorism-related charges in California and Texas, including a refugee from Syria who is charged with lying to federal investigators about his travels to the civil war in that country.

The arrests feed a national debate over whether the United States is doing enough to screen refugees from Syria for terrorists from that nation.

Court documents say the men wanted to aid terrorist organizations affiliated with the Islamic State group. However, one man is accused of assisting a group that allied with the Islamic State

organization only after he had returned to the United States.

A criminal complaint unsealed Thursday accuses that man, Aws Mohammed Younis Al-Jayab, 23, of Sacramento, Calif., of traveling to Syria to fight and lying to investigators about it. U.S. Attorney Benjamin Wagner said in a statement that while Al-Jayab was potentially dangerous, there is no indication that he planned any attacks in the United States.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Attorney's Office based in Houston said late Thursday that Omar Faraj Saeed Al Hardan, 24, was indicted Wednesday on three charges that he tried to provide material support to the extremists.

Sex assault reports surge at academies

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Reports of sexual assaults at the three military academies surged by more than 50 percent in the 2014-15 school year, and complaints of sexual harassment also spiked, according to documents reviewed by The Associated Press.

A senior defense official said the sharp increases were due largely to students' growing confidence in the reporting system and expanded awareness programs that during the past several years have included training, videos and information sessions for students and leaders. The programs have been aimed at making victims more aware of the reporting process and more comfortable seeking help.

But the dramatic increases raise nagging questions about whether criminal assaults and harassment are on the rise or if the numbers reflect a growing willingness of victims to come forward.

"I think it's appropriate for people to feel frustrated about hearing this in the news. Bottom line is that if this were an

easy problem, we would have solved it years ago," said Nate Galbreath, the senior executive adviser for the Pentagon's sexual assault prevention office. "Unfortunately, this is a very hard problem to solve."

According to the report documents reviewed by the AP, there were 91 reported sexual assaults during the past school year at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md., the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., and the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado, compared with 59 during the 2013-14 school year.

Reports of assaults went up at all three of the schools, but the number nearly doubled at the Air Force Academy, jumping from 25 to 49.

At the same time, the number of sexual harassment complaints spiked by 40 percent, to a total of 28 during the past school year. According to the documents, the most sexual harassment complaints were at the Naval Academy, with 13. There were seven at West Point and eight at the Air Force Academy.

Bergdahl court-martial set for August in NC

Judicial officials at Fort Bragg, N.C., have set aside two weeks in August for the court-martial of Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl.

Bergdahl is charged with desertion and misbehavior for walking off a combat outpost in Afghanistan in 2009. He was subsequently captured and held prisoner by the Taliban for five years.

The case has been watched closely by many observers since Bergdahl's release in May 2014 in exchange for prisoners being held at the U.S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

The early stages of Bergdahl's case, including a pretrial investigation similar to a civilian grand jury that is known as an Article 32, were held in Texas.

His first appearance at Fort Bragg came last month in a short arraignment hearing, in which Bergdahl deferred his plea.

He next will appear in a Fort Bragg courtroom for a pretrial hearing on Tuesday. Four other hearings are scheduled at Fort Bragg between April and July.

The court-martial is scheduled to begin Aug. 8 and to last through Aug. 19.

From The Fayetteville (N.C.) Observer

Three wild-card teams favored on road

Associated Press

It looks like it's a good year to be a wild card in the NFL playoffs.

The oddsmakers certainly think so, making Kansas City (3 points), Pittsburgh (2½), and Seattle (5½) favorites on the road in the opening round of the postseason. The only wild card that opened as an underdog is slumping Green Bay, and by only a point at Washington.

Those wise guys also have made the sixth-seeded Seahawks the third choice to win the NFC at 9-4, behind Arizona and Carolina, each at 2-1 odds. The AFC's sixth seed, the Steelers, also are the third choice behind division winners Denver and New England.

As for the upcoming weekend, what they are thinking in Las Vegas is that none of the division winners — Redskins, Texans, Bengals or Vikings — is impressive.

Indeed, much of the talk the past few weeks around the league was about which opponent was a must to avoid, with the Seahawks, Chiefs and Steelers the front-runners in that race.

"You know what? I could honestly care less about what anybody says outside of this locker room," Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce said. "We know that we line

up against anybody that we're confident that we're going to get the job done."

They have done what's necessary in 10 straight games for one of the great turnarounds in NFL history. The Chiefs rank first in the AFC with a plus-14 turnover margin. The defense is formidable and might get back its best player, linebacker Justin Houston (knee). They're 5-3 on the road and already have won at the Texans, in the season opener, when KC wasn't nearly so strong.

"First of all they have a lot of good players and they have a really good coaching staff. That combination is tough," Texans coach Bill O'Brien said.

"On defense they've got really good pass rushers with (Tamba) Hali and Houston and they've got a good secondary playing at a high level, their linebackers fly around, their front seven is really, really good.

"Offensively Alex Smith's had a good year, receivers, (Jeremy) Maclin. I know Jamaal Charles is on IR now, but they've still got running backs, Kelce the tight end, a really good offensive line. So it's a big challenge."

Although Pittsburgh stumbled badly in Week 16 with its loss at the Ravens, it got another chance when the moment proved too big for the Jets in Buffalo.

Considering how the Steelers can ring up points on anyone, plus their strong postseason pedigree with leaders such as Ben Roethlisberger, Heath Miller, Cam Heyward, revitalized James Harrison and coach Mike Tomlin, the Bengals can't be thrilled with Saturday night's matchup.

Also remember the Steelers won in Cincinnati 33-20 a month ago, are 18-7 overall against their AFC North rivals since 2004, have won 21 of 26 at Riverfront or Paul Brown stadiums, and Cincy hasn't won a playoff game since the 1990 season.

"The postseason is a different season," Roethlisberger said. "You're going to have to do your best, throw out all of the records, throw out where you are playing. Everybody has to step up and be ready to go."

Steelers fans expect their team to be ready: Saturday's prime-time affair is sold out and you can bet plenty of Terrible Towels will be waving in Cincinnati.

Considering how Minnesota has closed the schedule, winning three straight to grab the NFC North and also with a close defeat at Arizona before that, some might be surprised to see the Seahawks so heavily favored. If so, those folks have forgotten the shellacking Seattle handed the Vikings in Minneapolis in early

December.

For further emphasis, this is a more balanced Seahawks team than the squads that reached the past two Super Bowls. Its defense might not be quite as dynamic, but its offense is vastly superior to 2013 and '14.

"I think people can sometimes forget who we are," star cornerback Richard Sherman said. "We let a few penalties, weird calls or miscues change their perception, and then we come back and remind them."

Only the Packers among the wild cards don't seem fearsome, mainly because their offense has frozen. Yet they play the perceived weakest of the division champions, so no one is counting out Aaron Rodgers and company. Also, the Redskins (9-7) didn't beat a team that finished with a winning record.

This could be one of those years when being on the road in January matters little. Visitors went 118-138 this season, and the wild cards were a collective 19-13 away from home.

Plus, it's not as if non-division champions can't win Super Bowls. Indeed, the Steelers, Chiefs and Packers all have done it.

Texans try to put an end to Chiefs' 10-game streak

Associated Press

HOUSTON — The previous time the Kansas City Chiefs won a playoff game Bill Clinton was President and Tonya Harding's ex-husband had just been arrested for hiring someone to attack figure skating rival Nancy Kerrigan.

Kansas City (11-5) has lost eight postseason games since that win over the Oilers in Houston on Jan. 16, 1994, and will return to the city to face the Texans on Saturday in the wild-card round, looking to snap this lengthy skid.

The Chiefs, who have won a franchise-record 10 straight games, insist they won't be thinking about their years of playoffs woes when they line up to meet the AFC South champion Texans.

"I don't think this team's carrying that weight, to be honest," quarterback Alex Smith said. "Those were the other 22 years and 22 teams. This is us."

So instead of thinking about playoff failures that include Lin Elliott's three field-goal misses against Indianapolis in 1995 and the 28-point lead they blew against the Colts two years ago, they're simply focusing on the challenge of dealing with Houston.

"Since 1-5, it's been a playoff atmosphere," Kansas City linebacker Derrick Johnson said. "It was kind of a win or go home type deal. We've been winning for 10 weeks straight — that doesn't guarantee us an 11th win, but we do have some momentum ... (but) we have to play our best game if we're going to win in Houston."

The Texans are perhaps this season's most improbable playoff team after winning seven of their last nine games to rebound from a terrible start to finish 9-7 and return to the postseason for the first time since 2012.

Sack Attack is back: Chiefs linebacker Justin Houston will play for the first time since Nov. 29, when he hyperextended his knee in a game against Buffalo, and fellow pass rusher Tamba Hali will not be limited after playing a handful of snaps last week following surgery on his broken thumb. That means the Chiefs' defense — allowing 17.9 points, third-best in the NFL — should be even better.

Also returning: This time a year ago, Eric Berry was in the middle of chemotherapy treatment for lymphoma. Now, the Pro Bowl safety is anchoring the Kansas City secondary as it prepares for DeAndre Hopkins and Co.

"There's more at stake, more on the line. But we just keep raising the level," he said, "and go about it that way."

Dynamic Duo: Watt had 17½ sacks this season and outside linebacker Whitney Mercilus finished with 12 to give Houston the only duo with at least 12 sacks each in the NFL and give the Texans two players with at least 10 for the first time in franchise history. Mercilus finished the regular season strong, piling up 5½ sacks, with one forced fumble, one fumble recovery and one pass defensed in December to earn AFC defensive player of the month honors.

Cincinnati seeking first playoff victory since 1990

Associated Press

CINCINNATI — All week long, they played nice. The Bengals and the Steelers went out of their way to curb their comments about how they really feel about each other.

Umm, let's talk about something else. Treat it like just a game. Forget that rivalry stuff.

"All that stuff's over when you get into the playoffs," Bengals left tackle Andrew Whitworth said. "It really doesn't matter who it is or what division they're from."

Sorry. Nobody's buying it. The Ohio River rivals have such a deep dislike for each other that they traded nasty words and tweets before they met at Paul Brown Stadium on Dec. 13, and then scuffled on the field during pregame warmups. There were so many personal fouls during the game that the league handed out more than \$100,000 in fines.

Four weeks later, the only difference is that the stakes are higher.

The Bengals (12-4) are putting their 25-year streak of playoff futility on the line against the Steelers (10-6) on Saturday night, trying to do a better job of keeping their cool. They got caught up in the emotion and suffered a meltdown four weeks ago, a 33-20 defeat that basically cost them a playoff bye and their starting quarterback.

Andy Dalton was leading the league in passer rating when he broke his thumb while making a tackle during an interception return. AJ McCarron took over

and threw a pair of interceptions, one of which was returned for a touchdown.

And the trash talking went on endlessly, getting so out of hand that Bengals coach Marvin Lewis and Steelers coach Mike Tomlin talked about it by phone the following day.

Television monitors in the Bengals locker room this week had the usual schedule of activities, plus a quote from franchise founder Paul Brown: "The key to winning is poise under stress."

Some things to watch on Saturday night at Paul Brown Stadium:

The history: Cincinnati hasn't won a playoff game since the 1990 season, the sixth-longest streak of postseason futility in NFL history. Coach Marvin Lewis is 0-6, tied with Jim Mora for most consecutive playoff losses to start a career. The Steelers and Bengals have met only once in the playoffs, and that was 10 years ago when Carson Palmer got his knee torn up on his first pass and Pittsburgh won 31-17. The Steelers are 14-3 all time at Paul Brown Stadium, which opened in 2000.

McCarron's big moment: McCarron hasn't thrown an interception in his three starts in Dalton's place, leading the Bengals to a 2-1 mark. He won two national championships at Alabama and thinks his experience in big games should help on Saturday. History is against him: No quarterback with so little NFL starting experience has won a playoff game since Gifford Nielsen led the Houston Oilers over the Chargers in the 1979 season.



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Kings hold off Lakers' rally

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Kobe Bryant received a hug and a gift from former teammate Vlade Divac. The Los Angeles Lakers star left Sacramento without his prime objective: a victory.

DeMarcus Cousins had 29 points, 10 rebounds and seven assists, and the Kings blew all of a 27-point lead in the second half before beating the Lakers 118-115 on Thursday night in Bryant's last Sacramento appearance.

Divac and the 37-year-old Bryant have a long, intertwined history. Now the Kings' general manager, Divac was traded by the Lakers in 1996 to the Charlotte Hornets, who gave Los Angeles the draft rights to the 17-year-old Bryant, who is playing in his 20th and final season as a Laker.

"He gave me a Charlotte Hornets jersey. No. 8. It's awesome," said Bryant, who was later a teammate of Divac. "He has a great sense of humor and is a real practical joker. It goes well with my sarcasm."

Although the Kings were ahead 25-4 five minutes into the game, they needed a late rally and a go-ahead basket from Rajon Rondo to spoil the night for Bryant, who thrilled the partisan crowd with 28 points.

Bryant made 10 of 18 shots and was 6-for-8 on free throws. But he was on the bench for the night by the time the Lakers made a huge comeback to take the lead down the stretch.

"Kobe was amazing; I tip my hat to him. He had a great game and gave the crowd what they wanted," said Ben McLemore, who guarded Bryant for much of the

game. "Defending him in his final game in Sacramento was an honor. It's something I will remember forever."

What the Kings may want to forget was a fourth quarter where they squandered a 16-point lead and were outscored 29-16.

"In the second half we got outfought and outthusted," Kings coach George Karl said. "I think we mentally shut down. Maybe we celebrate too much when we are playing really well."

Rookie D'Angelo Russell scored 11 of his 27 points in the fourth quarter before having to leave with an ankle injury for the Lakers, who have dropped five straight games to the Kings.

Lou Williams added 20 points for the Lakers and Jordan Clarkson had 12 of his 15 in the fourth quarter.

Rudy Gay scored 18 points and Quincy Acy had a season-high 18 for the Kings. McLemore had 16 points and Kosta Koufos added 14. Rondo had nine points and 12 assists.

Bulls 101, Celtics 92: Pau Gasol had 17 points and 18 rebounds, Derrick Rose scored 18 points, and host Chicago beat Boston for its sixth straight victory.

Jimmy Butler added 19 points and 10 assists.

The Bulls used a big third quarter to extend their longest winning streak of the season and handed the Celtics their fourth loss in five games.

Boston coach Brad Stevens missed the game to visit a cancer-stricken former player from his time as a university coach.

With assistant Jay Larranaga filling in

for Stevens, Boston got 17 points from Jae Crowder. Kelly Olynyk added 16 points and nine rebounds, but the Celtics shot just 35.7 percent and were 5-for-25 on three-pointers.

Hawks 126, 76ers 98: Kent Bazemore scored 22 points, Paul Millsap and Al Horford had 18 apiece and visiting Atlanta blew out Philadelphia to end a two-game losing streak.

Dennis Schroder added 14 points off the bench for the Hawks, who shot 54 percent from the field and 42 percent from three-point range against the NBA's worst team en route to their most lopsided win of the season.

Rookie Jahlil Okafor led the Sixers with 21 points, while Nerlens Noel had nine points and 13 rebounds. Recently acquired point guard Ish Smith finished with 12 points and seven assists.

Rockets 103, Jazz 94: James Harden scored 33 points to lead visiting Houston to its second victory over Utah in four days.

The Rockets won 93-91 Monday in Salt Lake City. Harden had 30 points in that one and has scored at least 30 in three of his last four games.

Playing without Dwight Howard, who sat out with lower back tightness, the Rockets beat the Jazz for the 10th time in the last 12 meetings.

Gordon Hayward scored 15 points for Utah. Center Rudy Gobert played for the first time since spraining a left knee ligament on Nov. 30. He was limited to just 15 minutes but chipped in six points and three rebounds.

Forbes, Spartans top Illinois

Associated Press

EAST LANSING, Mich. — Bryn Forbes has been a good player for No. 5 Michigan State.

Tom Izzo, though, is not satisfied with that.

Forbes scored 17 points to help the Spartans rout Illinois 79-54 on Thursday night for their second straight victory without Denzel Valentine.

"He's got to become a great player," Izzo said.

Forbes made more than half of his 13 shots, connected on three three-pointers, and had three assists, one rebound, one steal and one turnover.

"I didn't think Bryn had his best game," Izzo lamented. "He has been playing a lot better defensively."

The Spartans (15-1, 2-1 Big Ten) missed Valentine for a fourth straight game. The senior guard participated in pregame warmups and might play at Penn State on Sunday, nearly three weeks after having surgery on his left knee.

"Could've played, wanted to play, but he wasn't quite there yet," Izzo said.

Valentine practiced Wednesday night, moving closer to playing in a game.

The Illini (8-8, 0-3) didn't have scoring leader Kendrick Nunn. He stayed in Illinois for the birth of his child, a boy, who was born at about the same time as the game began.

"As the father of three kids, I felt like he needed to be there," Illinois coach John Groce said.

Maverick Morgan had 15 points and Malcolm Hill scored 10 for Illinois. The Illini made barely more than one-fourth of their shots in the first half and allowed the Spartans to connect on 61 percent of their shots before halftime.

UCLA 87, No. 7 Arizona 84: Bryce Alford scored 25 points, hitting a go-ahead three-pointer with 1.8 seconds left that gave the host Bruins an upset of the Wildcats for their first Pac-12 victory after opening conference play with consecutive road losses.

Aaron Holiday added 15 points, Isaac Hamilton had 14 points and Tony Parker had 14 points and 12 rebounds for the Bruins (10-6, 1-2). They lost to the Washington schools last weekend.

No. 15 SMU 59, Cincinnati 57: Jordan Tolbert tipped in Nic Moore's missed shot for the go-ahead score with 28 seconds left and then had a big block as the host Mustangs rallied to remain undefeated.

Short-handed SMU (14-0, 3-0 American Athletic Conference), off to the best start in school history, overcame a seven-point deficit in the final 3½ minutes.

No. 16 Louisville 77, N.C. State 72: Quentin Snider scored a career-high 21 points to help the visiting Cardinals beat the Wolfpack.

Freshman Ray Spalding had 12 points off the bench for the Cardinals (13-2, 2-0 Atlantic Coast Conference). They shot 51 percent and used a 9-0 run in the second half to build a double-digit lead before having to hang on against a frantic rally by the Wolfpack.

No. 20 Purdue 87, Michigan 70: A.J. Hammons scored 17 points and had four blocks and Rapheal Davis added 16 points to lead the host Boilermakers past the Wolverines.

The Boilermakers (14-2, 2-1 Big Ten) have won eight of 10 and are 10-1 at home this season.

Panthers extend winning streak to 11

Associated Press

OTTAWA, Ontario — The Florida Panthers needed 12 minutes to get their first shot on goal and had just 16 of them total Thursday night.

Goalie Roberto Luongo kept the NHL's hottest team on track.

Reilly Smith and Vincent Trocheck scored 8 seconds apart in the first period, Luongo made 30 saves and the Panthers extended their franchise-best winning streak to 11 games with a 3-2 victory over the Ottawa Senators.

Aleksander Barkov also scored for the Atlantic Division-leading Panthers and Luongo won his career-high ninth straight start.

"I don't think by any means that was our best game," Luongo said. "It was probably one of our worst in the last 11, but for some reason or other right now we're finding ways to win games, so it's nice. We'll take them."

Florida's streak is the NHL's longest since Boston won 12 straight in March of 2014, according to the NHL.

"We have to say thanks to (Luongo) for this one," Panthers forward Jaromir Jagr said. "We didn't play our best, but we found a way to win. It's big for us."

Max McCormick and Milan Michalek scored for the Senators and Craig Anderson stopped 13 shots.

In the first period, Luongo made a great save, and on the ensuing play, Smith deflected Jonathan Huberdeau's shot to open the scoring at 12:01 on the Panthers' first shot of the game. Trocheck made it 2-0 after Ottawa's Fredrik Claesson turned the puck over trying a no-look pass from the end boards out in front of his own net.

"The first one was a great shot by Smitty and the second one we capitalized on their mistake," Jagr said. "It was big for us. We didn't play very well, but we had a 2-0 lead so it was big."

Florida kept the lead from there despite being outshot 23-12 over the final two periods. The 36-year-old Luongo has allowed two or fewer goals in six straight games. He deflected attention when asked if this is the best hockey he's played.

"I think so, but that's also due to the fact that the guys in front of me are playing so well defensively, also, so it goes hand in hand," he said. "When they play well in front of me, makes my job easier, makes me play well and maybe they feed off of that. That's what a team's all about."

Barkov made it 3-1 7:30 into the third period. Claesson got his stick on Jaromir Jagr's centering pass, but the puck still trickled over for Barkov to backhand in near the far post.

"For me it's a tough one to swallow because we put ourselves behind the eight-ball down 2-0 when we were playing pretty good hockey," said Anderson.

Capitals 4, Islanders 1: Alex Ovechkin scored his 497th goal, Braden Holtby stopped 34 shots to keep up his stellar play and NHL-leading Washington beat host New York.

Jason Chimera, Nate Schmidt and Nicklas Backstrom also scored to help Washington reach 63 points and become the first team with 30 wins. Holtby improved to 26-4-2, including 18-0-2 in his last 21 games.

Kings 2, Maple Leafs 1: Jake Muzzin and Jeff Carter scored third-period goals and Vincent Lecavalier had an assist while making his debut with host Los Angeles.

Los Angeles acquired Lecavalier and defenseman Luke Schenn from Philadelphia on Wednesday, and both veterans played solidly against the Maple Leafs a few hours after their cross-country flight.

Red Wings 2, Sharks 1: Petr Mrazek made 35 saves, Justin Abdelkader scored with 6:52 remaining and visiting Detroit got its third straight win.

Danny DeKeyser also scored and Detroit remained perfect midway through a six-game trip. Mrazek has started each of those three games and allowed four goals in that time.

Coyotes 2, Flames 1: Stefan Elliott scored on a point shot through traffic 1:47 into the third period and visiting Arizona beat Calgary.

Elliott worked a cycle up high with Anthony Duclair before firing through Martin Hanzal's screen. Hanzal was originally credited with the goal, but replays showed the puck deflected off Flames defenseman Kris Russell and not Hanzal.

Stars 2, Jets 1 (SO): Tyler Seguin and Patrick Sharp scored back-to-back goals to start the shootout and host Dallas ended a season-high three-game losing streak.

Seguin stopped a three-game pointless streak, his longest of the season, with a first-period goal. Mathieu Perreault pulled Winnipeg even in the second period.

Flyers 4, Wild 3 (OT): Michael Del Zotto scored his second goal of the game with 37 seconds left in overtime to send visiting Philadelphia over Minnesota.

Sean Couturier scored his fifth goal in nine games and Ryan White also scored to help Philadelphia win its second straight after losing three in a row. Steve Mason made 31 saves for the Flyers and Brayden Schenn added two assists.