

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## 10 US sailors detained by Iran freed

BY TARA COPP  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Ten U.S. sailors were released early Wednesday by Iranian authorities after being detained for less than 24 hours in what was described as an unintentional entry into Iran's territorial waters in the Persian Gulf.

The crews of the two U.S. riverine command boats — small, shallow-water patrol craft with minimal technology or defenses on board — were detained Tuesday after a mechanical failure caused the boats to drift into Iran's territorial waters near Farsi Island, U.S. defense officials said. There were nine male sailors and one female sailor on board the vessels.

What could have become a tense international incident instead was quickly resolved through U.S. and Iranian diplomacy, a sign of what's at stake in the Persian Gulf, said retired Navy Cmdr. Chris Harmer, a senior naval analyst with the Institute for the Study of War.

Harmer, a former Navy helicopter pilot, deployed many times to the Persian Gulf and was assigned to various U.S. aircraft carriers, destroyers and cruisers there during his 20-year military career.

"I think the real interesting question here is, 'What is the internal state of play in terms of the hardliners in Iran versus the moderates? I thought there was a real possibility Iran would hold the sailors longer, but it seems the senior Iranian leadership told the [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps] who had the U.S. sailors, 'You are going to release these guys right now.'"

Farsi Island is used as a base for Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Navy, which is part of the 150,000-strong Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' ground, air and naval forces. The hardliner group was formed in 1979 to protect the Islamic Republic and is loyal

**'Absolutely zero truth to rumors that [Secretary of State John Kerry] apologized to Iran over the sailors. Nothing to apologize for.'**

John Kirby  
State Department spokesman

to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as opposed to Iran's regular armed forces, which report to Iranian president Hassan Rouhani, according to the Council on Foreign Relations.

Harmer said the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Navy is responsible for patrolling the Persian Gulf, whereas Iran's regular Navy patrols outside the Gulf.

The release also comes just days before the International Atomic Energy Agency is expected to verify that Iran has fulfilled the terms of last year's nuclear deal with the United States, which lifts numerous sanctions worth billions of dollars off Iran's financial, shipbuilding, software, automobile and oil industries. In exchange, Iran must cease its development of enriched uranium, used to make nuclear weapons, and sharply curtail other aspects of its nuclear research.

In a statement on the sailors' release, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps said the United States apologized for the incident. However, John Kirby, a State Department spokesman, said reports of an apology were false.

"Absolutely zero truth to rumors that [Secretary of State John Kerry] apologized to Iran over the sailors.

Nothing to apologize for," Kirby wrote on Twitter.

The sailors were detained after at least one of the vessels experienced mechanical problems and their vessels floated within the 12-mile radius of Iranian territorial waters near Farsi Island in the middle of the Persian Gulf. However, the Navy said later that it was still not clear what caused the boats to become disabled.

When the Navy confirmed the boats were at Farsi Island, it turned to the State Department to negotiate their release.

The Navy stated in a news release that after Iran released the boats, the crews met U.S. Navy aircraft, which took them ashore. New crews were swapped onto the two boats, which continued on to Bahrain, the original destination.

The quick release of the U.S. sailors was a far different scenario than in 2007, when the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Navy detained 15 British sailors and held them for 13 days at the height of the Iraq War.

The promise of opened markets for Iran "plays a lot" into Wednesday's quick resolution, but it doesn't mean that Iran isn't still looking for a reason to engage in war with the United States, Harmer said.

"My assumption is, at some point, the United States and Iran will face off again, even though they have a nuclear deal in place," Harmer said, citing Iran's interests in Syria and support of Hezbollah.

During Harmer's eight deployments there between 1995 and 2009, he said U.S. pilots and ship crews took care to stay in communication with their Iranian counterparts and not take unnecessary risk.

He questioned why the Navy would have its patrol craft near Farsi Island.

"You don't put two 50-foot patrol boats at the tip of the spear," Harmer said.

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## Will 2016 be the year of commissary reform?

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Last year was mostly a bust for lawmakers on Capitol Hill hoping to overhaul military commissaries, one of servicemembers' oldest and most cherished benefits, though 2016 kicks off with new momentum and proposals.

If last year was about privatization, this year could focus on "variable pricing" and commissary-branded products as a way to cut \$1.4 billion in annual costs and modernize the worldwide chain of 243 military grocery stores.

"It's what every grocery chain does across the country," said Rep. Joe Heck, R-Nev., a retired Army brigadier general. He chairs an Armed Services subcommittee that kicked off new hearings Wednesday on overhauling the stores.

Adjusting commissary product prices depending on the region where they are sold and selling products under a Defense Commissary Agency label are ideas backed in a consultant study delivered last fall to Congress, which will likely form the basis of debate on the Hill. Advocacy groups are already warning Congress to move with caution and that changes could result in shoppers abandoning the stores.

The Pentagon proposed reducing the commissary budget to \$400 million but the road to reform during the past couple of years has been rocky. Servicemembers

are wary of changes to the benefit and groups opposed a proposal put forward by the Senate last year that would have privatized a handful of stores as part of a pilot project.

Still, proponents of military personnel reform in Congress are fresh from a major victory in 2015 with a historic overhaul of the armed services retirement system.

Heck, whose family was in the supermarket business when he was growing up, hopes lawmakers are ready to move this year on military grocery stores and he is now leading the effort in the House. But he said slashing the stores' budget is not the main goal.

"There are some that feel the driving factor should be moving the commissary off of [Defense Department] appropriated funds. ... I can say from my perspective that is not the driving motivation," Heck said.

Instead, the grocery stores could improve the way they sell food and be more efficient by using variable pricing. That would mean operating more like their commercial counterparts outside of the gate.

"If you go to the Kroger in Alabama, they are going to have a different price than the Kroger in San Francisco," he said. "So the goal is to make sure the beneficiary has the same level of savings across the [DECA] footprint in relation to where they actually live and would be purchasing."

The DECA-labeled products would also take a page from private stores that

shelve their own groceries to compete with name brands.

Heck hopes to get commissary sales to at least a break-even point — the stores now lose money on every sale — though still at a level that saves shoppers money over local commercial supermarkets. Of course, that would likely mean some increased prices.

"I think that compared to what we see today there may be some places where costs would go up, but there also may be some places where costs would go down," he said.

Military advocates and a military trade association are skeptical. They told lawmakers during a hearing called by Heck on Wednesday to beware of variable pricing and DECA-labeled products.

"This becomes a slippery slope," said Tom Gordy, president of the Armed Forces Marketing Council, a group that lobbies for commissaries and exchange stores.

Adjusting commissary prices in each store to more closely match local prices will result in higher costs for shoppers — and could allow DECA to increase prices even more in five or 10 years if new financial pressures come along, Gordy said.

Eileen Huck, government relations deputy director of the National Military Family Association, said many shoppers now depend on the commissaries to stock brand-name products and that supplying a DECA-labeled alternative would not give the same assurance of quality.

"Our concern is that DECA does not have

the expertise to develop private label products," he said.

Such opposition could cause problems for reform efforts on the Hill. To complicate the issue, the Government Accountability Office is still expected to release a report this year on the possibility of privatization, which could trigger new hearings on that controversial idea, according to Heck.

If any changes gain enough lawmaker support, they could be added into the National Defense Authorization Act, a massive military policy bill that typically takes most of the year to hammer out.

Brooke Goldberg, deputy director for government relations for the Military Officers Association of America, called commissaries a landmark benefit and said lawmakers should not look to cut it in times of austerity unless they can replace it with something of equal or higher value.

Meanwhile, changes in pricing regionally — instead of consistent prices across the global chain of stores — is also perceived as a threat by military families and risks their loyalty to the commissary system, Goldberg said.

"They rely on that consistency, so when you change things you risk them leaving and not coming back," she said.

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# Sailor aboard destroyer Ross punished for sex harassment

BY STEVEN BEARDSLEY  
*Stars and Stripes*

NAPLES, Italy — A sailor assigned to the destroyer USS Ross will be confined for 120 days and stripped of rank for making repeated sexual comments to younger female sailors, a Navy judge ruled Tuesday.

Petty Officer 2nd Class Aldane Aarons, a gas turbine systems mechanic aboard the Spain-based ballistic missile defense ship, will have his pay docked and be demoted to seaman recruit under the court-martial sentence. He is expected to face administrative separation from the service.

Navy judge Capt. John Waits sentenced Aarons to a bad-conduct discharge but was bound by a pretrial agreement ruling out that option. Under the agreement, Aarons pleaded guilty to a sexual harassment charge on

Tuesday and prosecutors withdrew a sexual assault charge. The convening authority and the defendant agreed to a maximum 120 days in confinement.

Military law calls for a judge to deliver an independent sentence in any case that involves a deal between the convening authority and the defendant. If the judge's sentence is stiffer than the punishment outlined in the deal, the judge must defer to the agreement. If more lenient, the judge's ruling will stand. The judge is kept from seeing the punishment set out in the deal before ruling.

The maximum penalty for sexual harassment is a year of confinement, pay forfeiture and a bad-conduct discharge.

Two of Aarons' three victims were present to testify on Tuesday. One, a Navy fireman who worked with Aarons during deployment, testified that the

hugs he playfully sought turned awkward as his hands moved further down her back. Aarons asked why he couldn't get "any sugar," made suggestive gestures and once tried pulling her coveralls off as she was pulling them up, she testified.

Another sailor, a petty officer third class, told Waits that Aarons refused to sign a training certificate until she told him whether she liked "brown sugar." Aarons, a naturalized U.S. citizen from Jamaica, is black.

She recalled Aarons once pulling her against a bulkhead after she brushed past him in a tight space and trying to pull her coveralls down. After pushing him away, she avoided him in the ship whenever possible, she said, to the point of missing meals.

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## Carrier Ford wired with millions of feet of cable

(Newport News, Va.) Daily Press

NEWPORT NEWS — America's newest aircraft carrier is officially wired for war, and it only took about 14 million feet of cable.

Workers at Newport News Shipbuilding have installed all the necessary electrical and fiber optic cable on the Gerald R. Ford, the company announced Monday. It works out to more than 10 million feet of electrical cable and 4 million feet of fiber optic.

The Ford is the first in a new generation of aircraft carrier that relies far more on electrical power and automation than the current Nimitz-class ships.

"Ford's increased electrical capacity makes this ship unique," said Rolf Bartschi, vice president of construction for the Ford.

The distribution system increases the Ford's electrical capacity more than 250 percent. The fiber optics improve automation and data networks. The electrical system powers new components that will allow the ship to load weapons and launch aircraft faster.

Hundreds of sailors assigned to the Ford have now begun to live on the ship as the carrier enters its final stages of construction at Newport News Shipbuilding.

The Ford will have new electromagnetic catapults that replace the steam-powered catapults on Nimitz class ships. The new technology has experienced growing pains, but Navy leaders say the catapults will help increase sorties by 33 percent.

More reliance on electrical power will also translate into less maintenance time, officials say.

The Ford's construction is largely complete, and the Navy is scheduled to take delivery of the ship later this year.

## Obama calls for change, compromise

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — With Americans soon to begin choosing his successor, President Barack Obama is casting his seven divisive years as a time of positive change, implicitly asking voters to replace him with a Democrat who would continue his hard-won policies on health care, climate change and Iran.

Addressing a hostile Republican-led Congress and a country plunged in a tumultuous, at times angry presidential campaign, Obama used his final State of the Union address to summon an affirmative vision of his administration and for the future. He rebutted critics, naysayers and the GOP White House hopefuls, but also acknowledged his own failure to transform the country's bitter

politics and unite the nation.

With a year left in office, he presented that task as more urgent than ever and pleaded with voters to turn away from harsh voices and come together.

"Democracy grinds to a halt without a willingness to compromise; or when even basic facts are contested," Obama said. "Our public life withers when only the most extreme voices get attention."

Conceding that changing Washington was not the job of one person, Obama called on voters to change the system itself by demanding less money in politics, fairly drawn congressional districts and easier access to voting.

"It's one of the few regrets of my presidency — that the rancor and suspicion between the parties has gotten worse instead of better," the president

said.

At times, Obama referred sarcastically to the Republicans running to replace him, though without mentioning them by name.

At another point, the president said, "Anyone claiming that America's economy is in decline is peddling fiction." He also declared: "The United States of America is the most powerful nation on Earth. Period. It's not even close."

Referencing terrorism threats around the globe, Obama defended his own efforts fighting Islamic State militants, and said: "Our answer needs to be more than tough talk or calls to carpet bomb civilians. That may work as a TV sound bite, but it doesn't pass muster on the world stage."



# NFL approves Rams' LA move

Associated Press

HOUSTON — The Rams are moving back to Los Angeles, maybe with company.

The San Diego Chargers and Oakland Raiders might end up staying put, although the leadership of both NFL teams didn't come close to making that commitment on Tuesday. Or one of them could be headed to L.A., too.

A long day of votes and re-votes ended with 30 of 32 NFL owners approving Rams owner Stan Kroenke's ambitious plan to move his team from St. Louis to the site of the old Hollywood Park racetrack in Inglewood, Calif., about 10 miles from downtown L.A. The Chargers have a yearlong option to join the Rams, followed by the Raiders if the San Diego franchise declines.

The Raiders and Chargers had a competing proposal to share a new stadium in nearby Carson, but neither option got the 24 votes needed for approval. After another negotiating session on Tuesday afternoon, Kroenke's \$1.8 billion project prevailed.

The decision ends the NFL's 21-year absence from the nation's second-largest media market.

"I often said over those 21 years what we need is a great facility," NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell said at a news conference about 11 hours after the meetings began. "I think what happened over the last years is we had two outstanding opportunities, both of these stadium projects were outstanding."

Chargers chairman Dean Spanos was asked if he intended to play in Los Angeles

in 2016.

"I'm going to take a day off tomorrow I think," Spanos said. "This has really been excruciating for everyone. It's very difficult to say right now I'm going to do this or do that."

Oakland is still in debt from a renovation 20 years ago when the Raiders moved back from Los Angeles. City officials have said they won't seek help from taxpayers with a new stadium and asked the NFL for more time to develop a project in a response to the Raiders' relocation plan. The NFL agreed.

The Chargers play 120 miles south of Inglewood in aging Qualcomm Stadium. The Raiders played in Los Angeles from 1982-94 and currently split a facility with Major League Baseball's Oakland Athletics, the last remaining combination stadium.

The Rams — based in the L.A. area from 1946-94 — will likely have a temporary home at the Los Angeles Coliseum until the new stadium is ready in 2019. It's unclear where the Chargers would play if they move.

San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer says the city and county will negotiate with the Chargers, but "are not interested in a charade by the Chargers if they continue to pursue Los Angeles."

St. Louis had a plan for an open-air, \$1.1 billion stadium along the Mississippi River north of the Gateway Arch to replace the Edward Jones Dome. But Kroenke mostly ignored the city's overtures, and Goodell said the requirement of at least \$200 million from the NFL was double what league policy allowed.

Kroenke also has said St. Louis' economy makes it difficult for an NFL franchise to thrive there.

"We understand the emotions involved of our fans," he said. "We made a decision and worked long and hard at the various alternatives. When they didn't succeed, we worked this one to this point."

Dave Peacock, co-head of the task force working to keep the team in St. Louis, said in an impromptu conference call that the process was "more contemplated and contrived than I realized" and that it appeared "St. Louis never had a chance."

"We had aimed for a target, hit it, and they said, 'No, the target is over here.'"

Peacock concluded: "This is a byproduct of an owner who just didn't want to be here."

Attorney Bob Blitz, the other co-head of the task force, did not rule out legal action.

The last NFL team to move was the Houston Oilers to Tennessee in 1997. The Raiders and Rams both left Los Angeles after the 1994 season.

"It is troubling that the league would allow for the relocation of a team when a home market has worked in good faith and presented a strong and viable proposal," Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon said. "We will review the NFL's decision thoroughly before determining what next steps to take."

The relocation agreement gives the Chargers and Raiders \$100 million each if they build new stadiums in their current markets, but a stadium plan is required within a year.

# Raiders left in limbo by decision

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Oakland was given another shot to keep the Raiders.

The NFL approved a compromise measure Tuesday that allows the St. Louis Rams to move back to the Los Angeles area and gives the San Diego Chargers the option to join them in Inglewood.

The Raiders had hoped to move to Carson with the Chargers, but were left out of the high-stakes game of musical chairs. But the team could get the chance to join the Rams at their stadium in 2017 if the Chargers remain in San Diego.

"This is not a win for the Raiders today," owner Mark Davis said after the vote in Houston.

But for now, the Raiders can negotiate with Oakland on building a new stadium or look to other cities such as San Antonio, or possibly San Diego or St. Louis for a new home.

The Raiders' lease at the Oakland Coliseum expires next month, but they could reach a short-term extension to stay until they find a long-term solution. Davis said the "world is a possibility" for the Raiders and a team-issued statement did not mention Oakland.

Oakland officials were pleased by the news and hope the additional time granted by Tuesday's decision will help them reach a deal for a new stadium without direct public subsidies.

"We recognize the clock is ticking and this opportunity will not last forever," Mayor Libby Schaaf said. "My hope is we are given a year to get what will be a very complex project together."

The decision Tuesday gives at least a temporary reprieve to Oakland fans who had their hearts broken once before when the Raiders departed for Los Angeles following the 1981 season.

The team spent 14 years in Los Angeles before returning to Oakland amid much fanfare for the 1995 season. But the return stay has not been nearly as successful as the first tenure when the Raiders won two Super Bowls and were one of the league's top teams.

The Raiders have been unable to add to that success since their return outside of a three-year run starting in 2000 when the Raiders made it to two AFC title games and one Super Bowl. The team has failed to post a winning record or make the playoffs in the 18 other seasons.

The move back also wasn't very successful off the field as the city of Oakland and Alameda County were left holding the bag after personal seat licenses failed to cover the cost of the \$220 million renovation that added more than 10,000 seats and luxury boxes in what was called Mount Davis.

The city and county still owe about \$100 million in debt on the upgrade, which has made financing a new stadium problematic.

But with the Coliseum growing more outdated and suffering from occasional sewage backups and other infrastructure problems, a new stadium is essential.

Oakland officials said they would be able to give the Raiders 60 acres of land on the Coliseum site to build a new 55,000-seat stadium if they can get the funding.

# Chargers consider whether to stay put

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — The San Diego Chargers face a big decision: take the option to move to the Los Angeles area along with the Rams, or accept an extra \$100 million from the NFL and try to repair their badly damaged relations with San Diego in working out a deal for a new stadium.

Team chairman Dean Spanos looked stunned at the decision Tuesday by fellow owners to let the Rams leave St. Louis and build a stadium in Inglewood.

There was a feeling the Chargers would make it to L.A. one way or another, either with the rival Oakland Raiders in a joint

stadium they proposed to build in Carson, or with the Rams in Inglewood.

But after a day of negotiations in Houston, owners approved the Rams' move in a 30-2 vote, with a first option for San Diego to share the \$1.8 billion stadium Rams owner Stan Kroenke is building in Inglewood.

Spanos said he will spend the next several weeks exploring his options. He described the process as "excruciating, for everyone."

The Chargers have time to try to get something done in San Diego, if they choose, although any deal would need approval by the voters in either June or November.

The Chargers walked away from nego-

tiations with the city and county in June, instead focusing on that stadium project in Carson.

San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer and County Supervisor Ron Roberts issued a pointed statement Tuesday evening.

"Today NFL owners rejected the Chargers' bid to move to Carson. If Mr. Spanos has a sincere interest in reaching a fair agreement in San Diego, we remain committed to negotiating in good faith. We are not interested in a charade by the Chargers if they continue to pursue Los Angeles."

The Chargers have been trying since 2002 to replace aging Qualcomm Stadium.

# Browns hire Jackson from Bengals

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — A person familiar with the decision says the Browns are hiring Bengals offensive coordinator Hue Jackson as their next coach.

Jackson will become the team's eighth coach since 1999 once the sides have finalized his deal, the person told The Associated Press on Wednesday on condition of anonymity because the team has not announced the hiring.

The Browns were drawn to the 50-year-

old Jackson because of his NFL head coaching experience, his deep knowledge of the AFC North and his strong record working with quarterbacks.

Cleveland has the No. 2 overall pick in this year's draft and will likely use it on a quarterback.

Jackson spent the past two seasons overseeing Cincinnati's offense. He pushed quarterback Andy Dalton to his best statistical season and was known for his creative flair with unbalanced lines and unorthodox formations.

Jackson replaces Mike Pettine, who was fired after going 10-22 in two seasons.

Owner Jimmy Haslam had said it could take up to two months to find Cleveland's next coach.

Jackson went 8-8 in his only season coaching the Raiders in 2011. He was fired amid an ownership change and joined Marvin Lewis' staff in Cincinnati as a defensive assistant. He previously coached the Bengals wide receivers from 2004-06.



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# Cavs stretch win streak to 8

The Associated Press

DALLAS — Kyrie Irving was headed toward Cleveland's locker room when he was greeted exuberantly by general manager David Griffin.

"You might stick in this league," Griffin told the fourth-year player from Duke.

Irving scored 22 points with some big three-pointers, including one in overtime after LeBron James made the go-ahead layup, and the Cavaliers extended their winning streak to eight games with a 110-107 victory over the Dallas Mavericks on Tuesday night.

James had 27 points, including a layup with a minute left in overtime that pushed the Cavs ahead 106-105. After an attempted three by Deron Williams rattled out for Dallas, Irving beat the shot clock with a three-pointer from the top of the key after James passed up a shot and got the ball to Irving instead.

"It's just the confidence I have in him and he has the confidence in his self," James said.

It was only the 10th game for Irving this season after recovering from a broken left kneecap sustained in Game 1 of the NBA Finals last June.

Cleveland, which trailed by 16 points in the first quarter, never led until Irving made a three-pointer with 10 minutes left to make it 75-74. That was the first of nine lead changes in a span of less than 4 minutes that Irving capped with another three to put the Cavs up 85-83.

"That's not the team that we want to be [in the first half], but we were still in the game," Irving said. "Talent kept us around for that long, but we locked in in the second half and matched up really well when they went small ball. For us, it's just a luxury having that ability."

Chandler Parsons led Dallas with a season-high 25 points on 10-for-14 shooting.

The game was tied at 95 after James made a drive through the Mavs for an em-

phatic two-handed slam with 20 seconds left in regulation, though he didn't get the foul he wanted.

Dallas then had the ball in Dirk Nowitzki's hands for a possible final shot to win in regulation, but Iman Shumpert stripped the ball free and the Cavs had less than a second after a timeout.

"It's not surprising. We know Shump's got the best hands in the business. We keep saying that," James said. "He got two big strips late in the game, one in regulation and one in overtime when we needed a stop. That's why he's on the floor."

Shumpert had another similar play late in overtime, getting the ball away from Williams, who finished with 16 points and 10 assists.

James also had 10 rebounds, while Kevin Love finished with 15 points and 11 rebounds but shot just 5 of 19.

Nowitzki had 17 points and 11 rebounds, while Zaza Pachulia had 14 points and 12 rebounds.

**Spurs 109, Pistons 99:** Tony Parker scored 31 points, LaMarcus Aldridge added 22 points and 13 rebounds, and visiting San Antonio beat Detroit for its ninth straight victory.

Manu Ginobili added 15 points while Tim Duncan had 14 points and nine rebounds for the Spurs, who return to San Antonio trying to extend their 31-game home winning streak Thursday against Cleveland.

**Knicks 120, Celtics 114:** Kristaps Porzingis scored 26 points, Arron Afflalo had 20 of his 24 in the second half, and host New York beat Boston.

Jerian Grant scored 10 of his 16 points in the fourth quarter and added eight assists in the best game of his rookie season as the Knicks held off the Celtics despite losing leading scorer Carmelo Anthony to a sprained right ankle seconds into the third quarter.

**Rockets 107, Grizzlies 91:** James Harden scored 25 points, Dwight Howard

added 17 points and 14 rebounds and visiting Houston beat Memphis.

Terrence Jones finished with 20 points for Houston, 10 in the fourth quarter when the Rockets pulled away to win their fourth straight after the game was tied at 83.

**Bucks 106, Bulls 101:** Giannis Antetokounmpo had 29 points and 10 rebounds, and host Milwaukee used a late rally to slip past Chicago.

Jimmy Butler scored 30 points and Nikola Mirotic and Tony Snell added 17 apiece for Chicago, which used a 25-9 run late in the third quarter and early into the fourth to seemingly gain control of the game.

**Thunder 101, Timberwolves 96:** Kevin Durant shrugged off a slow start to finish with 30 points in Oklahoma City's victory over host Minnesota.

Durant scored 12 straight for the Thunder in the final three minutes and also had seven rebounds. Russell Westbrook added 22 points, 11 assists and seven rebounds to help the Thunder hold off a late charge from the struggling Wolves.

**Pacers 116, Suns 117:** Paul George had 21 points and seven rebounds, and host Indiana pulled away in the fourth quarter to beat Phoenix.

Indiana outscored Phoenix 36-21 in the final period, with George scoring nine points. Monta Ellis had all of his 14 points in the second half.

**Lakers 95, Pelicans 91:** Lou Williams scored nine of his 19 points in the fourth quarter, and host Los Angeles rallied late to end its four-game losing streak.

After Julius Randle hit the go-ahead shot with 43 seconds left, Williams added a clutch running jumper with 18 seconds to play. Los Angeles hung on to win the meeting of the Western Conference's worst teams, surviving a back-and-forth fourth quarter for just its ninth win of the season.

# W. Virginia knocks off No. 1 Kansas

Associated Press

MORGANTOWN, W.Va. — Jaysean Paige scored 26 points, Devin Williams had 17 points and 12 rebounds, and No. 11 West Virginia beat top-ranked Kansas 74-63 on Tuesday night.

West Virginia (15-1, 4-0 Big 12) is off to its best start since 1982, when it started 24-1.

Perry Ellis scored 21 points for Kansas (14-2, 3-1). The Jayhawks committed a season-high 22 turnovers, shot 42 percent for the game and were held to their lowest point total of the season.

West Virginia fans stormed the court and sang John Denver's "Country Roads" after the Mountaineers' first win over a top-ranked team in 33 years.

With snowy conditions and traffic gridlock outside, Kansas arrived at the WVU Coliseum from their nearby hotel only an hour before the game with the help of a police escort.

The Jayhawks are the fourth No. 1 to lose this season joining North Carolina, Kentucky and Michigan State.

**Michigan 70, No. 3 Maryland 67:** Zak Irvin scored 22 points and the host Wolverines held on for an upset of the Terrapins when Rasheed Sulaimon missed a three-pointer in the final seconds.

Maryland's nine-game winning streak came to an end despite 22 points and 11 rebounds from Diamond Stone. Michigan (13-4, 3-1 Big Ten) held Maryland's backcourt duo of Sulaimon and Melo Trimble to 10 points on 4-for-17 shooting.

**No. 7 Xavier 84, DePaul 64:** Trevon Bluiett scored a career-high 24 points — 19 in the first half — for the host Musketeers.

Xavier (15-1, 3-1 Big East) led most of the way as Bluiett got his shooting touch early, making his first four shots from beyond the arc. He tied his career high with five three-pointers on 11 attempts. Xavier made a season-high 12 three-pointers.

**No. 13 Virginia 66, No. 8 Miami 58:** Malcolm Brogdon had 20 points and London Perrantes scored all 13 of his in the second half as the host Cavaliers ended a two-game losing streak.

Anthony Gill added 15 points for Virginia (13-3, 2-2 Atlantic Coast Conference), which used an 11-2 run in the second half to turn a 43-41 deficit into a 52-45 lead with 7½ minutes to go and never trailed again.

**No. 12 Providence 50, Creighton 48:** Kris Dunn hit a fadeaway jumper at the buzzer and scored 16 of his 20 points in the second half as the visiting Friars overcame their worst shooting of the season.

Providence (15-2, 3-1 Big East) took its first lead with less than 5 minutes to play after trailing by as many as 12 points.

**No. 14 Kentucky 80, Mississippi St. 74:** Jamal Murray scored 22 points to lead the host Wildcats.

Kentucky (13-3, 3-1 Southeastern Conference) has won nine straight over the Bulldogs and 12 consecutive league games at home.

**No. 15 Texas A&M 71, Florida 68:** Jalen Jones scored 26 points and Danuel House added 22 to help the host Aggies to their seventh straight win.

Florida (10-6, 2-2 Southeastern Conference) never led after halftime but tied it twice and never let the Aggies (14-2, 4-0) pull away.

**Texas 94, No. 17 Iowa St. 91 (OT):** Isaiah Taylor scored 28 points, including five in overtime, for the host Longhorns in the upset.

Tevin Mack and Eric Davis scored 14 points each for Texas (10-6, 2-2 Big 12), and Javan Felix added 13.

# Blackhawks win eighth straight game

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Andrew Shaw scored two goals and the Chicago Blackhawks celebrated coach Joel Quenneville's contract extension Tuesday night with a 3-2 win over the Nashville Predators for their eighth consecutive victory.

Brent Seabrook also scored for Chicago, which was without center Artem Anisimov due to an illness. Corey Crawford made 41 saves and Marian Hossa added two assists on his 37th birthday.

The Blackhawks closed out a perfect four-game homestand hours after they announced a three-year extension with Quenneville that runs through the 2019-20 season. Quenneville, the only active coach with three Stanley Cup titles, also moved into a tie with Al Arbour for second on the NHL list with his 782nd victory, trailing only Scotty Bowman (1,244).

Nashville has lost four in a row and six of seven.

**Lightning 4, Avalanche 0:** Ben Bishop stopped 21 shots for his second shutout of the season and Steven Stamkos scored twice, helping Tampa Bay beat Colorado for its first win in Denver since March 2004.

Ondrej Palat added a goal and two assists, and Tyler Johnson scored late as the Lightning wrapped up a 3-1 road trip.

Stamkos gave Bishop a comfortable cushion with two goals in 3:37 during the second period. Bishop has allowed two

goals or fewer in 20 of his last 25 starts.

**Blues 5, Devils 2:** Patrik Berglund scored twice, including the go-ahead goal in the second period, and Ty Rattie netted his first NHL goal to lead host St. Louis past New Jersey.

Scottie Upshall and David Backes also scored for St. Louis, which converted on its first two power-play attempts. The Blues won in regulation for the first time since Dec. 22.

St. Louis also won its fifth in a row against New Jersey, which lost for the fourth time in five games.

**Sabres 3, Wild 2:** Brian Gionta had a goal and an assist as Buffalo scored three times in the first period and hung on to beat host Minnesota.

Jamie McGinn and Rasmus Ristolainen also scored for the Sabres, who won their second straight after losing six in a row. Linus Ullmark made 28 saves.

Ryan Suter and Thomas Vanek scored for the Wild.

**Sharks 4, Jets 1:** Joe Pavelski scored his 22nd goal of the season and added an assist to help visiting San Jose defeat Winnipeg.

San Jose was playing its third game in four nights and won them all.

Joe Thornton, Chris Tierney and Joel Ward, with an empty-netter, also scored for the Sharks. Tierney had an assist as well.

**Coyotes 4, Oilers 3 (OT):** Oliver Ekman-Larrson's goal with 9 seconds left

in overtime and a hat trick from rookie Max Domi rallied Arizona past visiting Edmonton for its fourth straight win.

Louis Domingue made 25 saves for his fourth victory in a row. Ekman-Larrson assisted on all three goals that accounted for Domi's first NHL hat trick.

Arizona forced overtime with two third-period goals by Domi, both on the power play. Domi hadn't scored since Dec. 4 when he had two goals at Buffalo.

**Hurricanes 3, Penguins 2:** Jeff Skinner scored a power-play goal 3:02 into overtime to lift host Carolina over Pittsburgh.

Eric Staal and Kris Versteeg each had a goal and an assist, and linemate Elias Lindholm assisted on all three Carolina scores. Cam Ward made 23 saves for the surging Hurricanes, who won their third straight and have earned points in 12 of 16 games.

Kris Letang and Chris Kunitz scored for Pittsburgh, and Sidney Crosby had two assists.

**Islanders 5, Blue Jackets 2:** Brock Nelson scored a hat trick to take over the team lead in goals and Thomas Greiss made 18 saves in New York's victory over visiting Columbus.

Nelson broke a 2-all tie with his 16th of the season at 17:29 of the second period, scoring unassisted against goalie Anton Forsberg with a shot from the left side. The 24-year-old forward also scored at the 12-minute mark of the first and added an empty-net goal to seal it.