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Training cuts a factor in helo deaths?

BY TARA COPP

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A threefold increase in helicopter crash deaths last year is raising questions as to whether budget cuts are endangering troops by forcing deep cuts in maintenance and training.

Twelve helicopter crashes in 2015 killed 30 servicemembers — three times as many deaths as in 2014. Twelve more died Jan. 14 when two U.S. Marine CH-53 Super Stallions collided off the coast of Oahu in Hawaii during a night training flight.

Marine commanders including Lt. Gen. Jon Davis, deputy Marine commandant for aviation, and Gen. Robert Neller, commandant of the Marine Corps, are looking at why so many helicopters are crashing, according to a senior defense official familiar with the discussions.

Almost all the deaths, including those on Jan. 14, occurred during home-station training missions.

Nondeployed units at their home stations have dealt with reduced flight training opportunities for years. The continued high pace of wartime operations meant units deploying to conflict areas got priority for training.

Cuts by Congress and the White House to funds used by the Marines and other services to pay for flight time and helicopter repairs means that there may not be enough air-worthy aircraft available for nondeployed units to train safely.

For the Marines, for example, almost one-fifth of their helicopters aren't available due to maintenance requirements.

During testimony at the Senate Armed Services Committee in March, Davis said the Marine Corps is "having a difficult time, you know, getting our ready bench, which [Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Marine] General [Joseph] Dunford calls a 'ready bench,' ready to deploy," he said. "We do a great job getting the guys out the door ... with assets and training, but it's training that next group that's ready to go" that is more difficult, he said.

'Degradation in performance'

In addition, because nondeploying units spend less time in the air, their training opportunities become even more dangerous, former Marine Corps and Navy pilots say.

"It's not a direct, one-for-one correlation, but once you go below 15 hours (a month) per pilot, that's when you see real degradation in performance," said retired Maj. Carl Forsling, who has piloted CH-46 Sea Knights and MV-22B Ospreys for the Marines.

In the Marines' 2015 aviation plan, the service noted, "We need to increase the amount of time our aviators spend in the air" and set new training hour requirements based on each type of aircraft. Two of its most heavily used aircraft — the Super Stallion and the Osprey — were assigned 16.5 flight hours a month and 16.8 flight hours a month per pilot, respectively.

Requirements are "just above the bare minimums for safety. ... There's not a lot of wiggle room," Forsling said.

Retired Cmdr. Chris Harmer, who flew SH-60F Sea Hawk helicopters for the Navy and who now is a defense analyst at the Institute for the Study of War, said there is a direct tie.

"There is no doubt whatsoever that reduced flying hours equal increased [accidents] and fatalities," he said.

"The reality is flying is a perishable skill," he said. The type of flying that the helicopter units train for, such as close-formation flying during nighttime operations, "is highly calibrated and coordinated. If you lose currency, it is extremely difficult and dangerous to regain it."

In late 2015, a string of Army helicopter crashes led the Army to order all helicopter units to stand down for several days in December. About 1,000 Army helicopters not deployed or assigned to critical needs were grounded to force their squadrons to look closely at whether there were problems in maintenance, flight training, crew coordination and operations procedures.

What the Army found was that while the cluster of crashes was concerning, the number of incidents was still consistent with past years, and the primary cause was pilot error.

Harmer acknowledged the role of pilot error, "but a lack of flying causes pilot error," he said. Fewer hours in the air makes the pilot less able to safely respond to unforeseen weather or contingencies, he said.

In May 2014, the Navy took a similar type of stand-down. After a month in which the service saw three crashes, Vice Adm. David Buss, then commander of Naval Air

Forces, ordered a "tactical pause for safety," said Navy spokeswoman Cmdr. Jeannie Groeneveld.

In that review, Buss directed each commanding officer to look at the accidents that had happened that year "and find factors relative to their squadrons," Groeneveld said. One of the Navy's helicopter wings modified its training as a result, she said.

Capt. Sarah Burns, a Marine Corps spokeswoman, said the service hasn't decided whether to take a similar action.

"The decision to hold aviation safety stand-downs are enacted at the discretion of the commanding officer," Burns said.

Training, maintenance cuts

Reductions to training and maintenance budgets are a result of several years of cuts in Congress, said Mackenzie Eaglen, a senior defense fellow with the American Enterprise Institute, a nonpartisan policy group in Washington.

"The U.S. military has suffered a roughly 30 percent decrease in operations and maintenance funding from fiscal year 2012 through fiscal year 2016," Eaglen said. "The Army has taken a hard hit, with a nearly 40 percent decrease" to those same training and maintenance funds, she said.

The cuts have meant "reduced funding and training, along with deferred maintenance, for years now across military aviation platforms," said Eaglen, who has analyzed the impact that 15 years of nonstop wartime operations has had on the services.

Larry Korb, a former assistant secretary of defense for President Ronald Reagan and now a senior defense fellow at the Center for American Progress, said it was tempting to go after operations and maintenance accounts as budget cuts were needed due to sequestration. Unlike cutting a weapon system, readiness doesn't have specific members of Congress or lobbyists protecting it, he said. "It's always easy to cut readiness because then I don't have to worry about a contract or something I have to carry out," Korb said.

Now the Marines are looking inward, although it's not clear whether the discussions will lead to a similar type of stand-down like the Army had last fall.

"These conversations are not just specific" to the most recent Oahu crashes but look at readiness overall, Burns said.

Big storm takes toll on start of workweek in US

Associated Press

NEW YORK — East Coast residents clobbered by the weekend blizzard trudged into the workweek Monday amid slippery roads, spotty transit service and mounds of snow that buried cars and blocked sidewalks after some cities got an entire winter's snow in two days.

For others, the weekend extended into Monday because of closed schools and government offices. The storm dropped snow from the Gulf Coast to New England, with near-record snowfalls tallied from Washington to New York City. At least 31 people have died as a result of the storm; the deaths occurred in car accidents, from carbon monoxide poisoning, and from heart attacks while shoveling snow.

Amtrak operated a reduced number of trains on all its

routes, serving many people who couldn't get around otherwise, spokesman Marc Magliari said. Bus and rail service was expected to be limited around the region into Monday.

Flying remained particularly messy after nearly 12,000 weekend flights and hundreds more on Monday were canceled.

Airports resumed limited service in New York City, Baltimore and Philadelphia, which said it got an entire winter's snow in two days. In the Washington area, Reagan National Airport tweeted that it saw its first flights Monday, and Dulles International Airport expected to resume flights late in the day.

The snow began Friday, and the last flakes fell just before midnight Saturday. In its aftermath, crews raced all day Sunday to clear streets and sidewalks devoid of their usual bustle.

Metal on Thai beach likely part of rocket, not plane

Associated Press

TOKYO — A Japanese rocket maker said Monday that a large piece of metal that washed up on a beach in Thailand is likely part of a rocket launched by Japan, not a missing Malaysian plane.

The discovery of the metal sparked speculation that it might be from Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, which disappeared almost two years ago.

Mitsubishi Heavy Industries said the metal piece is "highly likely" to be part of a Japanese H-IIA or H-IIB rocket that was launched from southern Japan, based on an initial examination of photos and videos of the object.

Company spokeswoman Sayo Suwashita said officials are trying to determine which rocket and its launch date. Rocket debris falls into the ocean after

every launch and, while most is collected, pieces sometimes can be found some distance from the launch site, including in foreign waters, she said.

Thai air force and civil aviation authorities said Monday they were unaware of the statement from Japan, while the agency within the Transport Ministry that investigates aviation accidents was unavailable for comment.

Japan has launched H-IIA and H-IIB rockets since the 2000s. The most recent H-IIA launch was in November 2015.

Flight 370 took off from Malaysia in March 2014. It lost communications and made a sharp turn away from its Beijing destination before disappearing. It is presumed to have crashed in the southern Indian Ocean, far away from Thailand.

Navy seeks to raise Osprey cargo load

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The Navy is tweaking take-off and landing procedures to increase the cargo load of its helicopter of the future — the tilt-rotor V-22 Osprey.

Helicopter Test Squadron 21 performed nine days of tests in October aboard the aircraft carrier USS Eisenhower, said Naval Air Systems Command spokesman Billy Ray Brown. The team flew 25.6 flight hours, performing 69 short take-offs and minimum run-on landings. This maneuver is used to transition from forward flight to a landing when there may not be sufficient power available to sustain a hover, as might be the case when the helicopter/airplane hybrid is at high gross weight.

Testing was a success in that engineers were able to complete the assessment plan without missed or canceled events, Brown said. However, in-depth analysis is still required before the maneuvers can be added to an Osprey pilot's repertoire.

Results, expected in late spring, will be used to expand the envelope for the Marine Corps and Air Force variants of the V-22, known as the MV-22 and CV-22 respectively, as well as a future variant that will be employed by the Navy.

"Throughout the lifetime of

an aircraft, there are lessons learned and new tactics and techniques which are identified," Brown wrote in a statement to Stars and Stripes. "Before they are included in the standardized flight operating procedures, the tactics and techniques are tested by the developmental test team to develop how and under what conditions a pilot could safely employ them."

Rolling take-offs and run-on landings would allow the aircraft to take off and land at a higher gross weight due to the "aerodynamic advantage" known as "translational lift," Brown said. Further examination is required to determine adequate control margins and the effects of changes in movement on the flight deck as well as atmospheric conditions.

When the final parameters and procedures have been developed and evaluated, they will be incorporated into the Osprey's Naval Air Training and Operating Procedures Standardization program, or NATOPS. NATOPS manuals contain standardized operating procedures, training requirements, aircraft limitations and the technical data necessary for safe and effective operation.

The Osprey, created through a partnership between Bell Helicopter and Boeing, is the military's only tilt-rotor aircraft.

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Swedish doctor on trial over woman's abduction

STOCKHOLM — A Swedish doctor who admitted to abducting a woman and locking her up in a homemade bunker had planned the crime for years and may have tried to capture other victims, prosecutors said as the trial started Monday.

Prosecutors and defense lawyers gave opening statements in the Stockholm district court

before proceedings continued behind closed doors.

The man, 38, whose name wasn't published in Sweden in line with privacy rules, has admitted to sedating the woman, abducting her and locking her up for almost a week in a sound-proofed bunker he built inside a machine shed next to his home. He denies charges that he also raped her.

From The Associated Press

Broncos back in Super Bowl

Gostkowski misses PAT

Associated Press

DENVER — If this 17th matchup with Tom Brady was indeed the final one, Peyton Manning got the last laugh — thanks to Von Miller.

The star of Denver's dizzying defense had 2½ sacks, an interception that set up a touchdown and a pass breakup in the Broncos' 20-18 win over the New England Patriots in the AFC championship game Sunday.

"Hey, I tell you. I can do it all, baby," Miller cracked.

No joke. The Broncos (14-4) beat the Patriots (13-5) for the second time this season, and they dethroned the defending champs by hitting Brady an incredible 23 times.

"He was rattled," Aqib Talib said. "I don't think I've ever seen anybody put that much pressure on Tom — ever. So, I think we did a hell of a job getting that pressure on him. That's why we're going to the 'ship."

Along with Manning, who was hit just four times.

"I've enjoyed playing on the same team as that defense," Manning said.

"I'm glad I haven't had to face them this season, I'll say that. They've been challenging to go against in practice, going back to training camp, but it is special to watch them work and watch them perform on Sunday."

Brady praised not only Denver's front seven, but its star-studded secondary.

"It was just tough for us to ever get in a rhythm," Brady said.

DeMarcus Ware and Derek Wolfe applied plenty of pressure, complementing a "No Fly Zone" secondary that was missing safeties T.J. Ward (ankle) and Darian Stewart (knee) by the end of the game.

Denver, which led the league in defense for the first time in franchise history, held on fourth down inside the 20 on consecutive drives before allowing Rob Gronkowski to haul in a 4-yard TD pass

with 12 seconds left.

A bruised and battered Brady tried to hit Julian Edelman over the middle for the tying 2-point conversion. Talib batted the pass into the air and Bradley Roby intercepted it.

The Broncos needed one last big play to secure their spot in the Super Bowl and they got it from the unlikely of places — safety Shiloh Keo, a free agent who joined the team last month, smothered the inside kick.

"That was intense," Wolfe said. "But I didn't have any doubt in my heart. I knew we were going to win the game."

Talib said Denver's defense was fired up over being a 3-point underdog at home to a team they'd already beaten, 30-24 in overtime back in November.

"We're the No. 1 seed, got the No. 1 defense," Talib said.

Manning, who suffered through the worst season of his career and dealt with a tear in the plantar fascia near the heel of his left foot that cost him seven starts, improved to 6-11 against his rival with half of those wins coming in AFC championship games.

One was in Indianapolis the year he won his only Super Bowl ring and now he's beaten Brady twice in Denver for the Lamar Hunt Trophy.

So, two months shy of 40, Manning is going to Super Bowl 50 with the chance to become the first starting QB to win Lombardi Trophies for two franchises.

"The big thing is we've got to win," Broncos boss John Elway said. "It's going to be a tremendous add to Peyton's legacy, but also the Broncos legacy, too. We've given ourselves and opportunity and hopefully saved our best for last and in two weeks go out beat a good football team."

The Broncos just don't get tight when the games get that way — Sunday's win was their NFL record 11th by seven points or fewer.

"We won a lot of games this year just grinding as a football team, playing great

defense," coach Gary Kubiak said. "We played tremendous today in making the play at the right time."

Ware, an 11th-year veteran heading to his first Super Bowl, gave a speech to his teammates Saturday night. Tired, he tried to come off the field after Gronkowski's TD. Kubiak burned his final timeout instead.

"We weren't going to play another play without him out there, not if I could help it," Kubiak said.

Kubiak also had high praise for Miller, his fellow Texas A&M alum.

"Today," Kubiak said, "along with the defense, he was big time."

The pass rushers praised Denver's secondary for giving them the time to knock Brady around.

Brady misfired 29 times to go with his 27 completions and finished with a paltry passer rating of 56.4.

"They said we couldn't cover their receivers and their tight ends — and we shut them down," cornerback Chris Harris Jr said.

Wolfe said he could tell Brady was bothered after he clobbered him on the game's first series.

"That kind of got in his head: 'Oh, the D-line's here, they're ready to play,'" Wolfe said. "It sticks in anybody's head when you've got four or five guys that are coming to take your head off."

Wolfe, Miller and Harris were sideline spectators in the Super Bowl against Seattle two years ago, and now they're leading Manning back with a chance to go out on top during a season when his skills and character were both questioned in media reports.

"God couldn't have written the story any better for Peyton," Harris said. "He gets hurt. Then they said he got HGH. And he loses his spot. He comes back. We're on our way to the Super Bowl. I can see a beautiful ending for Peyton."

Associated Press

DENVER — An hour after the game, New England kicker Stephen Gostkowski still felt the sting of a rare missed extra point.

Gostkowski sent his PAT wide right early in a 20-18 loss to the Denver Broncos on Sunday in the AFC championship game. It was his first missed PAT in nine years.

"I just feel terrible," Gostkowski said. "All day, these guys put their bodies and lives on the line, and for me to come out here and miss a kick, it's a nightmare scenario. I can't even explain how I feel right now. It's just a complete shock and I let a lot of people down."

His teammates weren't about to lay the blame at the right foot of Gostkowski, who had made an NFL-record 523 consecutive PATs.

"You definitely shouldn't put the heat on him. It's a team game," tight end Rob Gronkowski said. "You can't put it on the hands of Steph. There's no way."

Gostkowski said he just didn't "hit a good kick" following Steven Jackson's 1-yard touchdown run with 1:49 remaining in the first quarter. After the miss, the Broncos held a 7-6 lead.

Gostkowski's only other miss came in Week 17 of his rookie season in 2006 against Tennessee.

After Gronkowski caught a 4-yard TD pass with 12 seconds remaining in the game, the Patriots went for the 2-point conversion as they tried to tie the game. On the attempt, Tom Brady's pass was picked off.

"I should have been out there kicking the tying extra point and helping us go into overtime," Gostkowski said. "I had a good week of practice. Sometimes, things don't fall your way."

"It just stinks. It's a nightmare. You want to help your team win. You don't want to be the reason you lose."

Newton helps Panthers soar past Cardinals

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — For all his daring and dabbling and Superman persona, Cam Newton quickly reminds everyone that football is all about team.

And his Carolina Panthers are headed for the big game.

"For everyone who wears the blue and black, it has been a long time coming," Newton said after another virtuoso performance Sunday with two touchdown passes and another two TD leaps — minus the Superman cape — in a 49-15 destruction of the Arizona Cardinals for the NFC championship. "It's a question you got to ask: Why not us?"

"We've been dreaming about this moment since Day 1. Our pen has a lot more ink left."

The Panthers (17-1) have written quite a story so far. They manhandled two prominent defenses in the play-offs, Seattle (at least for a half) and then Arizona (14-4). They led the league in points (500) during the regular season, and against the Cardinals' top-ranked offense they forced six turnovers by Carson Palmer.

So now it's on to the Bay Area to face Peyton Manning and the Denver Broncos (14-4) in Super Bowl 50. Manning,

a five-time league MVP, will play in his fourth Super Bowl and Denver in a record-tying eighth. Carolina, a loser 12 years ago to New England, gets its second trip.

"When I was growing up," said All-Pro linebacker Luke Kuechly, who had a 22-yard interception return touchdown to give Carolina the most points in an NFC championship, "it was Peyton Manning and the Colts putting up big numbers. He was the guy and still is the guy that everyone looks at. It's going to be a lot of fun."

Some memorable things from the Panthers' romp:

Cam of steel: Newton's superhero image was enhanced by yet another fabulous performance. On both of his TD runs, he laid out the ball or himself to get into the end zone. And one of his TD passes was an 86-yard catch-and-run by Philly Brown, helped by Rashad Johnson's botched tackle.

Newton set an NFL mark with 45 touchdowns: 35 passes and 10 runs. On Sunday, all of those talents were on display.

"We knew from the get-go when he first got here," said center Ryan Kalil, like Newton an All-Pro, "we had something special. Watching him grow each and every year, it's been incredible, and this has been a big year for him?"

Big-play defense: Denver was practically overwhelming defensively in edging the Patriots 18-16 for the AFC crown. Carolina WAS overwhelming against Arizona.

Palmer threw four interceptions and lost two fumbles; a seventh Carolina takeaway came on special teams.

Kurt Coleman, who had an NFC-best seven picks during the season, grabbed two. Tre Boston had one and Kuechly got the capper.

There were also three sacks.

Ginned up: Ted Ginn Jr. spent a very unproductive 2014 with the Cardinals, who quickly released him after that season. He hooked back up with Carolina, where Ginn spent 2013.

Ginn has had his best year, and against Arizona he had one of his best games. His 32-yard punt return set up his darting, weaving 22-yard TD run. He had 52 yards in receptions, and he tracked down All-Pro cornerback Patrick Peterson to prevent a touchdown on an interception return.

Man, that felt good.

"I felt like deep down inside they felt like I couldn't do it," Ginn said of the Cardinals. "They sent me back out to the wolves. Yes, it was personal. My team knew it was personal."



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Murray, Azarenka make quarterfinals

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — In the darker moments, when the medical needs of his family were becoming more urgent, Andy Murray thought about leaving the Australian Open before the fourth round.

The stress was obvious Monday, when an agitated Murray yelled and berated himself repeatedly and had trouble dealing with Bernard Tomic's unusual style before advancing to the quarterfinals with a scrappy 6-4, 6-4, 7-6 (4) win.

"The last few days were very, very tough. A lot of emotions, things sort of changing all of the time in my head," Murray said. "It's been a stressful few days, but I'll try to rest up the next few days to get ready for the next one."

Murray's wife, Kim, is due to have their first baby next month and he promised he'd fly back to Britain at any time if she went into labor — even if it meant missing a chance at a drought-breaking fifth Australian final.

The two-time major winner was playing in the third round on Saturday when his father-in-law, Nick Sears, who was in Melbourne as Ana Ivanovic's coach, needed sudden medical in a nearby stadium. Sears had to be taken from Rod Laver Arena, where he was watching Ivanovic play, to a nearby hospital by ambulance and was admitted overnight.

"I just can't believe something like that happened a few days ago. It's shocking," Murray said. "Nige is an unbelievably fit guy. Very, very scary."

Next up for Murray will be No. 8 David Ferrer, a two-time semifinalist, who held off No. 10-seeded John Isner 6-4, 6-4, 7-5.

In the other quarter of the draw, Milos Raonic persevered with his serve-and-volley game plan and withstood a strong comeback from 2014 champion Stan Wawrinka for a 6-4, 6-3, 5-7, 4-6, 6-3 win.

Wawrinka was the only man to beat top-ranked Novak Djokovic in a Grand Slam match last year — the French Open final — and the last man to beat him at Melbourne Park since 2010.

Raonic lost to Djokovic in the quarterfinals here last year. This time, he'll be facing No. 23 Gael Monfils, who reached the last eight in Australia for the first time in 11 trips with a 7-5, 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (4) win over Andrei Kuznetsov.

On the women's side, two-time Australian Open champion Victoria Azarenka advanced with a 6-2, 6-4 win over Barbora Strýcova 6-2, 6-4. A growing favorite for the title in a strong comeback from two injury-interrupted seasons, Azarenka next faces No. 7 Angelique Kerber, who beat fellow German Annika Beck 6-4, 6-0.

Two nights after her dramatic win over Ivanovic, Madison Keys followed her out of the tournament.

Keys needed medical attention on her upper left leg while up a set against Chinese qualifier Zhang Shuai, and limped through the end of a 3-6, 6-3, 6-3 defeat.

Crawford's seventh shutout lifts Chicago

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Following a pair of listless losses, the Chicago Blackhawks and Corey Crawford slammed the door defensively and returned to their winning ways.

Crawford stopped 25 shots for his league-leading seventh shutout, rookie Artemi Panarin and Andrew Shaw scored and the Blackhawks beat the St. Louis Blues 2-0 on Sunday night to end a two-game losing streak.

Crawford wasn't consistently tested while earning his 19th career shutout. The defending Stanley Cup champion Blackhawks rebounded from a 2-1 setback at Tampa Bay and a 4-0 drubbing at Florida that followed a franchise-record 12-game winning streak.

The Blues outshot Chicago 12-6 in the first period and missed on a handful of chances, but after that, the Blackhawks were stingy and in control.

"We started to get our legs and were making plays after that," Crawford said. "There wasn't too many chances. After a couple losses, I thought it was important to get back on track."

"We stuck with it. We didn't panic at all, showed good poise. Just kept playing our game," he added.

Before this season, Crawford had never had more than four shutouts in a year — in 2010-11.

"The D-men are working so hard in front of me, limiting second chances and keeping a lot of stuff to the outside," Crawford said. "I'm able to see pucks. It's just a solid effort by a unit."

Kings 3, Sharks 2 (OT): Vincent Lecavalier tied it with 12.2 seconds remain-

ing in regulation and Marian Gaborik scored in overtime as visiting Los Angeles rallied past San Jose.

Drew Doughty also scored while the Kings earned their league-best sixth win when trailing after two periods and extended their lead in the Pacific Division to nine points over the second-place Sharks. Jhonas Enroth made 30 saves to earn his first win since Nov. 12.

Logan Couture and Joe Pavelski scored for the Sharks, who extended their point streak to nine games despite the loss. It's the longest streak for San Jose since getting a point in the first nine games in the 2013-14 season. Martin Jones made 29 saves.

Senators 3, Rangers 0: Craig Anderson stopped 35 shots for his third shutout this season and host Ottawa snapped a two-game skid with a win over New York.

Bobby Ryan, Mike Hoffman and Jean-Gabriel Pageau each scored for the Senators and Anderson earned his 32nd career shutout.

Henrik Lundqvist made 31 saves for the Rangers.

Hurricanes 5, Flames 2: Kris Versteeg scored twice to lead host Carolina over Calgary.

Victor Rask, Elias Lindholm and Joakim Nordstrom also scored for Carolina. The Hurricanes led 3-0 early in the second period and chased Calgary goalie Karri Ramo. Eddie Lack made 33 saves for Carolina.

Calgary got goals from Jiri Hudler and Joe Colborne. It fell to 0-15 when trailing after one period.

No. 2 Tar Heels edge Hokies

Associated Press

BLACKSBURG, Va. — Brice Johnson and North Carolina are hardly worried about moving back into the top spot in The Associated Press poll. They're focused on playing better.

Johnson scored 19 points and grabbed 17 rebounds Sunday, leading the No. 2 Tar Heels over Virginia Tech 75-70 for its 12th straight victory.

With No. 1 Oklahoma losing to 19th-ranked Iowa State this week, North Carolina (18-2, 7-0 ACC) could find itself back atop the poll Monday, a spot it held at the beginning of the season but quickly lost.

"It doesn't matter," Johnson said. "We've still got to come out and be ready to play every day. That's nice to have it (the ranking), but at the same time, we've still got to play. We've got a bulls-eye on our back now with that No. 1 ranking."

Roy Williams earned his 350th victory with the Tar Heels and a unique place in basketball history, becoming the first NCAA coach to win at least 350 games at two Division I schools. He won 418 games at Kansas before joining North Carolina in 2003.

North Carolina, which is off to its best start in the conference since the beginning of the 2000-01 season, led by as many as 20 in the first half. The Tar Heels were up 57-49 with 11:01 remaining but the Hokies went on a 12-2 run and took a 61-59 lead on a basket by Kerry Blackshear Jr. with 8:05 remaining. It was their only lead of the game.

Seth Allen made two free throws with 19.2 seconds left for the Hokies (12-8, 4-3)

to pull to 72-70, but Marcus Paige hit two free throws with 17.8 seconds remaining to push the lead back to four.

After Virginia Tech's Justin Bibbs missed a three-pointer with 8 seconds to go, the Tar Heels' Johnson made one of two free throws with 6.5 seconds remaining for the final margin.

Zach LeDay led the Hokies with 17 points. Jalen Hudson added 14.

Six of Johnson's 17 rebounds came on the offensive end. The Tar Heels had 20 offensive rebounds and scored 18 second-chance points. North Carolina outrebounded the Hokies 48-33.

No. 16 Providence 82, No. 4 Villanova 76: At Philadelphia, Ben Bentil scored 10 of his 31 points in overtime, including two free throws with 14.7 seconds left as the Friars stopped Villanova's 22-game Big East winning streak.

Kris Dunn added 13 points and tied his career-high with 14 assists for Providence (17-3, 5-2).

"A lot of my teammates were open," Dunn said. "I believe in my teammates, and they made big plays today. It was a great team win for us because everybody contributed."

Ryan Arcidiacono scored 19 points for the Wildcats (17-3, 7-1).

Temple 89, No. 8 SMU 80: At Philadelphia, eighth-ranked SMU became the last Division I team to lose this season when Devin Coleman scored a career-high 23 points for the Owls.

Coach Larry Brown and the Mustangs (18-1, 7-1 American Athletic Conference) were off to the best start in team history. SMU is ineligible for postseason play

this year because of NCAA infractions.

"Our motivation is to try to get better and make it a special year for the seniors," the SMU coach said. "And this loss is not going to take that away."

Coleman made all seven of his three-point shots. Quenton DeCosey added 19 for the Owls (11-7, 5-2) in their highest-scoring game of the season.

No. 9 Iowa 83, Purdue 71: Jarrod Uthoff scored 22 points and host Iowa won its ninth in a row.

Adam Woodbury added 13 points and 10 rebounds for the Hawkeyes (16-3, 7-0 Big Ten), who've beaten four ranked teams since late December.

Vince Edwards had 19 points and P.J. Thompson had 16 for Purdue (17-4, 5-3), which has split its last six games after a 14-1 start.

No. 13 Virginia 73, Syracuse 65: Malcom Brogdon scored 12 of his 21 points in the final 5:45 and the host Cavaliers held off a three-point barrage by Syracuse and beat the Orange, ending their three-game winning streak.

Anthony Gill and London Perrantes added 16 points each for the Cavaliers (15-4, 4-3 ACC), who squandered all of a 10-point second-half lead, then rallied behind some clutch shooting and defense.

Michael Gbinije scored 24 points and Malachi Richerdson 23 for the Orange (13-8, 3-5).

Oregon State 85, No. 21 USC 70: Gary Payton II had 22 points, 15 rebounds, eight assists and four steals to lead the host Beavers' upset.

Raptors top LA Clippers for eighth straight win

Associated Press

TORONTO — Kyle Lowry scored 21 points and Jonas Valanciunas had 20 as the Toronto Raptors beat the Los Angeles Clippers 112-94 on Sunday for their season-high eighth straight win.

DeMar DeRozan and Terrence Ross both added 18 points each for the Raptors. Ross shot 5-for-7 on three-pointers and totaled at least 10 points off the bench for the fourth straight game.

Chris Paul had 23 points and 11 assists for the Clippers, and DeAndre Jordan had 15 and 13 rebounds. JJ Redick scored 17 points for Los Angeles.

Nets 116, Thunder 106: Brook Lopez scored a season-high 31 points and grabbed 10 rebounds, and Brooklyn snapped visiting Oklahoma City's seven-game winning streak.

Rockets 115, Mavericks 104: James Harden had 23 points, 15 rebounds and 10 assists, Trevor Ariza scored a season-high 29 and Houston rallied past visiting Dallas.

Celtics 112, 76ers 92: Jae Crowder and Isaiah Thomas scored 20 points each and Boston cruised past host Philadelphia.