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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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HIV-positive troops see follow-up cases

McClatchy Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Gavin B. Atchak's commanding officer at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in North Carolina ordered him to avoid unprotected sex after Atchak tested positive for HIV in 2011.

The officer also directed Atchak, an enlisted man in the Air Force security forces, to inform future sex partners that he carried the virus that can cause AIDS.

Atchak disobeyed and engaged in unprotected oral and anal sex with fellow airmen. At a subsequent court-martial, he pleaded guilty to aggravated assault. Then the ground shifted.

Now Atchak and others, including a former South Carolina-based airman, are caught amid changing times, as military prosecutors and defense lawyers sort through the evolving legal guidelines applicable to sexual activity among HIV-positive troops.

While 34 states have adopted criminal laws related to exposure to HIV, Congress has not done the same for the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

Next month, the nation's highest military court will review Atchak's case. And this

week, the Air Force's top appeals court will review a separate court-martial conviction involving an HIV-positive airman from South Carolina's Shaw Air Force Base named Adolphus A. Young III.

The Atchak and Young cases differ in several respects. Both, though, represent fallout from a groundbreaking 2015 decision by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces that involved an HIV-positive enlisted man at McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita, Kan., named David Gutierrez.

The results of these follow-up cases will, in turn, shape the military legal landscape as well as individual fates for years to come.

Up until the decision in *United States v. Gutierrez*, military courts had determined that AIDS' presumed lethality meant an HIV-positive individual could be convicted of aggravated assault simply for not telling partners of their viral status.

In the *Gutierrez* decision, though, appellate judges concluded that the proper test for an aggravated assault conviction was not whether AIDS, once contracted, would probably kill

or injure but whether the sexual act itself was likely to result in HIV transmission.

"For a number of reasons, it was a pretty big deal," Pepis Rodriguez, a program director for the Center for HIV Law and Policy, said of the *Gutierrez* decision Thursday. "The court acknowledged that HIV transmission is pretty highly unlikely for a number of acts."

"We're challenging what *Gutierrez* actually means," said Air Force Capt. Michael Schrama, an appellate attorney for Atchak and Young.

The ruling occurred after Atchak had pleaded guilty to aggravated assault in 2013 but before the Air Force Court of Criminal Appeals reviewed his case. Citing the intervening *Gutierrez* decision, the Air Force appellate panel last August dismissed Atchak's aggravated assault charges.

The Air Force panel noted that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says, "HIV transmission through oral sex has been documented, but rare," while the risk of transmission from unprotected anal sex is estimated at 1 in 200.

"A risk of 'almost zero' or a risk that is only 'remotely possi-

ble' is not sufficient to sustain an aggravated assault conviction," the Air Force court reasoned.

The decision cut Atchak's prison sentence to eight months from 36. The government appealed, hoping for a conviction on lesser charges of assault consummated by a battery.

The notion of assault consummated by a battery is also at the heart of the case involving Young, which will be heard Tuesday by the Air Force appeals court.

A staff sergeant while based at Shaw, Young acknowledged in 2014 engaging in unprotected oral sex and protected anal sex with men to whom he had not divulged being diagnosed as HIV-positive in 2007. He has been receiving medical treatment.

Government attorneys argued in their brief that "the only question to be asked" is whether Young had engaged in sexual relations without first informing his partners of his HIV-positive status. Since he did not, the government concludes, his partners could not knowingly consent, which means the sexual touching amounted to battery.

US exercises freedom to navigate South China Sea

Associated Press

BANGKOK — A U.S. warship sailed near a disputed island in the South China Sea on Saturday to exercise the United States' freedom to navigate in international waters, a defense official said.

The destroyer USS Curtis Wilbur sailed within 12 nautical miles of Triton Island, in the Paracels chain, without notifying the three claimants to the surrounding seas beforehand,

according to Defense Department spokesman Mark Wright in Washington.

China, Taiwan and Vietnam have claims in the Paracels and require prior notice from ships transiting in nearby waters. Wright said the claimants' attempts to restrict navigational rights by requiring prior notice are inconsistent with international law.

Wright reiterated that while insisting on freedom of naviga-

tion, the United States took no position on the competing territorial claims to natural islands in the South China Sea.

In October, another U.S. warship sailed among the disputed Spratly Islands near Subi Reef, where China has built an artificial island.

U.S. officials said after that operation that such ship movements would be regular in the future.

China protested the October

sail-by strongly. It had no immediate comment on Saturday's movements.

China says virtually the entire South China Sea and its islands, reefs and atolls are its sovereign territory, although five other regional governments have overlapping claims.

The area has some of the world's busiest shipping lanes, and U.S. officials say ensuring freedom of navigation there is in U.S. national interests.

Carter decides not to punish Petraeus

The Washington Post

Defense Secretary Ash Carter has decided not to impose any further punishment on David Petraeus, the former CIA director and retired Army general who was forced to resign in a sex-and-secrets scandal in 2012.

In a brief letter sent Friday to the leaders of the Senate Armed Services Committee, the Pentagon reported that Carter had agreed with the Army's recommendation not to discipline Petraeus.

"Given the Army's review, Secretary Carter considers this matter closed," Stephen C.

Hedger, the assistant secretary of defense for legislative affairs, wrote in the three-sentence letter, obtained by *The Washington Post*.

The Pentagon letter was addressed to Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., and Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., the chairman and the top Democrat, respectively, of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

In a public letter of their own on Jan. 20, the senators had urged Carter to let the Petraeus matter lie and to allow him to keep the four-star rank he had earned during his long career in the Army.

After a lengthy investigation by the FBI that disgraced the onetime military hero, Petraeus pleaded guilty in April in federal court in North Carolina to a misdemeanor charge of mishandling classified materials. He received two years of probation and a \$100,000 fine.

Petraeus' civilian sentence, however, did not necessarily exempt him from further punishment at the hands of the military. Although he retired from the Army in 2011 to take the top job at the CIA, under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, he still could have faced discipline for his actions.

Under military law, Carter could have imposed a range of disciplinary measures, from issuing a nonbinding letter of concern about Petraeus' actions to demoting him from his current rank as a retired four-star general.

Petraeus' attorney, David Kendall, declined to comment Saturday on the outcome of the case.

As part of Petraeus' plea deal with the Justice Department, he admitted in a signed statement that he had committed wrongdoing while he was still in the Army before he retired in 2011 to take charge of the CIA.

Navy officer sentenced to 3 years

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — A Navy officer was sentenced Friday to more than three years in federal prison in a sex-for-secrets scandal that shows few signs of fading away.

Lt. Cmdr. Todd Dale Malaki was given a 40-month prison sentence by U.S. District Court Judge Janis Sammartino in federal court in San Diego after he pleaded guilty to a charge of

conspiracy to commit bribery.

In a plea agreement signed last year, Malaki admitted to delivering classified documents on more than a dozen occasions to a foreign defense contractor in exchange for a night out with a prostitute at a Malaysian karaoke club, envelopes of cash and hotel stays in Asia and the South Pacific. All told, the value of the bribes was estimated at \$15,000.

Malaki is the second mem-

ber of the Navy this month to receive a prison sentence in the epic corruption case, which has slowly unfolded since the first targets were arrested in September 2013. On Jan. 21, Daniel Layug, a petty officer first class, was sentenced to 27 months behind bars for leaking military secrets to the defense contractor, Glenn Defense Marine Asia, in exchange for cash and electronic gadgets.

22 Clinton emails are 'top secret'

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration has confirmed for the first time that Hillary Clinton's home server contained closely guarded government secrets, censoring 22 emails that contained material requiring one of the highest levels of classification. The revelation came three days before Clinton competes in the Iowa presidential caucuses.

State Department officials also said the agency's Diplomatic Security, and Intelligence and Research bureaus are investigating if any of the information was classified at the time of transmission, going to the heart of Clinton's defense of her email practices.

The department published its latest batch of emails from her time as secretary of state on Friday. But *The Associated Press* learned ahead of the release that seven email chains would be withheld in full for containing "top secret" information.

Prison terms for 2 linked to Navy silencer deal

Associated Press

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — Even in the Byzantine world of government contracting, this particular deal stood out: \$1.7 million to build 350 untraceable assault-rifle silencers for the Navy, awarded on a no-bid basis to a race-car mechanic whose brother happened to be a naval official pushing the deal.

Now, two men who helped engineer the deal have been sentenced to prison, albeit for terms far shorter than prosecutors had sought.

Mark Landersman, of Temecula, Calif., the mechanic who re-

ceived the no-bid contract, was sentenced to 60 days in prison Friday at U.S. District Court in Alexandria, Va. Ex-naval intelligence officer Lee Hall, of Sterling, Va., who was convicted of theft of government money for pushing the contract through, received six months.

Hall's boss at the Navy was Landersman's brother, David Landersman. He faces separate charges and hasn't gone to trial.

Prosecutors sought prison terms of four to five years. The defendants asked for no time.

Trial testimony indicated Landersman was paid \$1.7 mil-

lion for silencers that cost only \$10,000 to build. Tests showed that the silencers actually enhanced light and sound when weapons were fired.

The two argued that the silencers were needed for a classified project. But the defense was unable to convince U.S. District Judge Leonie Brinkema, who convicted the two in 2014 at a bench trial. Brinkema said that if there were really a need for untraceable silencers, she couldn't understand why the boxes, after they were delivered, sat in an office for months unclaimed.

Kerber upsets Serena in final

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Serena Williams put up both hands after a sending a forehand long and high over the baseline in the first set. She wanted nothing to do with yet another unforced error in her Australian Open final against Angelique Kerber.

For the second time in as many majors, nerves got to Williams as she tried to equal Steffi Graf's Open-era record of 22 Grand Slam singles titles.

No. 7-seeded Kerber had never played in a major final and had lost five of her six previous career meetings with Williams, but she responded with a stunning 6-4, 3-6, 6-4 upset win over the six-time Australian Open champion.

Williams had won the title every previous time she'd reached the final at Melbourne Park, and was the overwhelming favorite to continue that streak against Kerber, who joked she was "one leg in the plane to Germany" when she faced match point in her first-round win over Misaki Doi.

"I mean, every time I walk in this room, everyone expects me to win every single match, every single day of my life," Williams said in her post-match news conference. "As much as I would like to be a robot, I'm not. I try to."

The 28-year-old Kerber used acute angles to keep Williams guessing, tossed in two drop shots for a crucial break in the long sixth game of the third set, and continually tried to pass the 21-time major winner or forced errors at the net.

And she had five service breaks — two in the first set, and three in the third — against the top-ranked Williams, who hadn't dropped a set in the previous six rounds.

"My whole life I was working really hard and now I'm here and I can say I'm a Grand Slam champion," said Kerber, who had only reached the semifinals twice at the majors and hadn't been beyond the quarterfinals since Wimbledon in 2012. "It sounds really crazy and unbelievable."

She is the first German woman to win the Australian title since Graf in 1994, and is projected to rise to No. 2 in the rankings next week.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel was quick to respond, saying "It was fascinating to see how courageously and with such nerves of steel how you prevailed against arguably the best player in the world."

And other congratulatory messages poured in.

"My phone is exploding right now," Kerber said. "It's so good also for German tennis. After Steffi, now somebody won a Grand Slam."

It took her 33 majors to win the title — sixth on the list for longest waits that is topped by 2015 U.S. Open champion Flavia Pennetta's 49.

Williams admitted previously she became nervous and was stalled for a while trying to get to 18 major titles, to equal Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova's career marks in second place in the Open era. For three majors, Williams didn't reach the quarterfinals, but when she finally won her 18th, it triggered a roll of four straight major titles.

She's been stuck on 21 since Wimbledon.

Williams won the Australian Open, French Open and Wimbledon titles last year before losing to Roberta Vinci in the U.S. Open semifinals.

After being so close to a calendar-year Grand Slam in 2015, she has no chance to

push for that honor in 2016 after losing the season's first major.

Despite a rash of uncharacteristic unforced errors, Williams pushed Kerber all the way. She had never lost a major final that went three sets, and she had only lost to three players — twice to her sister Venus (U.S. Open 2001, Wimbledon 2008), and once each to Maria Sharapova (Wimbledon 2004) and Sam Stosur (U.S. Open 2011).

Kerber had a chance to serve for the match at 5-3 in the third but couldn't hold. Williams had a chance to level but dropped her serve, too. It finished when she hit a forehand volley long on championship point, her 46th unforced error.

Kerber dropped her racket on the court and lay flat on her back as Williams walked around the net to embrace her.

"She had an attitude that I think a lot of people can learn from — to always stay positive and never give up," Williams said. "If I couldn't win, I'm happy she did."

Kerber credited Williams with being an inspiration to a generation of players.

"You created history, you are a champion, you are a really an unbelievably great person," Kerber said. "So congratulations for everything you did already."

Novak Djokovic is chasing history on Sunday night, aiming to join Roy Emerson as the only six-time Australian Open champion. He's 5-0 in finals at Melbourne Park, and will be meeting Andy Murray, who is 0-4 in finals here.

Murray was at Rod Laver Arena after midnight to see his older brother, Jamie, combine with Bruno Soares to beat Daniel Nestor and Radek Stepanek 2-6, 6-4, 7-5 for the men's doubles title.

"Andy, you should be in bed," the older sibling said.

Broncos safeties promise to return

Associated Press

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. — T.J. Ward's Super Bowl guarantee doesn't exactly possess the same sort of sizzle as Joe Namath once promising — and delivering — a win.

For the Denver Broncos, though, the strong safety's guarantee just might make the difference in one.

Ward vowed he would play a week from Sunday despite a tender ankle. Even more, free safety Darian Stewart pledged to be back, too, after spraining the MCL in his right knee during a win over New England in the AFC title game. Their health is the biggest question mark for Denver heading into Super Bowl 50 against Carolina.

Ask them, and there's really no uncertainty at all.

"Without a doubt in my mind, I'm playing," Stewart said.

Ward was just as adamant: "Anytime you get an opportunity to play in this game, and you can run a little bit, I'm guaranteeing you're going to be out there."

Especially since this is basically a homecoming for Ward. He went to high school in Concord, Calif., which is about 60 miles away from Levi's Stadium.

"There's something about where you come from — the air, the grass, the sounds — that brings up memories," Ward said. "Sometimes, I'll be somewhere away from home and smell that grass and it reminds me of playing Pop Warner. This is going to take me back of when I was dreaming of this moment."

Only, now it's a reality.

But trying to bring down Panthers quarterback Cam Newton may prove to be a nightmare. These two safeties could prove instrumental in containing Newton, who's 6-foot-5, 245 pounds and does just about everything well.

"He's probably at all times one of the top-10 biggest players on the field," Ward said. "He's a talented dude. He's got a big arm. He can run. Did he win MVP yet? Well, he's probably going to win the MVP. He won the Heisman. He's a rare breed of athlete."

That's why Ward needs to be at 100 percent — or close to it, anyway — for this top-ranked defense. He could also see some time covering Greg Olsen, a tight end who "works well within that offense," Ward explained. "He has great hands. He runs good routes. He seems to be a smart player."

Stewart banged up his knee midway through the third quarter, while Ward left early in the fourth. That left backup safeties Shiloh Keo and Josh Bush to patrol the field against Tom Brady & Co.

Ward and Stewart have yet to practice this week and are listed as questionable on the injury report. "Extra days are always needed for healing, so I definitely think it helps," Stewart said. "It's just getting healthy and getting ready to play."

Chargers staying in San Diego for 2016

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — Chargers Chairman Dean Spanos said Friday that the team will play in San Diego in 2016, and he'll work with politicians and the business community to try to resolve a long, bitter fight over a new stadium.

Spanos' statement was posted on the team website shortly after the Union-Tribune reported that the Chargers had agreed in principle to join the Los Angeles Rams in a stadium expected to open in Inglewood in 2019.

It also came shortly after Spanos invited Mayor Kevin Faulconer and County Supervisor Ron Roberts to his La Jolla home for an afternoon meeting.

"I am committed to looking at this with a fresh perspective and new sense of possibility," Spanos' statement said.

A spokesman for Faulconer said Mark Fabiani, who has led the Chargers' stadium push for 15 years, was not at the meeting. It wasn't immediately clear if Fabiani, who has attacked Faulconer's proposals for the last year, will be involved when negotiations resume.

Spanos' announcement was a relief to fans who feared the Chargers would leave their home of 55 seasons and join the Rams in Los Angeles in the fall.

Spanos said he hoped the Chargers would remain in San Diego "for the long term in a new stadium."

"I have met with Mayor Faulconer and Supervisor Roberts and I look forward to working closely with them and the business community to resolve our stadium dilemma," Spanos said. "We have an option and an agreement with the Los Angeles Rams to go to Inglewood in the next year, but my focus is on San Diego."

"This has been our home for 55 years, and I want to keep the team here and provide the world-class stadium experience you deserve. Everyone on both sides of the table in San Diego must now determine the best next steps and how to deploy the additional resources provided by the NFL."

Spanos' announcement came more than two weeks after NFL owners voted to approve Rams owner Stan Kroenke's plans to build a stadium in Inglewood, near Los Angeles. A competing proposal

by Spanos and Oakland Raiders owner Mark Davis to build a stadium in Carson was defeated.

While the owners gave Spanos the option to relocate to Los Angeles, the league said the Chargers and Raiders would each get an additional \$100 million to try to get new stadium deals in their home markets. That money is in addition to a \$200 million loan from the league available to each team.

"We are very supportive of the decision by Dean Spanos to continue his efforts in San Diego and work with local leaders to develop a permanent stadium solution," Commissioner Roger Goodell said in a statement. "NFL ownership has committed \$300 million to assist in the cost of building a new stadium in San Diego. I have pledged the league's full support in helping Dean to fulfill his goal."

The next steps are uncertain. Faulconer has insisted a stadium measure be put on the ballot. Faulconer and Roberts said earlier this month that a November ballot issue is more realistic than trying to rush one onto the June ballot.



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Rebuilding Bradley looks abroad

Associated Press

PEORIA, Ill.— Practice is no problem. Luuk van Bree, Callum Barker, Dwayne Lautier-Ogunleye and Joel Okafor are used to the training that goes along with playing hoops at a high level.

The most challenging aspect of college ball for Bradley's international freshmen is learning how to compete, and it's a constant point of emphasis for coach Brian Wardle.

"Make everything competitive. Shooting drills, free-throw drills, rebounding drills, everything's competitive," Wardle said. "There's a winner or loser. Mano a mano, and you got to be the more aggressive player and make the play. So you just try to teach them how to, just, constantly, [in] everything they do have that game speed and aggressive, competitive mindset."

There is a lot of teaching going on these days at the small private school that last made it to the NCAA Tournament in 2006. Wardle replaced Geno Ford after Bradley went 9-24 last season, and the former Wisconsin-Green Bay coach filled out his 14-man roster for his new program with a whopping 10 newcomers — including nine true freshmen from five different countries.

Okafor was born in Lagos, Nigeria, but played high school ball in Indiana. Barker, who is from the Australian island state of Tasmania, had a year of prep school in Massachusetts before coming to Bradley.

But this is the first extended time in the United States for van Bree, a native of Venray, Netherlands, and Lautier-Ogunleye, who is from London.

"It was a lot of, like, small things, like I

feel like people apologize for everything here, a lot," van Bree said. "Stuff like that. And people say thank you for everything and, like, you don't use your knife and fork when you eat. ... Minor stuff. There's nothing really major that's different."

Van Bree, Barker, Lautier-Ogunleye and Okafor are part of a steady rise in international players for the top rung of men's college basketball, from 376 for the 2010-11 season to 506 Division I players this year with a listed hometown outside of the U.S. and at least one appearance for their school this season, according to STATS.

Bradley is tied for the 15th most international players in the country. New Mexico State leads the way with nine, followed by Canisius and St. John's with six apiece, and then a large group with five, including Harvard, Oregon State and South Carolina.

"We have a lot of international players here and different languages," said Jamal Murray, a freshman guard for No. 20 Kentucky who is one of four international players to appear in at least one game this season for the Wildcats. "I've been in this position before playing with new guys with different cultures, different styles to the game. So it's fun coming here and having a school that's multicultural."

A slight increase in the number of Division I teams has provided more opportunities for international players in recent years. Wardle also points to the popularity of basketball around the world and the international players in the NBA as two major reasons for the growth in college hoops. And the Internet helps international players draw attention from American colleges.

When it comes to recruiting internationally, relationships are a big deal, and success with an international player can lead to more players from one country coming over to a specific school.

"As long as I'm here, we're going to continue, and hopefully we get tipped off on more African players and more foreign players," Louisville coach Rick Pitino said.

Pitino, who helped Gorgui Dieng develop into a first-round pick in the 2013 NBA Draft, also has four international players on his roster this season: Matz Stockman (Norway), Mangok Mathiang (Australia), Anas Mahmoud (Egypt) and Deng Adel (Australia).

"The great thing about the Gorgui Diengs and Mangok and Matz and Anas is what great people they are, totally unspoiled by (Amateur Athletic Union) basketball in terms of the name on the back," Pitino said. "It's a pleasure to coach those guys."

While the 16th-ranked Cardinals and the Wildcats are gearing up for the postseason, Bradley is looking to build a foundation for the future.

Lautier-Ogunleye, van Bree and Barker are among the leading scorers and rebounders for the Braves, who are 3-19 and 1-8 in the Missouri Valley Conference. While the losses have piled up in a hurry, they remain optimistic about where the program is headed.

"Starting young, it's tough because we have the growing pains of learning everything from the start," Lautier-Ogunleye said. "But I believe it'll be beneficial in the long term just because we would have all experienced everything from the beginning and then we'll see the end result."

Melo leads NY to win over Suns

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Carmelo Anthony had 19 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists in his return from a two-game absence, and the New York Knicks snapped a four-game losing streak with a 102-84 victory over the Phoenix Suns on Friday night.

Kristaps Porzingis also rejoined the lineup with seven points and seven rebounds, and the Knicks sent the Suns to their 13th straight road loss.

Anthony had sat out with soreness in his surgically repaired left knee, and Porzingis missed his first game of the season Thursday with an upper respiratory illness. Having them back helped Arron Afflalo, who scored 12 of his 17 points in helping the Knicks open a big first-quarter lead that was never really threatened.

Rookie Devin Booker scored 21 points for the Suns, who fell to 4-21 on the road. Their last road victory was Dec. 7 in Chicago.

Cavaliers 114, Pistons 106: Kevin Love scored 19 of his 29 points in the first half, Kyrie Irving had 28 points and visiting Cleveland rolled to another high-scoring win.

The Cavaliers have won three straight since losing to Chicago in Tyronn Lue's first game as Cleveland's coach, scoring at least 114 points in each win.

Thunder 116, Rockets 108: Russell Westbrook's sixth triple-double of the season helped host Oklahoma City defeat Houston.

Westbrook finished with 26 points, 14 assists and 10 rebounds.

It was the 25th triple-double of his career.

Celtics 113, Magic 94: Kelly Olynyk and Marcus Smart scored 16 points apiece as host Boston won a season-high fifth straight game, beating slumping Orlando.

Jae Crowder and Evan Turner each added 15 points, and Isaiah Thomas had 14 points and eight assists in just 27 minutes.

Heat 107, Bucks 103: Dwyane Wade scored 24 points and hit a long jumper with 44.5 seconds left, and Miami won its third straight road game by beating Milwaukee.

Wade led a balanced scoring effort with all five Miami starters scoring in double figures. Chris Bosh added 20.

Mavericks 91, Nets 79: Chandler Parsons had 19 points and a season-high 10 rebounds while Deron Williams struggled in his first game against his former team and host Dallas beat Brooklyn.

Kevin Durant had 33 points and 12 rebounds and Enes Kanter scored 20 of his 22 points in the second half for the Thunder, who have won 10 of 11 overall and six straight at home.

Jazz 103, Timberwolves 90: Rodney Hood scored 22 points, Derrick Favors had 20 in his return to the starting lineup and Utah beat visiting Minnesota to win consecutive games for the first time in nearly three weeks.

Clippers 105, Lakers 93: Chris Paul scored 27 points and the Los Angeles Clippers beat the Lakers for their franchise-record ninth straight victory over their Staples Center co-tenant.

Trail Blazers 109, Hornets 91: Damian Lillard scored 22 points and Allen Crabbe added 20 off the bench to help host Portland top Charlotte.

Scott taking time to enjoy moment

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — John Scott sat back in his chair and took a cell phone photo of all the reporters crowded around him once the questions finally ended.

It was a big moment for a big man, and it almost didn't happen. So the journeyman enforcer who admits he's an odd fit for an NHL All-Star Game is soaking up every precious moment before heading back to Newfoundland, where he is toiling in the minors.

"It's definitely strange," Scott said Friday at one of the more unusual media days for the NHL's showcase event. "You go in the locker room everyone's got the NHL logo on their helmet. They threw the NHL logo on mine. It's definitely always like, 'You're not in the NHL anymore.' So it's neat, though like I'm not used to this and all this scrum and stuff. I'm going to enjoy it while I'm here and go back to the real world."

He is going to enjoy it with a blessing from NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman, too. The two had a talk Thursday night.

"And he's more than welcome to be here," Bettman told The Associated Press. "We're happy he's here. The fans spoke, and we're happy to reflect their will."

Scott said he was glad to hear that from Bettman because there was a time he really wasn't sure the league felt that way. He wrote in The Players Tribune this week that someone from the league called him to suggest he back out of the game, an idea he rejected much to the delight of his fellow All-Stars.

The last two weeks have been a whirlwind for Scott. He was traded Jan. 15 to Montreal, which promptly ordered him to its AHL affiliate in Canada's version of

the Far East. The league also had to decide what to do with him, since no one had really expected a 6-foot-8 bruiser with just five goals over 285 games in eight seasons to make an All-Star roster.

Scott didn't just make the roster: Fans flocked online and voted him captain of the Pacific Division, taking advantage of the NHL's willingness to give them the ability to turn at least one position into a popularity contest. The same thing happened a year ago as Latvian fans helped send Sabres forward Zemgus Girgensons to the All-Star Game.

Of course, Girgensons isn't a tough guy like Scott, who may very well look a bit out of place when the league shows off its frantic 3-on-3 format during Sunday's game.

Scott expects the NHL to change the fan vote for the All-Star Game to keep someone like himself from ever being picked again.

"They should do something if they don't want this to happen again," Scott said. "I think it's a good thing for the game. It's gotten a lot of publicity. It's gotten a lot of people excited to watch the game, so you never know. It could be a good thing."

All-Star merchandise with Scott's name and number has been a hot item, so popular that Scott said he couldn't find any of his own jerseys.

Scott said his former Arizona teammates supported him accepting his All-Star spot. Florida star Jaromir Jagr said the pressure from the league wasn't fair to Scott, who has played for six teams over the years and never averaged more than 10 minutes in ice time during an NHL season.

"He didn't do anything wrong," Jagr said. "He's a great guy. I think the change

will change something next year, but he shouldn't go through that. It was kind of cool when he said, 'No, I'm coming.' I like that. I think he's going to be the most popular player on the ice. ... I just hope he doesn't slash anybody."

Dallas forward Jamie Benn said the solution is simple.

"If they don't want certain players here, they shouldn't let the fans vote," Benn said.

But first things first. Scott worked with Chicago forward Patrick Kane, the NHL's top scorer, to set the lineups for Saturday's skills competition. Scott himself will take part in the shootout and hardest shot events.

"I wanted to stack the deck and put my eggs in as many baskets as I could and win those prizes," Scott joked.

The 33-year-old Scott has two daughters, and his wife is expecting twins within the next couple weeks. In his essay, he wrote that someone with the NHL asked him: "Do you think this is something your kids would be proud of?"

That incident only strengthened his resolve to play Sunday. Scott was asked if anyone with the league followed up with him about that comment about his children not being proud, and he said no. He doesn't expect anyone to come forward, either.

For now, he's looking forward to fan support in his big weekend with the superstars.

"It's obviously an anomaly," Scott said. "I'm not the typical All-Star, and it's probably not going to happen again. It's kind of one of those things where it might be the last time, and I hope they have fun with it and kind of get behind me a little bit."