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US South China Sea sail-by angers China

Associated Press

BEIJING — China strongly condemned the United States after a U.S. warship deliberately sailed near one of the Beijing-controlled islands in the hotly contested South China Sea to exercise freedom of navigation and challenge China's vast sea claims.

The missile destroyer USS Curtis Wilbur sailed within 12 nautical miles of Triton Island in the Paracel chain "to challenge excessive maritime claims of parties that claim the Paracel Islands," without notifying the three claimants beforehand, Defense Department spokesman Mark Wright said Saturday in Washington.

China, Taiwan and Vietnam have overlapping claims in the Paracels and require prior notice from ships transiting what

they consider their territorial waters. The latest operation was particularly aimed at China, which has raised tensions with the U.S. and its Southeast Asian neighbors by embarking on massive construction of man-made islands and airstrips in contested waters.

Vietnamese Foreign Ministry spokesman Le Hai Binh said that Vietnam respects "innocent passage" of ships through territorial waters in line with international law. State media quoted Binh as reiterating Vietnam's sovereignty over the Paracels and Spratlys and calling on nations to actively and practically contribute to peace and stability in the South China Sea.

The U.S. has claimed the attempts to restrict navigational rights by requiring prior notice are inconsistent with international law and pledged

to regularly carry out similar maneuvers.

In October, another U.S. warship sailed in the nearby Spratly Islands near Subi Reef, where China has built one of seven artificial islands.

The latest operation also drew Beijing's ire. Defense Ministry spokesman Yang Yujun issued a statement saying the "unprofessional and irresponsible" U.S. action "severely violated Chinese law, sabotaged the peace, security and good order of the waters, and undermined the region's peace and stability."

In an opinion published Sunday by the official Xinhua news agency, China described the maneuver as a "deliberate provocation" that raised doubts about the United States' sincerity just days after Secre-

tary of State John Kerry visited Beijing for meetings about the South China Sea and North Korea that were called productive by both sides.

China's official response has been restrained compared with the public outrage seen online, according to Xinhua. A social media search on Sunday showed a smattering of posts calling on China to adopt a tougher military posture against U.S. encroachment — if not wage war with the United States.

China claims almost the entire South China Sea and its islands, reefs and atolls on historic grounds. The area has some of the world's busiest shipping lanes, and U.S. officials say ensuring freedom of navigation is in U.S. national interests, while not taking sides in the territorial disputes.

Navy's littoral combat ship struggles during drills

Bloomberg

The Navy's Littoral Combat Ship struggled in drills at sea to fend off a swarm of small attacking vessels like the Iranian boats it could encounter in the Persian Gulf, according to the Pentagon's chief weapons tester.

The fast-attack boats were ultimately defeated by the USS Coronado during three mock engagements in August and September to test its guns and targeting gear. But in two exercises, an attacker came too close, penetrating the vessel's "keep-out" zone, Pentagon testing Director Michael Gilmore said in his annual report on major weapons.

The report adds to questions about the vulnerability and reliability of the ships, designed

in two versions by Lockheed Martin and Austal and intended to operate in shallow coastal waters. Twenty-six vessels are now under contract in a \$23 billion program.

In the exercise, the crew of the Coronado "expended a large quantity" of 57 mm and 30 mm ammunition "while contending with repeated network communications faults that disrupted" information flowing to gun systems, and weapon elevation flaws that occurred more than a dozen times, disrupting firings, he said.

Gilmore also cited reliability issues with both versions of the ships, from troubles with generators and air-conditioning units to "cybersecurity deficiencies that significantly degrade operational effectiveness."

That's a particularly serious problem for the littoral combat ship because its ability to survive in combat depends on communicating with better-armed vessels and support on shore through a maritime battle network linked by computers and sensors.

The lightly manned vessel also relies on ship-to-shore and satellite communications to help crews monitor the ship's condition, perform repairs and order medical supplies.

The Freedom-class version built by Bethesda, Md.-based Lockheed isn't "operationally suitable because many of its critical systems supporting ship operations, core mission functions and mission package operations are unreliable," Gilmore wrote.

Before the Lockheed-built

USS Fort Worth departed in November 2014 for a 16-month deployment to Asia, failures of subsystems "fundamental to ship operations," such as mobility and maneuvering, "caused the ship to return to port for repairs or reduced readiness at sea for 42 and 36 days respectively," Gilmore wrote.

Although data collected to date on the Independence-class version built by Henderson, Australia-based Austal are incomplete, many of its systems "have significant reliability problems," Gilmore wrote.

In tests at sea, the Coronado's crew "had difficulty keeping the ship operational as it suffered repeated failures of the ship's diesel generators, water jets and air conditioning unit," he said.

Panel: Return armored brigade to Europe

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Just four years after the Defense Department decided to inactivate two of Europe's four brigades, a review panel has recommended that the Army return an armored brigade to Europe along with a warfighting aviation headquarters to counter a more aggressive Russia.

The conclusion from a yearlong review of Army readiness by a congressionally mandated panel illustrates how dramatically the security situation in Europe has changed in the past two years, with perceptions of Russia changing from potential

ally to potential adversary.

The National Commission on the Future of the Army released its findings Thursday in a nearly 200-page report that offered a series of recommendations on the size and shape of the Army in the years ahead.

In the case of Europe, the commission argued that more permanent forces are needed on the continent, where Army presence now stands at roughly 28,000 troops.

"The changing security environment in Europe, its value as a stationing location for potential contingencies in the Middle East, and the relatively lengthy timelines associated with deploying an [armored brigade] suggest the need to return to permanent stationing of this asset in the re-

gion," the commission concluded. "Based on its review, the commission believes this adjustment would require minimal additional staffing."

In addition, the Army should convert U.S. Army Europe's administrative aviation headquarters to a "war-fighting mission command element" similar to a Combat Aviation Brigade headquarters.

While a heavier reliance on rotational aviation combat units in Europe makes sense, the current administrative aviation headquarters is "not sufficiently robust to accomplish this task at acceptable risk," said the commission, headed by retired Army Gen. Carter Ham.

Hopefuls take whirlwind tour before Iowa decides

The Associated Press

MANCHESTER, Iowa — Republican and Democratic presidential hopefuls crisscrossed the Midwestern state of Iowa in a frenzied weekend prelude before voters have their first say in the 2016 presidential race, which has taken an unexpected turn with the emergence of outsider candidates who have challenged the establishment in both parties.

Iowa offers only a small contingent of the delegates who will determine the nominees at each party's national convention in July. But Monday's caucuses will provide a test of whether the large, enthusiastic crowds turning out at rallies for real estate mogul Donald Trump and Vermont Sen. Ber-

nie Sanders will turn into actual votes. The caucuses also are expected to help winnow down the crowded Republican field and to provide momentum heading into the Feb. 9 New Hampshire primary.

In the last major preference poll before the caucuses, Trump had the support of 28 percent of likely caucus-goers, with Texas Sen. Ted Cruz at 23 percent and Florida Sen. Marco Rubio at 15 percent. The Iowa Poll, published by The Des Moines Register and Bloomberg, also found Hillary Clinton with 45 percent support to Sanders' 42 percent. The poll of 602 likely Republican caucus-goers and 602 likely Democratic caucus-goers was taken Tuesday to Friday and has a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percentage points.

Japan to boost its defenses in south, west

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Japan plans to double the number of F-15 fighter jets based in southern Okinawa and to establish a new Ground Self-Defense Force base on its westernmost island, Yonaguni, in an effort to strengthen its defenses in the face of an aggressive China.

The announcement was made Tuesday by Defense Minister Gen Nakatani at a time when China is challenging Japan and its American allies for supremacy in the East and South China seas, most notably for Japan's resource-rich southern island chain, called the Senkakus by Japan and Diaoyu by China.

From staff reports

Troops: Boosting parental benefits 'long time coming'

BY STEVEN BEARDSLEY
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — Many servicemembers overseas said a Pentagon plan to boost benefits for military parents was long overdue, but some in the Navy criticized the across-the-board maternity leave of 12 weeks, saying the 18 they get now is more appropriate.

Defense Secretary Ash Carter said Thursday he would set maternity leave at 12 weeks for all services and ask Congress to raise paternity leave to 14 days from 10. The Army and Air Force currently offer six weeks of maternity leave.

"It's a long time coming, and it's expected," said retired Navy Lt. Cmdr. Melody Fugazotto, who now lives in Wiesbaden, Germany. "You have more women in the military, in general, and in higher positions than they were before."

Female sailors and Marines now receive 18 weeks of maternity leave since Navy Secretary Ray Mabus tripled the benefit in July; they'll lose six of those weeks when the change goes into effect.

The Navy will honor the 18-week leave for sailors and Marines who are already pregnant

or become pregnant within 30 days of the service enacting Carter's new policy, said a spokesman for the service's personnel command.

Some sailors say 12 weeks is insufficient.

"I don't think it's enough time to come to an emotional place where you can take your child to the [Child Development Center] and leave them there while you go to work," said Seaman Jessica Spradley, a hospital corpsman with the Yokosuka Naval Hospital's OB-GYN section. "Only 12 weeks of maternity leave is not emotionally easy for moms."

Others hailed the uniformity of regulations across all services.

"I still don't think it's that bad. I think it's good that it's equal for all branches," said Petty Officer 1st Class Brittney Foster, a personnel specialist stationed in Bahrain.

Carter also said he'd increase hours at military day care centers and expand health coverage to include fertility treatment. He plans to ask Congress to increase leave for dual-military families adopting children and to allow some families to postpone military moves due to family reasons.

Djokovic earns 6th Australian title

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — In five previous Australian Open wins, Novak Djokovic had never felt so much love.

After maintaining his perfect record in six finals at Melbourne Park — and extending his old friend Andy Murray's streak to five losses from five championship deciders Down Under — Djokovic had hundreds of Serbian fans singing and chanting his name so loudly he could barely hear questions in a TV interview.

While Djokovic was still celebrating his 6-1, 7-5, 7-6 (3) victory on Sunday night, equaling Roy Emerson's record of six Australian titles, Murray was rushing for

the airport to catch a flight back to Britain to reunite with his pregnant wife.

"I never experienced this much crowd and this much love," Djokovic said. "I've had the fortune to win this trophy now six times, but I never experienced such support."

Djokovic has won the last three Grand Slam titles, and four of the last five, to lift his career haul to 11 — equaling Rod Laver and Bjorn Borg in fifth place on the all-time list.

"I don't take anything for granted, even though I won last four out of five Grand Slams, played five finals, it's phenomenal," said Djokovic, reflecting on a period of time in which he was married, became

a father and only lost one match in five major championships — the final of the French Open. "No doubt that I'm playing the best tennis of my life in the last 15 months.

"Everything is going well privately, as well, so I feel like I'm at the point in my life where everything is working in harmony. I'll try to keep it that way."

His next objective is a first Grand Slam title on clay to complete his collection. Djokovic has reached three French Open finals, but never won.

Murray became only the second man to lose five finals at one major — Ivan Lendl lost five and won three U.S. Open finals in the 1980s.

Djokovic had won 10 of his previous 11 matches against Murray and was 21-9 in their career meetings — including four finals at the Australian Open.

While Djokovic extended his perfect streak to six in Australian finals, Serena Williams' streak of 6-0 in Melbourne Park deciders ended in an upset loss to Germany's Angelique Kerber on Saturday. Kerber went for a dip in the Yarra River on Sunday morning after a night of celebrations after prolonging Williams' bid to equal Steffi Graf's record 22 majors in the Open era.

No. 1 Sooners hold off LSU

Associated Press

BATON ROUGE, La. — Oklahoma senior Buddy Hield has taken plenty of shots in crunch time and could not have looked more comfortable letting it fly again while his team roared back from a double-digit deficit in front of a packed, hostile and fully wound-up crowd.

Hield made seven of his eight three-pointers in the second half on his way to a 32-point performance, Isaiah Cousins hit a go-ahead jumper with 4 seconds left and No. 1 Oklahoma overcame a 14-point deficit to escape with a 77-75 victory over LSU on Saturday.

"That's all confidence," Hield said of his flourish down the stretch, which came after he'd made one of his first five threes. "My teammates keep lifting me up, even when I start off missing the first two of the second half. They find me in good spots and I was able to knock down good, rhythm shots."

LSU freshman sensation Ben Simmons — like Hield a top candidate for college player of the year — had his share of highlights in a 14-point performance, including a memorable driving reverse dunk. But he had trouble even getting his hands on the ball in the last 10 minutes.

LSU coach Johnny Jones emphasized the experience factor when explaining why the Tigers struggled to stop Hield, who scored at least 30 for the eighth time this season.

"He just made some huge plays out there tonight that were needed to put his team in position to win — and that's what veteran guys do," Jones said. "So for a guy like that to come back for his senior year and continue to improve as a player, you could see the fruits of his labor out there today."

Cousins finished with 18 points, and Ryan Spangler had 16 points and 10 rebounds for the Sooners (18-2).

LSU players said they expected Hield to get the ball on Oklahoma's final possession, which was part of the reason Cousins was able to rise for an open shot from just inside the foul line.

Oklahoma coach Lon Kruger said

Cousins made the right play.

"I liked the idea of Isaiah getting to his spot and getting off a good shot," Kruger said.

LSU (13-8) didn't go quietly. Antonio Blakeney hit a pair of late threes, and the second tied it at 75 with 24 seconds left.

The Tigers weren't finished until Khadeem Lattin blocked Tim Quarterman's driving shot as time ran out.

No. 2 North Carolina 89, Boston College 62: North Carolina won its 12th straight game, forcing a season-best 23 turnovers in a victory over visiting Boston College.

Paige had 12 points in his highest-scoring game in three weeks, hitting three three-pointers after making just one in his previous four games. After swishing the first three he tried, he shot a look of relief toward the Smith Center roof.

Brice Johnson had 17 points and 11 rebounds, and Joel Berry II added 13 points for the Tar Heels.

No. 4 Kansas 90, No. 20 Kentucky 84 (OT): Wayne Selden Jr. scored a career-high 33 points, seven in overtime, and Kansas beat Kentucky in the premier showdown of the Big 12/SEC Challenge.

Frank Mason III added 13 points and eight rebounds for the Jayhawks (17-4), who snapped a three-game losing streak to the Wildcats (16-5) by winning their 35th straight game at Allen Fieldhouse.

No. 5 Texas A&M 72, No. 14 Iowa State 62: Danuel House scored 20 points, including a go-ahead three late in the second half that sent host Texas A&M over Iowa State in the Big 12/SEC Challenge.

No. 7 Xavier 86, DePaul 65: At Rosemont, Ill., Trevon Bluiett scored 15 points and Xavier used an impressive burst spanning the halves to put away DePaul.

Macura and Larry Austin Jr. had 12 points apiece for the Musketeers (19-2, 7-2 Big East), who have won three in a row since their 81-72 home loss against Georgetown on Jan. 19.

Florida 88, No. 9 West Virginia 71: Dorian Finney-Smith scored 24 points, Brandone Francis-Ramirez hit three

huge three-pointers and host Florida upset West Virginia in the Big 12/SEC Challenge.

No. 10 Providence 73, Georgetown 69: Ben Bentil and Kris Dunn each scored 26 points, and Providence held off several late charges by host Georgetown.

The Friars (18-4, 6-3 Big East) beat a Hoyas team looking to pull off its second upset of a top 10 squad in the past two weeks. Georgetown (13-9, 6-3) erased an 11-point deficit to beat Creighton earlier in the week and defeated No. 5 Xavier on Jan. 19.

No. 11 Virginia 63, No. 16 Louisville 47: Malcolm Brogdon and Anthony Gill each scored 13 points and Virginia used stifling defense to rout host Louisville for its fourth straight victory.

No. 13 SMU 80, Memphis 68: Nic Moore scored 22 points and SMU rebounded from its first loss of the season with a victory over visiting Memphis.

North Carolina State 85, No. 15 Miami 69: Anthony "Cat" Barber scored 30 points to help host North Carolina State beat Miami.

No. 17 Baylor 83, Georgia 73: Rico Gathers had 17 points and nine rebounds, and Baylor used a quick start to the second half to beat visiting Georgia in the Big 12/SEC Challenge.

No. 18, Arizona 80, Oregon State 63: Gabe York made six three-pointers and scored 24 points, both career highs, and host Arizona bounced back from a rare home loss to beat Oregon State.

Ryan Anderson added 13 points and 12 rebounds for the Wildcats (17-5, 5-4 Pac-12).

No. 19 Indiana 74, Minnesota 68: Thomas Bryant scored a career-high 23 points to help Indiana hang on for a victory over Minnesota.

The Hoosiers (18-4, 8-1) barely retained their share of the Big Ten lead after blowing a 16-point second-half lead. They've won 13 of their last 14.

No. 21 Purdue 89, Nebraska 74: A.J. Hammons scored a career-best 32 points and grabbed 11 rebounds to lead host Purdue over Nebraska.

Police investigate Manziel after call

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Troubled Browns quarterback Johnny Manziel is being investigated by police in Texas following a disturbance during which he may have assaulted his ex-girlfriend.

Manziel, who has had two tumultuous seasons in the NFL, was identified by Fort Worth police after they were called at about 2 a.m. Saturday to investigate a report of a possible assault at an apartment complex. The officers didn't find the person who called, but they spoke to an unidentified 23-year-old woman who said she was "involved in a disturbance with her ex-boyfriend" earlier that night in Dallas.

Sgt. Steve Enright later identified him as Manziel. There were no arrests, and it's not clear if Manziel has yet been questioned.

Police didn't say if the woman was hurt. An ambulance was called, but she was not taken to a hospital.

The police report said the woman was uncooperative with officers, who were unable to locate a crime scene. The woman raised concerns about her ex-boyfriend's well-being. Police tried calling Manziel's cell phone and searching for him before it determined he was safe.

Fort Worth police are working with Dallas police to determine if a crime occurred.

The Browns had no immediate comment Saturday.

Beyond the legal matter, Manziel could face discipline from the league. NFL spokesman Greg Aiello said in an email the league is "aware and looking into it."



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James, Cavs get past Spurs

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Blasting toward the basket, LeBron James didn't break his stride as he flicked away Patty Mills, sending the San Antonio guard sprawling across the floor.

James scored a layup and flexed.

He and the Cavaliers finally bullied one of the NBA's big boys.

James scored 29 points — and overcame an early wardrobe malfunction — and Kevin Love and Kyrie Irving added 21 apiece and Cleveland got its first win this season over an elite team by beating the San Antonio Spurs 117-103 on Saturday night.

The Cavs won their fourth straight under new coach Tyronn Lue, who was promoted after David Blatt was fired on Jan. 22. Cleveland came in 0-5 against San Antonio, Golden State and Chicago, three top-tier teams who figure to contend with them for a title this season.

Lue has the Cavs playing at a faster pace and the Spurs, who were again without center Tim Duncan, couldn't keep up with them.

"The Big 3 came through for us," Lue said. "It gives us confidence to know that we can beat a great team like the San Spurs."

Kawhi Leonard scored 24 and LaMarcus Aldridge 15 for the Spurs, who lost for just the second time in 16 games. They lost to the Warriors on Monday, giving 120 points.

Cleveland's 117 were the second-most given up this season by San Antonio, which came in allowing a league-best 90.6 points per game. The Cavs had more than that after three quarters.

"They pushed the ball," said Spurs guard Tony Parker, who finished with 13 points. "They were still a very good team before. It's one of those games where our

defense just wasn't there. We made too many mistakes and against a good team you can't do that."

Irving (10) and Matthew Dellavedova (8) scored Cleveland's first 18 points in the fourth quarter. James scored the next three when he blasted through Mills, who was no match for the 6-foot-8, 250-pound James.

In just a week, the Cavs have been transformed under Lue, who has encouraged James to make plays for his teammates and Irving to attack the basket.

"We definitely played good basketball tonight on both sides of the floor," James said. "We pushed the tempo offensively and did everything coach wanted us to do against a great team."

Down by 17 points at the half, the Spurs scored the first eight of the third quarter.

But the Cavs responded with a flurry that showcased their offensive depth. Love and Dellavedova hit three-pointers and James powered inside for several baskets, helping Cleveland push its lead to 88-69 late in the third.

Warriors 108, 76ers 105: Harrison Barnes hit a three-pointer with 0.2 seconds remaining and visiting Golden State escaped with a win over Philadelphia.

Klay Thompson had 32 points and Stephen Curry scored 23 points for the Warriors, who nearly blew a 24-point second-half lead. Draymond Green added 10 points and 13 rebounds for Golden State, which opened a three-game road trip with their sixth straight victory while matching the NBA's best start through 47 games.

Pacers 109, Nuggets 105 (OT): Monta Ellis scored a season-high 32 points and grabbed nine rebounds to lead host Indiana past Denver.

Ellis missed a three-pointer with the game tied at 99 as regulation ended, but he converted a three-point play with 20.4

seconds left in overtime to seal it and send the Pacers to a second straight victory.

Raptors 111, Pistons 107: DeMar DeRozan had 29 points and host Toronto beat Detroit to push the team's franchise-best win streak to 11 consecutive games.

Kyle Lowry had 18 points and backup center Bismack Biyombo added 12 points and 13 assists. Cory Joseph also had 16 points off the bench.

Pelicans 105, Nets 103: Jrue Holiday hit a 15-foot shot with 1.3 seconds remaining and host New Orleans held off Brooklyn.

New Orleans' Anthony Davis scored 20 points and grabbed 16 rebounds in his first game back after sitting out with a concussion. Davis started 0 for 10 from the floor before finding his rhythm.

The Pelicans (18-28) and Davis were helped by Ryan Anderson's 24 points off the bench. Holiday's final shot gave him a team-best 26 points.

Wizards 123, Rockets 122: John Wall had 19 points, 13 assists and eight rebounds and visiting Washington rallied for a win over Houston to snap a three-game losing streak.

Ramon Sessions had 17 points off the bench, Jared Dudley had 16 points and Marcin Gortat had 13 points and 11 rebounds. The Wizards shot 52 percent.

Grizzlies 121, Kings 117: Jeff Green scored 29 points, Marc Gasol had 22 points, six rebounds and five assists, and host Memphis thwarted a fourth-quarter rally to defeat Sacramento.

The Kings, who lost their fourth straight, pulled within 118-117 on a three-pointer from Darren Collison with 18.7 seconds left. Courtney Lee converted two free throws for a 120-117 lead. On the next possession, Collison lost the ball, the Kings' 19th turnover, and Memphis held on for its third straight win and ninth in the last 11.

SEC West QBs lead South to Senior win

Associated Press

MOBILE, Ala. — SEC West quarterbacks Dak Prescott, Jake Coker and Brandon Allen all led scoring drives to help lead the South to a 27-16 win over the North in Saturday's Senior Bowl.

Arkansas' Allen passed for a game-high 106 yards, including a couple of on-target deep balls. Mississippi State's Prescott threw for 61 yards and a touchdown with both teams rotating their four quarterbacks after each quarter.

Both were 7-of-10 passing. Baylor's 6-foot-7 defensive end Shawn Oakman loomed large on the North defense. He racked up two first-half sacks and a forced fumble.

The game's top quarterback prospect, North Dakota State's Carson Wentz, had a mostly quiet first quarter. He completed 6 of 10 passes for 50 yards and the North didn't score.

Ohio State quarterback-turned-receiver Braxton Miller also didn't produce big plays on offense.

Miller, whose play got a lot of attention during the week in practice, had two catches for 8 yards and a 5-yard run while dropping a short pass. He did have a 31-yard kick return, one of the few roles he didn't play at Ohio State.

Each quarter had a two-minute warning to give more quarterbacks a chance to run the offense in that situation.

The game's rule switching possession after each quarter helped keep the North benefiting more from a huge special teams play.

USC's Cody Kessler couldn't get the North into the end zone before the third ended after a long blocked kick return and the South got the ball right back. Kessler couldn't hit an open Miller in the end zone.

Wisconsin's Joe Schobert blocked a field goal attempt and West Virginia's K.J. Dillon returned it 73 yards in the final seconds of the quarter.

That came after Allen's best drive. He threw a pretty deep ball to Kansas State tight end Glenn Gronkowski — younger brother of New England Patriots star Rob — late in the third quarter. Then he fired another pass to Paul McRoberts, the first player from FCS Southeast Missouri to make the game.

McRoberts, who caught a 5-yard touchdown from Prescott, gained 46 receiving yards and returned a punt 27 yards.

Ohio State tight end Nick Vannett led North players with three catches for 58 yards. For the South, North Carolina State's Jacoby Brissett, a Florida transfer, got into the act with a touchdown drive in the fourth.

He and former Gators teammate Jeff Driskel — who played his final season at Louisiana Tech — matched up in the final quarter. Driskel's wobbly throw on the final play went for a 29-yard touchdown to Aaron Burbridge of Michigan State.

Alabama's Coker, a Mobile native who led the Crimson Tide's national champion run in his lone season as starter, played the first quarter and helped set up a 25-yard touchdown scamper by TCU's Aaron Green.

Detroit rookie wins fastest skater title

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Dylan Larkin is very, very fast. That helped the only rookie at this NHL All-Star weekend make quite the debut.

The Detroit Red Wings forward won not only the title of fastest skater at this event but set the record for the fastest lap around a full rink. He topped Mike Gartner's time of 13.386 seconds in 1996 — months before Larkin was born.

Larkin easily beat Predators defenseman Roman Josi on the first lap of the first event Saturday night at the NHL skills competition at 12.894 seconds. That time easily stood to win the fastest skater. He then skated a full lap in just 13.172 seconds despite a bobble in turn three because he was going so fast.

Hometown favorite Predators captain Shea Weber won the hardest shot at 108.1 mph.

The Eastern Conference won the skills competition 29-12, giving John Tavares and Jaromir Jagr the choice as captains of which period to play their semifinal game Sunday in the All-Star Game. They chose the first period for the 3-on-3 competition.

P.K. Subban won the one event — breakaway — decided by fans voting by Twitter, edging out Sharks defenseman Brent Burns. Tavares of the New York Islanders won the accuracy event in 12.2 seconds. The West won the skills challenge relay, and the East finished off the shootout.

Fans gave John Scott, the enforcer voted in as captain of the Pacific Division, a standing ovation when he took part in the hardest shot. Traded by Arizona to Montreal on Jan. 15, and then sent to the minors by the Canadiens, Scott wore a black NHL All-Star jersey.

"He had a big smile on his face all night," Subban said of Scott.

Blackhawks forward Patrick Kane, the NHL's leading scorer at the break, was booed heavily at every chance. He helped Chicago oust the Nashville Predators in the first round of the playoffs last spring.

Larkin kicked the night off in record fashion. The rookie might have been even faster, but he said he dug in too hard and skated too fast, causing him trouble with his footing in the turn. Asked about topping Gartner's mark, Larkin had a quick question in response: "Was I born?"

No. Larkin was born in July 1996, months after Gartner set his mark at age 36.

"Yeah, I did find that out later," Larkin said. "It's crazy."

Weber hit 108.1 mph on his second shot in the hardest shot competition, just missing Zdeno Chara's record of 108.8 mph in 2012.

The event that brought out the All-Stars creativity was the breakaway challenge.

Matt Duchene of Colorado donned a cowboy hat, and Brandon Saad of Columbus bounced the puck off his stick. Subban failed to score after bouncing the puck off his stick and then kicking it off his right foot.

Predators forward James Neal used two pucks in a bit of deception, and then brought out country singer Dierks Bentley, who scored on a two-on-one.

Burns had help from two children, his son and teammate Joe Pavelski's son, with Florida goalie Roberto Luongo arguing with Cory Schneider of the Devils for the right to guard the net. Pavelski's son passed to Burns' son, who scored into an open net as the goalies' fight spilled over to the side.

On his second attempt, Burns had the arena lights turned down. Photos of him growing hairier over the years flashed on the video board to the "Star Wars" theme, and Burns was wearing a Chewbacca mask for his nickname when the lights came back up. It just wasn't enough hair to top Subban's final try.

Subban won by donning a long mullet wig in a nod to the 44-year-old Jagr, who was laughing as the Montreal defenseman scored only as Nashville goalie Pekka Rinne lifted his left leg sprawled in front of the net.

Subban said he decided on his Jagr tribute at the arena and credited trainers for finding the wig, then adding highlights with spray paint.

He didn't tip Jagr beforehand.

"I wanted it to be a surprise," Subban said. "It's a tribute to the great player that he is."