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Obama commutes Manning's sentence

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama has commuted the 35-year sentence of Army Pvt. Chelsea Manning, convicted of stealing thousands of pages of classified material and sending them to WikiLeaks, and pardoned retired Marine Gen. James Cartwright who pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI in a leak investigation.

The White House announced the actions involving Manning and Cartwright, a former vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, late Tuesday just three days before Obama leaves office.

Obama commuted sentences of 208 others, primarily for drug-related offenses, and pardoned 63 others. Presidential commutations shorten offenders' sentences, while pardons forgive convicted offenders of their crimes.

Notably absent from the list was Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, who had sought a presidential pardon to spare him from a court-martial on charges of desertion and misbehavior before the enemy. Bergdahl's trial is scheduled for April.

Cartwright admitted he lied to federal investigators probing a 2012 leak of information

to journalists about a covert cyberattack against Iran's nuclear program known as Stuxnet, which was used to cripple that country's ability to enrich uranium, according to court documents.

The former general confirmed to reporters details of the program, but he told investigators he did so in an attempt to influence them not to publish potentially damaging national security information. The former general pleaded guilty to the charges in October, and prosecutors had sought a two-year sentence.

Manning, formerly known as Bradley Manning, was convicted in July 2013 of 20 charges, including violating the Espionage Act, theft of government records, communicating national defense information and disobeying orders. That August, she was sentenced to 35 years in the military prison at Fort Leavenworth in Kansas, reduced in rank to private and given a dishonorable discharge upon her release.

She was a junior intelligence analyst in Iraq in late 2009 with access to classified information. She later admitted to copying thousands of documents — including a video that showed American helicopters killing

civilians and two journalists who were mistaken for enemy fighters — and later providing them to WikiLeaks, saying she thought that decision “was going to help people, not hurt people.”

Defense Secretary Ash Carter, who will leave that post on Friday, did not back Obama's decision to cut Manning's sentence, according to a U.S. official who was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and declined to characterize the secretary's objections.

More so, some Republican lawmakers blasted the outgoing president's decision on Manning. House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., called the commutation “outrageous” and said it set “a dangerous precedent.”

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., said it was a “sad” reflection of Obama's values as commander-in-chief.

Meanwhile, the American Civil Liberties Union, which has lobbied for Manning's release, praised the decision.

Manning, who was diagnosed with gender dysphoria while in prison and revealed she identified as a woman, has served more than six years, the longest a person has ever served for leaking sensitive information, according to the ACLU. The organization has also charged

she has been held in inhumane conditions, including solitary confinement, which has led her to at least twice attempt suicide.

Last week, WikiLeaks announced on Twitter that its founder, Julian Assange, would agree to be extradited by the United States to Sweden, where he faces sexual-assault charges.

“If Obama grants Manning clemency, Assange will agree to U.S. extradition despite clear unconstitutionality of ... [the] case,” WikiLeaks tweeted Jan. 12. Assange has spent five years at the Ecuadorian Embassy in London to avoid extradition to face those charges.

It was not clear whether the WikiLeaks announcement affected Obama's decision.

Bergdahl, the Army soldier who spent five years in Taliban captivity after abandoning his post in eastern Afghanistan, has sought a pre-trial pardon from Obama. His attorneys have said Bergdahl cannot receive a fair trial under a Donald Trump administration, because the president-elect has repeatedly called him a traitor.

It remains possible that Obama could grant him a pardon before he leaves office on Friday, but experts have told Stars and Stripes a pardon for the soldier is unlikely.

Marine stealth fighters arrive at Iwakuni for first mission

BY SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — A squadron of F-35B Lightning II stealth fighters touched down Wednesday at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan, to begin the aircraft's first overseas mission, Marine Corps officials said.

The controversial high-tech jets from Marine Fighter At-

tack Squadron (VMFA) 121 came from Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Ariz., but they will be permanently based at Iwakuni, the officials said in a statement.

VMFA 121's “Green Knights” fly a “short take-off vertical landing” version of the aircraft, which is designed to replace F/A-18 Hornet, AV-8B Harrier and EA-6B Prowler jets.

“The arrival of the F-35B embodies our commitment to the defense of Japan and the regional-security of the Pacific,” Maj. Gen. Russell Sanborn, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing commander, said in the statement. “We are bringing the most advanced technology to the Pacific to respond to the wide range of missions we take part in and provide greater support to our

regional allies.”

The new planes arrive at a time of high tension over disputed sea territory and North Korea's nuclear ambitions.

The hugely expensive F-35 project has been plagued by cost overruns and long delays. President-elect Donald Trump has described it as “out of control” and indicated he may abandon the entire program.

Top commander says some aspects of NATO 'obsolete'

The Washington Post

BRUSSELS — A top NATO general said Tuesday that aspects of the alliance were “obsolete,” echoing President-elect Donald Trump’s language and saying that the Western military alliance needs to adapt for a changing world.

The admission was a first sign of how NATO may try to pitch itself to the most skeptical U.S. president in the history of the bloc, which was formed as a defensive bulwark against the Soviet Union in the aftermath of World War II. But it appeared unlikely that French air force Gen. Denis Mercier, the senior NATO commander based in the United States, and Trump believe that the same aspects of NATO are obsolete.

Trump has said that he wants the 28-nation defense alliance to focus more on counterterrorism, a shift that NATO leaders say was already underway before Trump’s insurgent candidacy transformed into an election victory. He has also left open the question of whether he would come to the aid of NATO allies who have not been meeting their defense spending commitments and left open the door to a deal with Russia that would be anathema to most other NATO members.

NATO leaders have been left to struggle with how to present themselves to an incoming

president even as U.S. and allied troops fan out across Eastern Europe to provide deterrence to a threat of a Russian invasion.

“When I look at the threats we are facing now, we see that we may have focused too much, until the Ukraine crisis, we may have focused too much on expeditionary operations, especially in Afghanistan, and doing that, NATO has a bit failed to look at the change in the strategic background,” said Mercier, who is the supreme allied commander transformation of NATO, based in Norfolk.

His job, previously held by retired U.S. Marine Gen. James Mattis, Trump’s nominee for secretary of defense, is focused on the technical side of developing NATO’s future military stance and strategies, a command post that stands to benefit from major demands for change. His assessments do not appear to be shared by all senior staff at NATO.

“We have some structures that are obsolete,” Mercier told a small group of journalists in Brussels, saying that aspects of NATO bureaucracy are duplicative and could be streamlined. One example he offered was a standardized blueprint for the way NATO partners with non-member countries on security initiatives.

But in a sign that his vision of NATO’s future may di-

verge from Trump’s, he said that the July 2016 summit in which NATO nations committed thousands of troops to Eastern Europe was an example of successful adaptation.

“If there was not obsolescence in many areas of the alliance, we would not have decided this adaptation, in fact,” Mercier said.

Mercier also said that NATO was working on counterterrorism efforts by committing military trainers to Iraq and by offering NATO radar planes to the coalition combating the Islamic State group. He said that additional initiatives were also possible as the world struggles to confront the terrorist group.

He carefully broke from Trump’s desire to team up with Russia, saying that NATO needed to talk to the Kremlin but that Russia should not violate the territorial integrity of other nations.

He acknowledged that Trump’s unorthodox approach to NATO, if carried through to a full reversal of military commitments made under President Barack Obama, could result in significant disruptions to the alliance.

“If the U.S. forces would stop deploying, it would be some kind of strategic shock in Europe,” he said of the deployments to Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

Marine killed, another hurt in training

Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — A U.S. Marine was killed and another was injured last week during a live-fire training exercise at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in Twentynine Palms.

The Marines were participating in small-arms live-fire training Friday just after 5 p.m. in preparation for an integrated training exercise, said Lt. Karen Holliday, a spokeswoman at the training center. Few details were released about the accident.

The combat center announced the Marine’s death on Facebook on Saturday.

“We send our prayers and condolences to the families of the Marines killed and injured,” the base’s commander, Brig. Gen. William F. Mullen III, said in the statement. “Our first priority is to support them during this difficult time.”

The Marine Corps has not identified either Marine.

But the Naples (Fla.) Daily News reported the dead Marine was Lance Cpl. Austin Ruiz.

His family and friends told the newspaper the 19-year-old Naples resident always wanted to be a Marine.

According to Ruiz’s Facebook account, he got engaged around the Christmas holiday.

Marines from throughout the United States are routinely sent to Twentynine Palms to participate in integrated training exercises, which usually involve firing live ammunition and other hazardous activities.

Military jet crashes in Miss.; 2 eject

Associated Press

MERIDIAN, Miss. — Officials at a Mississippi military base say a jet crashed on a training flight, and that two people on board the plane were able to safely eject near the airfield.

Naval Air Station Meridian said

in a statement that an instructor pilot and a student were taken to a medical facility and were in stable condition Tuesday.

Authorities said the T-45C Goshawk jet crashed shortly before 2 p.m. Tuesday at the base in eastern Mississippi. The aircraft is assigned to Training Air

Wing One, and crashed off the east runway.

Base officials said the jet that crashed is used for intermediate and advanced portions of the Navy/Marine Corps pilot training program for jet carrier aviation and tactical strike missions.

Iraq claims control of eastern Mosul

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — U.S.-backed Iraqi government troops announced on Wednesday they were in “full control” of eastern Mosul, after routing Islamic State militants from that part of the northern city almost exactly three months since the major operation started.

The achievement was a “big victory,” said Iraqi Army Lt. Gen. Talib Shaghatai, who commands the counterterrorism forces, describing the success of the Iraqi forces as “unprecedented.”

Shaghatai, who spoke to reporters in the town of Bartella, just east of Mosul, said plans were now being drawn up to retake the western part of the city. He did not elaborate on

when that part of the operation would begin.

Wednesday’s advance came after Iraqi troops over the past days intensified their push into the last Islamic State-held neighborhoods in Mosul’s eastern sector, closing in on the Tigris River, which roughly divides the city. Stiff resistance by the militants, thousands of civilians being trapped in their houses by the fighting and bad weather had in the past slowed the advances of the troops.

However, skirmishes and clashes continued in some pockets along the Tigris in eastern Mosul, according to Iraqi special forces Maj. Ali Hussein who said his unit was still pushing into the Ghabat area along the river bank. Small-arms fire

could be heard and at least one civilian was wounded by mortar fire.

Also, some commanders on the ground disputed Shaghatai’s claim of “full control” of eastern Mosul, with Lt. Gen. Abdul-Amir Raheed Yar Allah saying the eastern side “has not been fully liberated ... and the advance is still continuing.”

Yar Allah, who commands army operations in Ninevah, where Mosul is the provincial capital, said the special forces “have done their duty” in eastern Mosul.

Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi issued a statement, posted on his website, saying that “work is underway to liberate” Ghabat and the area housing Saddam Hussein’s former

presidential palaces in eastern Mosul. He also vowed to liberate the western side of the city.

But the prospect of retaking western Mosul looms heavy on Iraqi forces, despite all the support they have by the U.S.-led coalition, as well as Sunni and Shiite volunteer militias. The western half of the city is home to some of Mosul’s oldest neighborhoods, with narrow streets packed with buildings that will further complicate the urban fight.

Mosul — Iraq’s second-largest city and the Islamic State group’s last urban stronghold in the country — fell to the Islamic State group in the summer of 2014, when the militant group captured large swaths of northern and western Iraq.

Spc. found in barracks is 11th Fort Hood-based soldier to die since Nov.

BY ALEX HORTON
Stars and Stripes

SAN ANTONIO — A soldier assigned to Fort Hood was found dead in his barracks room last week, the latest in a string of deaths at the Texas installation, the Army said Tuesday.

Spc. Zackary Phillip Partin, 24, a radio operator with slightly more than four years of service, died Jan. 12, according to an Army statement.

Partin, who was from Oakwood, Ill., was assigned to 1st Calvary Division and has been at Fort Hood since May of last year. He had earned the Army Achievement Medal, Army Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Service Medal and the Army Service Ribbon since his enlistment, the release stated.

The cause of Partin’s death was not made available Tuesday, pending an investigation with the Army’s Criminal In-

vestigation Command, known as CID, the release stated.

“We hope the investigation is thorough and provides the family an avenue to continue the grieving process,” Darren Taylor, a first cousin to Partin, told Stars and Stripes on Tuesday.

“The investigation is ongoing. We are not releasing any further information at this time,” CID spokesman Christopher Grey said about Partin’s death.

Partin is at least the 11th stateside soldier assigned to the post to die since November, according to Fort Hood news releases reviewed by Stars and Stripes.

Sgt. Alex Mathew Dean Taylor, 23, was found unresponsive at his place of duty last week. His death is also under investigation by CID.

Other deaths at the installation since November have been attributed to gunshots, illnesses and automobile accidents.

Taliban bomb maker accidentally kills self, sons

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — The government says an expert bomb maker for the insurgent Taliban inadvertently killed himself and his four sons in northern Afghanistan, while building a cache of roadside bombs.

Zabiullah Amani, spokesman for the provincial governor in Sar-i-Pul province, says Wednesday that Kamal Khan,

a Taliban commander in the northern part of the province, died overnight while making explosive devices in his home.

Amani says Khan was believed to be the Taliban’s best maker of roadside bombs in Sar-i-Pul province. These bombs have been frequently and effectively used for years against both government security forces and international troops in Afghanistan.

Sailor guilty in child porn case

Associated Press

NORFOLK, Va. — A Navy sailor is facing up to 15 years in prison for production of child pornography.

The Virginian-Pilot reports that Petty Officer 2nd Class Jordan Lee Adams, 27, pleaded guilty Tuesday in federal court in Norfolk.

Court documents say Adams had sex with at least four girls between 2009 and 2013, and

he photographed or videotaped at least some of the sexual encounters.

Much of the case focused on Adams’ relationship with a girl in Wayne County, N.C., where Adams grew up. Court records say Adams distributed some of the photos. He also posted them to social media popular with child pornographers.

His sentence is scheduled for April. He is also awaiting a court-martial.

Denver to work on allowing pot in public, a first in US

Associated Press

DENVER — Denver is starting work Wednesday on becoming the first city in the nation to allow marijuana clubs and public pot use in places such as coffee shops, yoga studios and art galleries.

Voters narrowly approved the “social use” measure last November. But the ballot proposal didn’t spell out many rules for how the marijuana could be consumed, beyond saying that the drug can’t be smoked inside and that patrons must be over 21.

A workgroup made up of Denver business owners, city pot regulators and marijuana opponents will work on suggesting regulations.

The state Liquor Control Board already has decreed that no businesses with a liquor license can allow marijuana use. That leaves it to restaurants that

don’t serve alcohol and other event spaces.

There’s no deadline for Denver to finalize rules. Supporters hope to see the city start accepting applications by this summer.

Emmett Reistroffer, a cannabis-industry consultant who ran last year’s campaign to allow public marijuana use, said the eventual regulations will require neighborhood approval for any pot clubs or coffee shops.

Reistroffer organized a recent public meeting about the measure and invited interested businesses, saying a few dozen showed up to find out more.

“There are plenty of places in Denver where you can find neighbors who want this kind of establishment,” Reistroffer said.

The organizer of the opposition campaign also is attending Wednesday’s meeting. Rachel O’Bryan said she’s concerned

that businesses won’t be able to safeguard against intoxicated patrons driving home.

The measure does not allow participating businesses to sell pot, so they won’t have any control over what people are consuming. People would have to bring it in a form that does not require smoking, such as edibles.

“If you are neither serving nor counting the potency of the product, nor counting how much they consume, how are you protecting the public when they leave your property?” O’Bryan asked.

A bill to allow pot clubs statewide is pending at the state Legislature. The pot-club bill has bipartisan support but uncertain prospects, especially as Colorado and other legal pot states await word on whether Donald Trump’s administration will tolerate pot businesses in states flouting federal drug law.

Congress poised to undo key regulations

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — When Vice President-elect Mike Pence addressed House Republicans in a closed-door meeting earlier this month, he let them know just how quickly his running-mate plans to get to work.

The Jan. 20 parade from the Capitol to the White House would be sped up, Pence said, so a newly inaugurated President Donald J. Trump could sit down sooner in the Oval Office and start rescinding his predecessor’s executive actions. The lawmakers cheered, two people in the room said.

When it comes to unraveling President Barack Obama’s legacy, Trump could not have found a more enthusiastic partner than the GOP Congress.

After just two weeks of work, the House has already passed several sweeping bills that, if enacted, would roll back scores of Obama administration regulations and make it significantly harder for future presidents — including Trump — to write similar rules.

Among the regulations on the Republican chopping block are new Interior Department rules aimed at protecting waterways near coal mines and preventing the release of methane, a potent greenhouse gas, from oil and gas wells, as well as a Labor Department rule that expands overtime eligibility.

The effort could be slowed by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., who has expressed general enthusiasm for regulatory reform measures — but he has yet to commit scarce Senate floor time with health care and tax reform looming.

The Freedom Caucus has drawn up its own list of more than 200 executive orders or regulations, most but not all issued by Obama, it is eager to see Congress or Trump undo. They include school-lunch nutrition guidelines, renewable fuel standards, and anti-tobacco programs

Interior pick opposes sale of public land

Los Angeles Times

Rep. Ryan Zinke, the Montana Republican nominated by President-elect Donald Trump to be the next interior secretary, said Tuesday that his “No. 1 job is to restore trust” between Americans and the federal agencies that manage land and water across the West.

Referring to what he called the “top-down” policymaking methods of the Obama administration, Zinke in his confirmation hearing before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee said states should have more say in policies that affect land and water within their boundaries.

He also said he was willing to revisit decisions by the Obama administration, including recent moves to halt coal leasing, ban oil and gas drilling in most

of the Arctic and set aside parts of the West as national monuments under the Antiquities Act.

But Zinke also said that he “absolutely” opposed the sale or transfer of public land, and he rejected the idea, which Trump has asserted, that climate change is a hoax. He was less than emphatic in embracing the broad scientific consensus that human activity is the dominant cause of climate change.

Climate change has been a central issue at the Interior Department under President Barack Obama, which has sought to limit fossil fuel production on public land, manage forests to be more resilient, urge water conservation and protect vulnerable species.

The department helps oversee the government’s vast holdings of land, most of it in the

West, and includes the National Park Service, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and agencies that regulate mining, logging, oil and gas development, hydroelectric power and water management in the often drought-stricken region.

Conservation groups have largely condemned Zinke’s nomination, pointing to his support for fossil fuel development, his efforts to limit the use of the Endangered Species Act and his sometimes contradictory statements on climate change.

Zinke received hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from the oil and gas industry. He has also faced questions about his use of government money for personal travel when he was a Navy SEAL, which prompted discipline that slowed his advancement in the Navy.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Anniversary honored with uniquely named ale

NJ CAPE MAY — The co-owners of New Jersey's Cape May Brewing Co. are honoring the 175th anniversary of their alma mater with a uniquely named commemorative brew.

KYW-TV reported that the Jersey Shore-based micro-brewery is releasing its "Demisemiseptcentennial Ale" on Jan. 25 to celebrate the founding of Villanova University.

Co-owners Ryan Krill and Chris Henke first met as freshmen at the suburban Philadelphia school in 2001.

The beer is a classic pale ale brewed with a sampling of German Pilsner malt, the brewery's house ale yeast strain and a hefty dose of hops. It's been described as an easy-drinking draft that's perfect for cheering on the Wildcats this basketball season.

Dismembered deer carcasses a mystery

OH NEW FRANKLIN — Police in northeast Ohio have no leads in solving a "Friday the 13th" mystery involving the dumping of several dismembered deer carcasses that were found alongside the road.

The Akron Beacon Journal reported that the mutilated and disemboweled remains of at least three deer were discovered on the side of a road in New Franklin on Friday morning.

Police said the does were found wrapped in duct tape, and they didn't appear to be killed for meat. Investigators believe someone harvested organs from the animals before they were left on the side of the road. Lt. Ed Klein said the case doesn't look normal.

Freed sea lion happily hops on rescue boat

CA NEWPORT BEACH — Officials said a juvenile sea lion was so happy to be rescued after getting hooked by fishing gear off Southern California that it jumped into a Coast Guard boat.

The Coast Guard said a Los Angeles-area crew on patrol pulled the sea lion free Saturday near Newport Harbor.

Officials said after a little persuasion, the sea lion hopped aboard the boat and posed for photos.

The animal was handed off to a crew from the Pacific Marine Mammal Center, which brought the sea lion to its rescue facility. It will be rehabilitated and released.

Teen accused of holding up Facebook shoe seller

FL JACKSONVILLE — A Jacksonville teenager is accused of holding a Facebook shoe seller at gunpoint and taking off with a brand-new pair of Air Jordans.

WJXT-TV reported that Javaris Platts, 19, was arrested last week on charges of armed robbery and aggravated assault.

A report from the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office says the victim had posted an ad on a Facebook page where people buy and sell shoes and agreed to sell the sneakers to Platts at Billy Cobb Senior Park last month.

The report says the suspect held the seller at gunpoint and took the shoes when the two met at the park on Dec. 10.

Platts' mother, Bridgette Washington, maintains her son's innocence. Washington says Platts purchased the shoes from a store the same day as the armed robbery.

Crew hurt when laser beam pointed at helo

MD SYKESVILLE — Maryland State Police have charged a Sykesville man after a pilot and trooper were injured when a laser beam was pointed at their helicopter.

Media outlets reported that the helicopter was flying in Westminster at about 1 a.m. Monday. Troopers said the cockpit of the aircraft was struck by a green laser beam about eight times.

Authorities said the helicopter crew discovered that the source of the laser beam was a home in Sykesville, where the laser pointer was found.

Connor Brown, 30, is charged with shining a laser pointer at an aircraft and other offenses.

Police said the pilot and the crew chief, both with the State Police Aviation Command, sustained eye injuries. They were treated and released at Frederick Memorial Hospital.

Residents warned of phone scam for ransom

WI GREEN BAY — Green Bay police said local residents are being targeted by phone scammers who claim they're holding a loved one for ransom.

Police said they've been contacted by at least four residents in recent days who say they've been called by scammers trying to get money.

In one case, police said the caller told the person who answered the phone that they were holding his or her daughter and needed money if they wanted to see her again.

Authorities said the calls were traced to the same international phone number, which appears to be from Mexico.

None of those who were contacted complied with the requests.

Man faints, is struck by hit-and-run driver

NY NEW YORK — Police in New York City said a hairstylist was severely injured by a hit-and-run driver in Manhattan after he fainted on his cigarette break and fell into oncoming traffic.

Luis Melendez, 51, was struck by a black Ford Econoline conversion van at about 11:30 a.m. Monday after he fell onto the street in front of the West 35th Street salon where he works.

Witnesses said Melendez was having a cigarette with a customer when he became dizzy and passed out. The barber was rushed to Bellevue Hospital in critical condition.

4 men arrested after 3 roosters rescued

MA STURBRIDGE — Four Lawrence men have been arrested and three roosters have been rescued after state police say a trooper heard noises from inside a car he stopped in Sturbridge.

The trooper stopped the car early Sunday on Interstate 84. Police said the trooper saw four occupants shoving something underneath the seats and noticed bags moving.

Two roosters were found in laundry bags. One was in a trash bag. State police said they had no feathers below the neck and chest area and had gouges on their breasts, legs and heads.

Authorities said the roosters had been used in a cockfight in New Jersey.

Police said they found medical tape, nail files and styptic powder, used to stop bleeding.

The suspects face charges including animal cruelty and promoting animal fighting.

From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES

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Murray, Federer on to Aussie 3rd round

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — An hour after his win, Andy Murray still hadn't been able to get any video to see how he twisted his ankle and tumbled to the ground.

There's a good chance the most-viewed clip by that stage at the Australian Open was of the between-the-legs shot by enigmatic local hope Nick Kyrgios late Wednesday in his surprising loss to Andreas Seppi in the second round.

The third day of the season-opening Grand Slam had gone generally to script until the evening.

Roger Federer's progress was straight-forward, beating 20-year-old qualifier Noah Rubin 7-5, 6-3, 7-6 (3) to maintain his record of never failing to reach the third round at the 18 Australian Opens he's contested.

After back-to-back wins over qualifiers, the 17-time Grand Slam champion's comeback from a six-month injury lay-

off will increase in the degree of difficulty. Next up, Federer faces 2010 Wimbledon finalist Tomas Berdych, who had a 6-3, 7-6 (6), 6-2 win over Ryan Harrison.

Also looming, potentially, is No. 5 Kei Nishikori, the 2014 U.S. Open finalist.

They're all in the top-heavy quarter of the draw with the top-ranked Murray, who for a few moments at least was wondering if he'd make it to the third round.

Murray's shoe caught on the surface and he tumbled to the court at Rod Laver Arena, clutching his right ankle and cringing in pain during the third game of the third set against No. 156-ranked Andrey Rublev.

The five-time Australian Open runner-up continued and won that game, but told himself, loudly, "It's not good news." He saw a trainer during the next change of ends, but decided he didn't need any extra treatment on his already heavily braced joint.

He limped and stretched for a while, but went on to win 6-3, 6-0, 6-2.

"I was moving OK toward the end," he said, "so that's positive."

Murray next faces No. 31 Sam Querrey, who had a 7-6 (5), 6-0, 6-1 win over 17-year-old wild-card entry Alex De Minaur.

U.S. Open champion Stan Wawrinka, who won his first major title in Melbourne in 2014, advanced 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 over Steve Johnson and will next play No. 29 Viktor Troicki in the lower quarter of the draw's top half.

That part of the draw is now missing No. 7 Marin Cilic and the 14th-seeded Kyrgios, who were beaten in night matches.

Cilic, the 2014 U.S. Open champion, lost in four sets to Daniel Evans. Seppi, ranked 89th, rallied from two sets down and saved a match point to beat Kyrgios 1-6, 6-7 (1), 6-4, 6-2, 10-8 in a seesawing match that featured that oddly-time 'tweener.

Seppi was serving for the match when Kyrgios, already one of the most analyzed athletes in Australia, changed the pace of a rally with the high-risk shot that will spark further debate about his attitude toward the game.

He won the point, and that game, but 32-year-old Seppi kept his cool and won the match, closing with an ace.

No. 19 John Isner, the highest-seeded American in the men's draw, lost to Mischa Zverev 6-7 (4), 6-7 (4), 6-4, 7-6 (7), 9-7. But wins by No. 23 Jack Sock and Querrey ended the day on a more positive note for the Americans.

Defending champion Angelique Kerber celebrated her 29th birthday with a 6-2, 6-7 (3), 6-2 second-round win over Carina Witthoef.

Also, French Open champion Garbine Muguruza beat Samantha Crawford 7-5, 6-4 in a night match, while Venus Williams had a 6-3, 6-2 win over Stefanie Voegele and later withdrew from the doubles.

Patriots facing different Steelers team with Big Ben

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — The New England Patriots got a break by not having to face Ben Roethlisberger during their regular-season win over the Steelers in October.

The Patriots' coaching staff is expecting to get his best this time around with a trip to the Super Bowl at stake.

The 27-16 home loss to New England was the only game the Steelers' 34-year-old quarterback missed due to injury this season.

He was away less than a month after undergoing surgery to repair the meniscus in his left knee Oct. 17. He was also among several Pittsburgh players that sat out the regular-season finale against the Browns to rest.

Backup quarterback Landry Jones was serviceable in just

his third career start in Roethlisberger's absence.

The Steelers outgained the Patriots 375-362, but were 1-for-4 in the red zone and Jones finished with only one touchdown and an interception.

Pittsburgh is expecting — and will need — a stronger performance from the quarterback position this time around.

Patriots coach Bill Belichick said Monday that Big Ben's return only makes the Steelers' primary offensive options — running back Le'Veon Bell and receiver Antonio Brown — that much harder to contend with. Bell rushed for 81 yards in the first meeting and Brown had seven catches for 106 yards.

"They're a tremendous offense. Kansas City was able to make some plays in the red area, but I mean [the Steelers] could've easily been up in the 40s," Belichick said.

"They do a lot of things well; can run it, can throw it. Brown's the main guy, but all of the receivers, tight ends, backs, I mean they're all a problem."

The Chiefs may have planted the seed for how to keep Roethlisberger out of the end zone, however.

The Steelers were held without a touchdown in Sunday's 18-16 divisional-round win over Kansas City. They also ranked 12th in the NFL during the regular season in red-zone efficiency, scoring a touchdown on 59 percent of the trips inside the 20-yard line. They were 0-for-5 in their trips against Kansas City.

Roethlisberger had 13 touchdowns and only three interceptions in the red zone in 14 regular-season games.

But so far in the playoffs, Big Ben has just two total passing touchdowns and three

interceptions.

Still, the Steelers coaching staff's trust in him to throw the deep ball is something that will be a point of emphasis this week, Patriots defensive coordinator Matt Patricia said.

In particular, he said Roethlisberger's calm in the pocket and his offensive line's ability to protect him helps him buy time to improvise.

"If those plays can get extended or prolonged, that's when it becomes really difficult," Patricia said. "I think Roethlisberger right now (is) very mobile, very healthy, a guy that showed even again (Sunday night) that just a slight bit of movement or a slight bit of ability to maybe evade the rush, or stand in there just a little bit longer gives his guys enough time to get open in those situations."

Oregon suspends conditioning coach

Associated Press

The University of Oregon suspended football strength and conditioning coach Irele Oderinde one month without pay after three players were hospitalized following a series of intense workouts last week.

The school announced the decision in a statement Tuesday evening and detailed a review of the incident. It added that all future workouts have been modified and the strength and conditioning coach will now report to director of performance and sports science Andrew Murray instead of coach Willie Taggart, who apologized in the statement.

Oregon's statement detailed that players began an off-season conditioning program last Tuesday after six weeks away from "football-related activities" and Oderinde led those workouts.

Three days into the sessions one player complained of "muscle-soreness and displayed other symptoms of potential exercise-related injury." The medical staff took

"appropriate action" and two other players later complained of the same symptoms.

"I have visited with the three young men involved in the incidents in the past few days and I have been in constant contact with their families, offering my sincere apologies," Taggart said in the statement. "As the head football coach, I hold myself responsible for all of our football-related activities and the safety of our students must come first. I have addressed the issue with our strength and conditioning staff, and I fully support the actions taken today by the university.

"I want to thank our medical staff and doctors for caring for all of our young men, and I want to apologize to the university, our students, alumni and fans."

A hospital spokeswoman confirmed that one of the players, Doug Brenner, was released on Tuesday and the other two were in good condition as of the evening.

"The university holds the health, safety and well-being of all of our students in high regard," director of athletics Rob Mullens

said in the statement. "We are confident that these athletes will soon return to full health, and we will continue to support them and their families in their recoveries."

The Oregonian was the first to report that the players were hospitalized after being taken there late last week. The newspaper reported that the mother of one of the players said her son has been diagnosed with rhabdomyolysis, a condition that occurs when muscle tissue breaks down and leaks into the blood stream. The condition can cause kidney damage.

The University of Iowa said Friday it will pay \$15,000 to settle a lawsuit brought by a football player who was diagnosed with exertional rhabdomyolysis. William Lowe was one of 13 Hawkeyes hospitalized following a high-intensity 2011 workout.

Lowe's lawsuit alleged that coaches and trainers failed to properly supervise the January 2011 workout and didn't immediately offer medical care after he and others reported severe pain and symptoms.

Kentucky thwarts Mississippi State's rally

Associated Press

STARKVILLE, Miss. — Malik Monk, Kentucky's leading scorer, was struggling and so was star guard Isaiah Briscoe. So when the Wildcats needed some clutch baskets late, coach John Calipari turned to freshman point guard De'Aaron Fox and gave him some simple instructions.

"We just said, 'Here you go De'Aaron, go and do your thing,'" Calipari said.

Fox responded with two clutch baskets on drives to the basket in the final minutes to thwart a final Mississippi State rally and lead the fifth-ranked Wildcats over the Bulldogs 88-81 on Tuesday.

Fox finished with 21 points while Monk had 14. Wenyen Gabriel and Derek Willis both scored 13 points and Briscoe added 12.

"A lot of teams have a go-to person, but we don't have that right now," Fox said. "So whoever has the hot hand that game is the one that does it."

Kentucky (16-2, 6-0 South-

eastern Conference) looked like it would cruise to the win after building a 66-49 lead midway through the second half, but Mississippi State responded with 13 straight points to make things interesting down the stretch.

Calipari said he was frustrated with his team's inattention to detail. He was especially irritated when Monk got a technical foul for hanging on the rim after a dunk on an alley-oop pass.

"We go into the AAU mode when we're playing all freshmen and sophomores," Calipari said. "There's a point in the game where they just think 'OK, watch this.'

"You're never going to be that team if that's what your mindset is."

In the end, the Wildcats were too potent offensively. The 6-foot-3 Fox was especially impressive, shooting 8-for-15 from the field and adding five rebounds and five assists.

Kentucky also got plenty of production from its forwards. Willis scored all 13 of his points

in the first half, stepping out to make three three-pointers. Gabriel was 5-for-5 from the field, including 3-for-3 from three-point range.

Mississippi State (12-5, 3-2) was led by freshman Lamar Peters, who scored a career-high 25 points. Quindary Weatherspoon scored 15 points and Mario Kegler added 13 points and eight rebounds.

Mississippi State shot 32-for-59 (54.2 percent) from the field. The Bulldogs were hurt by 19 turnovers.

"You can't knock Kentucky — they're one of the best teams in the country," Peters said. "But when you look at the talent on our team, I feel like we're one of the best teams in the country, too. We can hang with anybody. And it's frustrating because we knew we could have won that game."

No. 6 Baylor 74, Texas 64: Johnathan Motley set career highs with 32 points and 20 rebounds for the host Bears, who went ahead to stay with a big run before halftime.

Nuni Omot, the junior col-

lege transfer playing in only his eighth game, had a season-high 14 points.

No. 17 Wisconsin 68, Michigan 64: Bronson Koenig scored 16 points, 10 in a key run that turned the game around, for the host Badgers.

Michigan (12-7, 2-4 Big Ten) seemed to have Wisconsin (15-3, 4-1) on the ropes at one point in the second half.

Wisconsin's Ethan Happ went to the bench with his third foul early and could largely only watch as the Wolverines went on a 17-2 run that put them up 38-30.

No. 21 Purdue 91, Illinois 68: Center Isaac Haas had 24 points and six rebounds, and power forward Caleb Swanigan added 22 points and 10 rebounds for the host Boilermakers.

Haas scored 13 points in the second half when Purdue (15-4, 4-2 Big Ten) led by as many as 27. Swanigan had a four-point first half but was almost unstoppable during the second half, accounting for 18 points and five rebounds.

Mavericks top Bulls, win third straight

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Wesley Matthews was mad at himself after Jimmy Butler's clutch shot in the final minute. He exacted his revenge on the other side of the court.

Matthews made a go-ahead three-pointer from the wing with 12 seconds left, and the Dallas Mavericks beat the Chicago Bulls 99-98 on Tuesday night for their first three-game winning streak of the season.

"We've been struggling, it's been tough for 2½ months, but guys kept hanging in and believing in each other," coach Rick Carlisle said. "Games like this give us even more confidence."

Six players scored in double figures for the Mavericks (14-27), including all five starters. Harrison Barnes had 20 points,

Seth Curry added 18 and Dirk Nowitzki finished with 10 points and 10 rebounds.

Dallas trailed 98-96 after Butler's long jumper over Matthews in a matchup of Marquette products with 23 seconds left, but Carlisle decided against a timeout and Deron Williams drove into the lane before kicking out to Matthews for the three.

"Jimmy came down and made a great play. He went over the top of me and shot," Matthews said. "And I can't really take much credit for the other end of the court. D-Will came down in transition. I think everyone was expecting a timeout, which was a good play by Coach to not do that."

"D-Will made a great play, he found me, and I just had to knock it down."

Matthews then prevented Butler from getting a shot off in the final seconds, and Dwyane Wade missed a potential game-winning jumper from the corner on his 35th birthday.

"They did a good job of pressuring on us, making us make tough shots," Wade said.

Heat 109, Rockets 103: Goran Dragic had 21 points and eight assists while Wayne Ellington scored 18 off the bench as host Miami overcame another triple-double from James Harden to beat Houston.

Harden had 40 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists for the Rockets (32-12), his 13th triple-double of the season.

Raptors 119, Nets 109: DeMar DeRozan had 36 points and 11 rebounds while Cory Joseph scored a career-high 33 as visiting Toronto beat free-fall-

ing Brooklyn.

Spurs 122, Timberwolves 114: Kawhi Leonard had 34 points as host San Antonio overcame a strong start by Minnesota. Leonard's fourth straight 30-point game helped him become the first San Antonio player to score 950 points in the first half of a season since Tim Duncan in 2003.

Nuggets 127, Lakers 121: Nikola Jokic had 29 points and 15 rebounds as Denver withstood a furious late rally the hosts.

Denver led by 19 late in the third quarter only to see the Lakers close to 120-119 with under two minutes to play. Wilson Chandler responded with a dunk for the Nuggets and scored five points in the final 1:40, sending Los Angeles to its fifth consecutive defeat.

Blue Jackets pull even with Capitals atop Metropolitan

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Brandon Dubinsky hadn't scored a goal since Dec. 9 at Detroit, a 17-game stretch during which he had chances but couldn't find the back of the net. The drought ended Tuesday night, maybe helping Columbus end a team-wide lull in the process.

Dubinsky scored in the second and third periods, Boone Jenner had a goal and an assist and the Blue Jackets beat the Carolina Hurricanes 4-1.

The Blue Jackets got their third win in seven games since ending a 16-game winning streak and pulled even with Washington atop the unforgiving Metropolitan Division.

"We wanted to reset for sure," Dubinsky said. "We haven't played that well, obviously, in the last six or so games. We wanted to get back to the way we play."

All-Star Sergei Bobrovsky returned after missing the past three games because of illness and made 24 saves for Columbus.

Stars 7, Rangers 6: Pat-

rick Sharp scored twice, Jamie Benn and Patrick Eaves had a goal and two assists each and visiting Dallas held on for a wild victory over New York.

Cody Eakin had a goal and an assist, Antoine Roussel and Adam Cracknell also scored and the Stars won for the third time in nine games (3-5-1).

Ducks 2, Lightning 1 (OT): Rickard Rakell scored a power-play goal off a faceoff 54 seconds into overtime, and surging Anaheim beat visiting Tampa Bay for its seventh win in nine games.

Rakell ripped a vicious shot past Ben Bishop for the 19th goal of his standout season for the first-place Ducks, who earned a point for the 12th time in 13 games.

Devils 4, Wild 3: Beau Bennett scored with 2:17 remaining to lift visiting New Jersey.

Pavel Zacha, Adam Henrique and Kyle Palmieri scored for New Jersey, which went 3-0-1 on its four-game road trip.

Jared Spurgeon, Jason Zucker and Erik Haula scored for Minnesota.

Blackhawks 6, Avalanche 4: Vinnie Hinostroza scored twice in the third period, including the go-ahead goal with 11:49 remaining, and visiting Chicago rallied for a win over Colorado.

Tanner Kero had two goals and Nick Schmaltz and Brent Seabrook also scored for Chicago, which snapped a two-game skid.

Matt Duchene had two goals and Blake Comeau and Matt Nieto also scored for the last-place Avalanche.

Canucks 1, Predators 0: Henrik Sedin scored in the third period for his 999th NHL point, Ryan Miller made 30 saves and host Vancouver beat Nashville.

With the teams playing a tight, close-checking game, Sedin fired the rebound of Luca Sbisa's shot off goalie Pekka Rinne and in with 7:32 left for his 10th goal of the season and first in nine games.

The shutout was the second of the season for Miller and the 38th of his career. Vancouver snapped a four-game losing streak that included three straight defeats where the Ca-

nucks earned a point (0-1-3).

Maple Leafs 4, Sabres 3: Auston Matthews, Leo Komarov and Matt Martin each scored in a nine-minute span in the second period and host Toronto rallied to beat Buffalo for its 10th win in 13 games.

Toronto came back after trailing 2-0 through 20 minutes, getting its first victory this season when behind after one period (1-8-1).

Flames 5, Panthers 2: Mikael Backlund scored twice in a 13-second span in the second period to break a 2-all tie and host Calgary beat Florida.

Vincent Trocheck had both goals for Florida to continue his red-hot scoring. He has nine points (five goals, four assists) during a five-game point streak.

Senators 6, Blues 4: Mike Hoffman and Mark Stone each scored twice to lead visiting Ottawa over St. Louis.

Jean-Gabriel Pageau and Bobby Ryan also scored for the Senators, who won their fourth straight at Scottrade Center for the first time in team history.