

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Okinawa sees 2nd US helo in emergency stop in 3 days

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — No injuries or damage were reported Monday after a Marine Corps helicopter — the second in three days — was brought down on Okinawa because of an emergency.

An AH-1Z Viper assigned to Marine Corps Air Station Futenma made an emergency landing about 4:45 p.m. inside a fenced-off, grassy area at a private waste disposal site in Yomitan village, an Okinawa police spokesman said. It was put down on the northern side of Hotel Nikko Alivila by its two crewmembers after a warning light came on. No smoke or flames were reported. Marine officials could not be reached for comment Monday evening.

The emergency landing comes on the heels of a similar incident Saturday, when a UH-1Y Venom from the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing made a “preventive landing” just after 4 p.m. on an Ikei Island beach. A warning light indicated excessive speed from its main rotor.

The Viper — dubbed by the Marines the most advanced attack helicopter in the world — has been in the Pacific only a little more than a year. With the benefit of advanced systems that include a fully integrated air-to-air missile capability, Viper pilots can run safety diagnostics while the helicopter is airborne and diagnose issues before they become a problem. A similar incident involving a Viper happened Jan. 20, 2017, when one of the attack helicopters made a precautionary landing on Ikei Island after a warning indication in the cockpit.

Carney cruises into Black Sea as Navy boosts patrols

BY SCOTT WYLAND
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The USS Carney cruised into the Black Sea on Friday, the third U.S. destroyer since August to patrol the tense region.

In the past, U.S. warships sailed into the Black Sea only sporadically and mostly for allied exercises. But the Arleigh Burke-class destroyers USS Porter and USS James E. Williams patrolled those waters in August and late November, respectively.

Russia views the increased U.S. presence in the Black Sea as part of Washington’s more aggressive posturing since Moscow annexed the Crimean

Peninsula in 2014.

Navy officials say the ships are being sent there to bolster allied defenses and to protect waters of economic and military importance.

“U.S. ships will continue to enter the Black Sea and work with our allies and partners to ensure maritime security and stability,” Capt. Tate Westbrook, who oversees ships in the 6th Fleet theater, said recently.

Washington rankled Moscow with its recent decision to supply lethal weapons, including anti-tank missiles, to Ukraine in its fight against Russia-backed separatist rebels. These will include the Raytheon Javelin anti-tank missiles that Ukraine wants to bolster its anti-tank

capabilities. Previously, Washington has provided Ukraine only with support equipment and training.

Some analysts say it’s imperative that the U.S. steps up its aerial and maritime patrols because Russia, too, is deploying more naval forces in the Black Sea.

“If Moscow mounts a challenge to our presence and our alliances in the region on a day-in, day-out basis and Washington replies to that challenge only erratically and occasionally, who comes out ahead in that dialogue?” said James Holmes, strategy professor at the Naval War College. “Moscow, in all likelihood.”

South Korean man captured after breaching gate at Camp Humphreys

BY KIM GAMEL
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — A South Korean man breached a gate at Camp Humphreys over the weekend but was captured and was turned over to national police, a spokesman said.

The suspect drove through the gate at the sprawling Army garrison south of Seoul on Saturday and reportedly was pursued by U.S. military police in a car chase before he was apprehended.

Garrison spokesman Bob McElroy confirmed a man got through a barrier at the gate before he was caught by the

MPs and was turned over to South Korean police.

McElroy said there were reports that the man had been seen outside the gate a couple of times before breaking through but declined to provide more details because the incident is still under investigation.

“He was apprehended without incident,” McElroy said. No injuries were reported.

McElroy said he didn’t immediately have information about damage, but a post on Humphreys’ Facebook page said the main gate was closed for emergency maintenance.

A newly expanded Camp Humphreys, about 40 miles

south of Seoul, is home to the Eighth Army headquarters and eventually will house the bulk of U.S. Forces Korea after a much-delayed project to relocate them from Seoul and other bases near the border with North Korea.

The U.S. has about 28,500 servicemembers along with family members and civilian contractors based in South Korea, which remains technically at war with the North after the 1950-53 conflict ended in an armistice instead of a peace treaty.

Stars and Stripes reporter Marcus Fichtl contributed to this report.

South Korea hopes Olympics talks ease tensions with North

BY KIM GAMEL
AND YOO KYONG CHANG
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea will try to use talks with North Korea about its possible Olympic participation to jump-start a broader process of engagement between the long-time adversaries, officials said Monday.

The statements reflect hopes that the dialogue to be held Tuesday in the truce village of Panmunjom will give momentum to efforts to peacefully resolve the crisis over the North's banned nuclear weapons program.

President Donald Trump also said he "would love" to see the two sides discuss more than just the Olympics, adding that he would be willing to speak by phone with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

The Republican president has previously dismissed talks with Pyongyang as a waste of time but appeared to soften his fiery rhetoric ahead of the first round of talks between the two Koreas in more than two years.

Seoul and Washington have agreed to postpone joint war games until after the Feb. 9-25 Olympics in a nod to the North, which considers the military exercises to be a rehearsal for an invasion.

No new date has been set for the drills, but Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said they would resume after the Paralympics conclude on March 18 in the South Korean resort city of Pyeongchang.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in has pressed for Pyongyang to participate in the Winter Games as part of his administration's efforts to pursue

peace and ease security fears surrounding the competitions.

Unification Minister Cho Myoung-gyon, who will lead a five-member government delegation to the talks on Tuesday, said South Korea also will seek to discuss ways to ease military tensions and reunite families that were left divided after the 1950-53 Korean War, which ended in an armistice instead of a peace treaty.

"The two sides will focus on the Olympics. When discussing inter-Korean relations, the government will seek to raise the issue of war-torn families and ways to ease military tensions," Cho was quoted by the Yonhap News Agency as saying. "After this week's high-level talks, there will be the need to continue discussions at the working level."

North Korea's chief negotiator will be Ri Son Gwon, chairman of the state agency in charge of inter-Korean affairs.

The talks were scheduled after North Korea's leader said in his New Year's Day address that his country may participate in the games. At the same time, Kim warned the United States that a nuclear button sits on his desk at all times.

That prompted Trump to boast that his nuclear button is "much bigger and more powerful," the latest salvo in a war of words between the two leaders.

U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley defended Trump's comments about North Korea after critics complained he was trivializing the possibility of nuclear war.

"I think he always has to keep Kim on his toes," she said during an interview on ABC's "This Week."

Military women rally outside Pentagon in #MeToo protest

BY DIANNA CAHN
Stars and Stripes

ARLINGTON, Va. — The moment was the most traumatic in her life. The last thing Nichole Bowen-Crawford wanted to do was fly across the country to stand in the bitter cold outside the nerve center of the nation's defense system and tell everyone who would listen about being assaulted by a fellow soldier and then silenced by her superiors.

But she believed she had to speak up and encourage others like her to break their silence.

On Monday — the morning after millions of viewers watched women in Hollywood declare at the Golden Globe awards that the time for sexual assault and harassment was up — she summoned the courage to fight through post-traumatic stress and step back into the limelight. She joined a small cadre of military survivors who demanded accountability from Pentagon leadership that has failed to end sexual assault in the Armed Forces.

Her hope, she said, is that the #MeToo movement that has penetrated Hollywood and the halls of Congress will take hold within the tight ranks of the male-dominated U.S. military, where a culture of sexual assault, harassment and retaliation for those who come forward remains pervasive.

"The truth is, I am really scared to be here, really scared to tell my story," she told a small crowd gathered at the Pentagon gates. "But standing up for the men and women who serve our country who can't report sexual assault in a safe way is more important than my feelings," she said. "It's time there is a safe way to report sexual assault in the military so that men and women have the freedom to say, 'Me too,' instead of (maintaining) silence."

Bearing signs like "Denial is not a policy" and "Veterans

demand reform," Monday's protesters demanded that the Pentagon take increased action to stop sexual assault by changing what several called a misogynistic military culture and taking military sexual assault cases out of the hands of commanders — a proposal that military leadership has blocked saying it undermines command authority.

Inside the Pentagon, Army Col. Rob Manning said there was "zero tolerance" for sexual assault or harassment in the military. "Events like this morning's underscore the importance of the department's continued efforts to eliminate sexual harassment and assault in the military," he said.

"Time's up! Time's up!" shouted Monica Medina, an attorney and adviser to former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, who helped draft protections for women in the military who were assaulted, including ensuring that victims have a lawyer and removing certain cases from the chain of command.

"Sexual assault is finally recognized as the morale-killing scourge that it is," she said. "This is the moment. #MeToo is the movement. And the military needs to use this movement and moment to encourage victims of sexual harassment to come forward."

Medina served in the Army straight out of law school, being posted to the Army general counsel's program at the Pentagon. There, she encountered a powerful senior officer and had to face career retaliation after rebuffing his advances.

It was then that she joined what she called "the #MeToo club." It was not a club she wanted, she said, or "even one I admitted to until a couple of months ago."

On Monday, she told her story publicly for the first time, calling for change. "I don't think we can change it unless more women speak up," she said.

Burst pipe at NY airport tied to weather

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A water pipe break in one of the terminals at New York's John F. Kennedy Airport on Sunday added to the delays at the beleaguered airport trying to recover from the aftermath of a snowstorm that has stranded thousands of passengers.

In a statement, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey said a water pipe that feeds a sprinkler system in the privately operated Terminal 4 broke about 2 p.m., causing water to flood the terminal and significantly disrupting operations.

"What happened at JFK Air-

port is unacceptable, and travelers expect and deserve better," said Port Authority Executive Director Rick Cotton. "While the water pipe break that occurred appears to be weather-related, we have launched an investigation into the incident to determine exactly what occurred and why an internal pipe was not weather-protected and whether any other failures contributed to this disruption."

The pipe break sent about 3 inches of water gushing onto the floor of the terminal. Video shows streams cascading from a ceiling and people slogging through pools of water.

Power to the affected areas was temporarily shut off for

safety reasons and additional staffing and busing operations were deployed to assist travelers, the Port Authority said.

Domestic arrivals and departures and international departures from Terminal 4 were experiencing delays Sunday. Some international flights destined for Terminal 4 were being diverted or accommodated at other JFK terminals, the Port Authority said.

Following the storm, which blasted New York on Thursday, passengers were kept on planes and waited hours to retrieve luggage as flights were delayed and canceled and a backup to get to terminal gates built up.

Carlos Koester, 52, was in

New York for a week with his wife and two teens and wanted to get home to Brazil.

"We love New York, but now we are stuck here," Koester told the Daily News on Sunday. "It's frustrating. The storm caught us and now we have been stranded here for 13 hours."

In a statement released before the water pipe break, the Port Authority said Saturday's cold "created a cascading series of issues for the airlines and terminal operators."

"These included frozen equipment breakdowns, difficulties in baggage handling, staff shortages and heavier than typical passenger loads," the statement said.

Trump allies rally in his defense

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Administration officials and allies are rallying to the president's defense, trying to contain the fallout from an explosive new book that questions President Donald Trump's fitness for office.

Chief policy adviser Stephen Miller, in a combative appearance Sunday on CNN, described the book as "nothing but a pile of trash through and through."

CIA Director Mike Pompeo said Trump was "completely fit" to lead the country.

"These are from people who just have not accepted the fact that President Trump is the United States president, and I'm sorry for them in that," Pompeo, who gives Trump his regular intelligence briefings, said on "Fox News Sunday."

Nikki Haley, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, said she visits the White House once a week and "no one questions the stability of the president."

"I'm always amazed at the lengths people will go to, to lie for money and for power. This is like taking it to a whole new low," she told ABC's "This Week."

Michael Wolff's "Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House" portrays the 45th presi-

dent as a leader who doesn't understand the weight of his office and whose competence is questioned by aides.

That picture, said Miller, "is so contrary to reality, to the experience of those who work with him."

Miller also criticized Trump's former chief strategist, Steve Bannon, who is quoted at length by Wolff, saying it was "tragic and unfortunate" that Bannon "would make these grotesque comments so out of touch with reality and obviously so vindictive."

Bannon's description of a June 2016 meeting at Trump Tower in New York between Donald Trump Jr., Trump campaign aides and a Russian lawyer as "treasonous" and "unpatriotic" particularly infuriated Trump, who released a seething statement accusing Bannon of having "lost his mind."

Trying to heal the damage and make amends, Bannon released a statement Sunday praising Trump Jr. as "both a patriot and a good man" and insisting his description was aimed at former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort, not Trump's son.

"I regret that my delay in responding to the inaccurate

reporting regarding Don Jr. has diverted attention from the president's historical accomplishments in the first year of his presidency," Bannon said in the statement, which was first obtained by the news site Axios.

Miller's interview on CNN's "State of the Union" quickly grew heated, with Miller criticizing CNN's coverage and moderator Jake Tapper accusing Miller of speaking to an audience of one: his boss.

Tapper abruptly ended the interview, saying, "I think I've wasted enough of my viewers' time."

Soon after, Trump tweeted: "Jake Tapper of Fake News CNN just got destroyed in his interview with Stephen Miller of the Trump Administration. Watch the hatred and unfairness of this CNN flunky!"

Trump took the extraordinary step Saturday of using Twitter to defend his fitness for office, insisting he is "like, really smart" and, indeed, a "very stable genius."

He pressed the case again on Sunday as he prepared to depart Camp David, where he spent the weekend meeting with Republican congressional leaders, top aides and Cabinet members.

Trump Tower fire contained

The Washington Post

Authorities in New York said Monday that emergency crews had responded to a fire at Trump Tower in Manhattan.

A New York Police Department spokesman said a call came in about 7:30 a.m. about a one-alarm fire on the roof of the 68-floor luxury building on 5th Avenue.

There were no evacuations, the spokesman said, and the flames reportedly are under control.

The fire department is on the scene, according to authorities.

Fire officials could not immediately be reached for comment, but FDNY tweeted an alert at 8:16 a.m., saying the blaze inside an HVAC system is "under control."

Police said no injuries had been reported, but a reporter with CW affiliate WPIX said officials confirmed two people had been injured.

President Donald Trump was in Washington on Monday morning, according to his public White House schedule.

The Manhattan high rise that bears his name houses Trump and his family in a penthouse condominium.

Syrian forces take 14 villages during advance on rebels

Associated Press

BEIRUT — Syrian government forces captured 14 villages on Monday as they advance on the largest rebel-held enclave in the country's north amid a wave of airstrikes.

Syrian government forces and their allies have been on the offensive since late October in Hama and Idlib provinces, capturing nearly 100 villages from insurgent groups, including the al-Qaida-linked Levant Liberation Committee. The offensive intensified on Christmas Day after reinforcements were brought in from other parts of Syria.

The main aim of the troops is to reach the rebel-held Abu Zuhour air base and secure the road linking the capital, Damascus, with the northern city of Aleppo, Syria's largest. Rebels captured Abu Zuhour in 2015 after a three-year siege.

The government-controlled

Syrian Central Military Media said the newly captured villages, include Freija, Jahman, Dawoudiyeh and Jub al-Qasab, bring the troops closer to the air base.

The SCMM and the opposition's Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights confirmed that 14 villages have been captured over the past hours.

The offensive in the southern parts of Idlib province comes amid intense airstrikes and shelling that have killed 21 people since Sunday, according to the Observatory.

Clashes also erupted Monday near the Damascus suburb of Harasta after government forces reached troops trapped for more than a week in a military base surrounded by insurgents.

State media said the Syrian army broke through rebel lines Sunday to reach soldiers

trapped at the Murakabat vehicle base near Harasta, in the eastern Ghouta suburbs.

Rebels surrounded the base late last month, trapping an unknown number of soldiers inside. The rebels say they have taken numerous soldiers hostage.

The Observatory says 159 rebels and government soldiers have been killed in fighting over the base since Dec. 29.

In the northwestern city of Idlib, meanwhile, paramedics said the death toll from a massive car bombing the previous evening has risen to at least 25. Nearly 100 people were wounded. The Syrian Civil Defense, known as the White Helmets, said four children and 11 women were among those killed.

The Observatory on Monday gave a higher death toll, saying 34 people were killed, including 18 civilians.

Iran's foreign minister warns neighbors not to stir unrest

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran's foreign minister on Monday warned neighboring countries over fomenting insecurity in Iran in a reference to anti-government protests that have roiled the country over the past two weeks.

The remarks by Mohammad Javad Zarif at a security conference in Tehran echoed the Iranian authorities' stance, which alleges that foreign powers — including regional rival Saudi Arabia — stirred up unrest linked to the protests.

"Some countries tried to misuse the recent incidents," Zarif said without blaming any specific country, and added that "no country can create a secure environment for itself at the expense of creating insecurity among its neighbors."

"Such efforts" will only backfire, the official IRNA news agency quoted Zarif as saying.

The anti-government demonstrations first broke out in Mashhad, Iran's second-largest city, on Dec. 28 and later spread to several other cities and towns. The protests were the largest seen in Iran since the disputed 2009 presidential election.

They were sparked by an increase in food prices amid soaring unemployment, but some demonstrators later called for the government's overthrow and chanted against the country's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

At least 21 people were killed and hundreds arrested. Large pro-government rallies were held in response, and officials have blamed the anti-government unrest on foreign meddling.

Also Monday, Iran's moderate president, Hassan Rouhani, said despite the abuse of the protests by outsiders, the authorities should heed the message of the people.

"People rightfully say: 'See us, listen to our words,'" Rouhani said.

Vietnam begins big corruption trial of 22

Associated Press

HANOI, Vietnam — A Vietnamese court began a major corruption trial on Monday of 22 defendants, including a former senior Vietnamese Communist Party official and a top oil executive the government is accused of snatching from Germany.

Most of the defendants are current or former senior oil executives, including three other former chairmen of state-owned energy giant PetroVietnam. The company and the banking sector have been at the center of an unprecedented crackdown on corruption under the watch of Communist Party General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong.

Former Politburo member Dinh La Thang, 57, also a former PetroVietnam chairman, is accused of "deliberately violating state economic man-

agement regulations, causing serious consequences" for his role in awarding PetroVietnam's Construction Joint Stock Co., or PVC, a contract to build a thermoelectric plant without a proper bidding process.

He also allegedly advanced \$67 million to PVC, which did not use the funds for the proper purpose, causing losses of \$5.5 million to the state.

Thang, the first former Politburo member to be prosecuted in decades, faces up to 20 years in prison if convicted.

Trinh Xuan Thanh, 51, a former PVC chairman, is accused of the same charge as well as embezzling \$186,000 from another thermoelectric plant. The embezzlement offense carries the death penalty.

In August, Germany accused Vietnam's intelligence service of kidnapping Thanh from a

Berlin park. Vietnam denied the allegation, saying Thanh turned himself in to police voluntarily, but the incident strained ties, and Germany expelled two Vietnamese diplomats.

The trial of Thang and Thanh "sends out a stern warning that there will be no 'no-go zones' in this campaign, and corrupt officials, no matter who they are and what position they hold, will be brought to justice," said Le Hong Hiep, a research fellow at the Singapore-based ISEAS — Yusof Ishak Institute.

"The campaign has some aspects of political infighting, but the main driver is still the party's wish to stem widespread corruption, which has undermined the people's confidence in the party's governance capabilities as well as its economic reform efforts," Hiep said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Woman run over by her car as cat attacks

FL COCOA BEACH — A Florida woman is recovering from severe injuries after a cat jumped into her car and attacked her, causing her to be run over by her own vehicle.

The Florida Highway Patrol said the unidentified woman was parked in front of a house near Cocoa on Friday night. As she prepared to drive away, the cat pounced into her car and attacked. Authorities said she jumped out of the car to escape the feline, forgetting the car was in reverse, and was run over.

Florida Today reported the car rolled into the street and struck a parked vehicle. The woman suffered critical injuries.

Accident may lead to man's 5th DUI charge

WI MILWAUKEE — A Wisconsin man with four drunken-driving convictions on his record was arrested on suspicion of a possible fifth offense after crashing his SUV.

WTMJ-TV reported that the incident was reported to Racine County authorities about 12:20 p.m. Friday. A caller said a vehicle was being driven recklessly and veered off the roadway and struck a tree.

The 43-year-old driver ran into the woods before he was arrested. He was treated for minor injuries.

The suspect is facing charges of a fifth offense operating while intoxicated, operating without a license and several other traffic citations.

Ex-teacher accepts penalty for comments

NJ TRENTON — A former New Jersey high

school teacher who posted anti-gay comments on her Facebook page several years ago has agreed to a three-year suspension of her teaching certificates.

NJ.com reported that Jenye "Viki" Knox initially appealed a state Department of Education's decision to revoke her three certificates to the Office of Administrative Law. But she then informed the education department she would agree to the three-year suspension.

The state Board of Examiners accepted the proposal Dec. 8. The panel then immediately suspended the elementary school, nursery school and handicapped teaching certificates Knox has held since February 1990.

Police: Snow thwarts would-be shoplifter

ND MINOT — Authorities say a North Dakota man who wheeled a shopping cart with stolen merchandise out of a Hobby Lobby craft store was stopped by snow.

Police said Dustin Johnson, 22, filled a cart with about \$4,000 in products at a Hobby Lobby store in Minot on Wednesday, but after the cart got stuck in the snow in the parking lot and tipped over, Johnson ran off.

Police said that along with the merchandise, Johnson left behind his wallet — which contained identification with his address. He is charged with theft of property.

Man to pay \$4,750 for killing 2 swans

OR BEND — A Cottage Grove man responsible for killing two trumpeter swans while hunting in central Oregon must pay \$4,750 in restitution.

The Bulletin reported in a story Friday that Michael J. Abbott, 35, received the sentence in Lake County Circuit Court. Abbott also must serve one year of probation and has lost his hunting privileges for three years.

Trumpeter swans are a protected species in Oregon, and Abbott was found guilty of two misdemeanor wildlife violations in September. Authorities said that Abbott shot the swans in October 2016 while hunting at the Summer Lake Wildlife Area.

No kids hurt as school bus window shot out

IA FOREST CITY — Police in north-central Iowa said no children were hurt when a window of their moving school bus was shot out.

The Mason City Globe Gazette reported that the incident happened in Forest City on Friday morning, when the window shattered after being hit by a shot from a pellet gun.

A statement from the Forest City School District said all children were safe and that no injuries resulted from the shooting or the flying glass.

Police said they know who is responsible for the shooting and believe it was isolated.

Official aims to raise marriage age to 18

AK KETCHIKAN — An Alaska lawmaker is seeking to change the state law that allows a person as young as 14 to marry.

The Ketchikan Daily News reports state Sen. Berta Gardner is planning to introduce legislation to raise the legal age of marriage to 18 in Alaska. The Democratic senator's legislation also would allow emancipated minors older than 16 to

marry.

Under current state law, a person between the age of 14 and 18 can marry with permission from a superior court judge.

Man claims attack by bobcat in lawsuit

FL TAMPA — A Florida contractor says he was attacked by a bobcat inside a woman's condo, but the animal's owner says her feline is no predator, just a 10-pound domestic longhair kitty named Calli.

The contractor, Marcos Hernandez, filed a lawsuit in Tampa on Dec. 19, alleging condo owner Christine Lee illegally kept a bobcat inside her unit. Hernandez said a bobcat scratched him on May 16, causing him serious injuries after he entered the condo to conduct a fire safety inspection.

Lee wasn't there at the time. She said she has never owned a bobcat, just Calli and a sleeker, black cat named Max.

\$1M given to project for student veterans

CT NEW HAVEN — A Yale astronomy and physics professor has been awarded a \$1 million prize to expand her work on a project that helps military veterans prepare for college.

Marla Geha will receive the money over the next five years from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute for her work on the science portion of Yale's Warrior-Scholar Project.

The project is a two-week "boot camp" on university campuses, aimed at giving enlisted veterans who have been admitted to college the skills and confidence needed to succeed there.

From wire reports

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Saints hold off Panthers' rally to advance

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Drew Brees and the New Orleans Saints face the prospect of seeing their season end where it began.

That is, unless they've improved enough to turn the tables on the Minnesota Vikings, who beat New Orleans convincingly in Week 1.

"That feels like ages and ages ago," Brees said of the 29-19 loss in Minnesota, describing the difference between the Saints then and now as "night and day."

The Saints (12-5) rebounded from double-digit losses to the Vikings and New England Patriots in their first two games to win the NFC South. Now they're on to the divisional round of the NFC playoffs after holding off Carolina (11-6) 31-26 on Sunday.

New Orleans' next game comes one day before Brees turns 39, and will come one week after the veteran quarterback reminded everyone he's still capable of big passing days

if opposing defenses sell out to stop the Pro Bowl running back tandem of Mark Ingram and Alvin Kamara.

Brees completed 23 passes to eight different receivers for 375 yards and two touchdowns. Only two of his completions went to Ingram or Kamara, who accounted for only 68 yards from scrimmage combined.

"We trust our system. We trust each other and what we proved is we can beat you in a lot of different ways," Brees said. "There's no better feeling than knowing you just won, not only won but won a playoff game as a team and now you're on to the next one."

His touchdown passes of 80 yards to Ted Ginn and 9 yards to tight end Josh Hill helped New Orleans open up a 21-6 lead late in the first half. Michael Thomas caught eight passes for 131 yards, including a 46-yarder that set up Kamara's short TD run in the fourth quarter.

For the Panthers, it was an excruciating end to the season.

Beaten soundly by the Saints twice before this season, they pushed New Orleans to the brink in the third matchup.

Aided by the return of star tight end Greg Olsen, the Panthers drove inside the Saints 22-yard line five times, only to come away with nothing twice and field goals three other times.

"That was the difference in the game," said Olsen, who had eight catches for 107 yards and a touchdown. "We moved the ball pretty much at will the whole game. We just struggled in the first half in the red zone and it turned out to be points that we kept chasing."

Still, the Panthers had a first down on the Saints 21 with 41 seconds left. It wasn't until Newton's intentional grounding in the face of end Cameron Jordan's pass rush, followed by Vonn Bell's sack on a safety blitz on fourth down, that the Saints sealed the victory.

Some other things to know from the Saints' win:

Getting pressure: The Saints sacked Newton four times. Jor-

dan, Bell, linebacker Jonathan Freeny and defensive tackle David Onyemata each had one. Jordan, a newly named All-Pro, also tipped two passes and might have made his biggest play when he ran through two blockers to force Newton's intentional grounding. Their pass rush could be a factor against Minnesota QB Case Keenum, who's been sacked 17 times in Minnesota's last six games.

Certainly, Jordan expects a different game that Week 1, when the Saints had one sack — by Jordan — against then-starter Sam Bradford.

Secondary concerns: While the Saints' defense has been far better this season than last, the secondary has looked more vulnerable lately. Against Carolina, they allowed Newton to pass for 349 yards, his second most all season. New Orleans struggled to cover Olsen and versatile running back Christian McCaffrey, who six catches for 101 yards, including a 56-yard score.

Jaguars' defense shines in win over Bills

Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — All-Pro cornerback Jalen Ramsey wasted little time turning his attention to Jacksonville's next playoff game.

He also knew everyone else wanted to look back at that Week 5 matchup at Pittsburgh.

"I'm sure they're thinking that game was a fluke," Ramsey said.

The Jaguars (11-6) will try to prove it wasn't when they return to the Steel City next week.

Jacksonville's latest defensive gem — a 10-3 victory against Buffalo (9-8) on Sunday — set up a rematch with the Steelers (13-3).

The Jaguars stunned Pittsburgh in the first meeting, a 30-9 win in which Ben Roethlisberger threw five interceptions, was sacked twice and finished with the lowest passer rating of his career.

"The game was a great illustration on if we play the way we're capable of playing, then we can beat anybody like that," Jaguars cornerback Aaron Colvin said.

"We know they're going to be motivated. Ben said it earlier in the week or whenever that he wanted to see us again, so we know we're going to get their best shot. But at the same time, they're to get our best shot, too.

"Whenever somebody gets our best shot, it hasn't turned out too good for people."

The Bills experienced that firsthand in Sunday's AFC wild-card game.

Tyrod Taylor completed 17 of 37 passes for 134 yards, with an interception, against the NFL's best pass defense. LeSean McCoy carried 19 times for 75 yards, but a third of those came on one run. McCoy also had 44 yards receiving.

Jacksonville's offense was even more inept.

Blake Bortles completed 12 of 23 passes for 87 yards, with a touchdown. Bortles was off all day, but made up for it with his legs. He ran for 88 yards, becoming the second starting quarterback in the past 25 years to win a playoff game with more yards rushing than passing. Atlanta's Michael Vick also did it against the St. Louis Rams in the 2004 playoffs.

"That's usually not ideal for a quarterback," Bortles said.

It was enough Sunday, at least with a defense this stingy.

"I think we should hold every team to zero because that's just the kind of defense we are," Colvin said. "Teams are going to move the ball and make plays, but at the end of the day, we're the most dominant defense in the league. We've got to hold teams to zero."

Leonard Fournette ran 21 times for 57 yards against a defense that had been giving up nearly 125 a game. It didn't help that Bortles misfired early and often.

He put together one decent drive, making as many plays with his feet as his arm, and capped it with a 1-yard scoring pass to backup tight end Ben Koyack on a gutsy, fourth-and-goal call.

"Kind of reference it to a pitcher," Bortles said. "You go out and something is not right, you don't have a fastball, you don't have a curveball. You have to find another pitch to be able to land and be successful and get guys out. That's kind of the same thing playing quarterback."

NBA roundup

Bender, Jackson help Suns top Thunder

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Dragan Bender scored 17 of his career-high 20 points in the second half, rookie Josh Jackson had 17 points and 10 rebounds for his first career double-double, and the Phoenix reserves helped the Suns beat the Oklahoma City Thunder 114-100 on Sunday night.

Bender made a career-best six three-pointers, going 5-for-6 in the second half. The Suns beat the Thunder for the third straight time dating to last season, with all three wins coming in Phoenix.

Russell Westbrook had his 14th triple-double of the season and second in a row with 26 points, 11 assists and 10 rebounds, but Oklahoma City never led after the first quarter. Paul George added 19 points for the Thunder.

Devin Booker scored 26 and T.J. Warren 23 for Phoenix.

Trail Blazers 111, Spurs 110: CJ McCollum hit a floater with 5.9 seconds left to give host Portland a victory over San Antonio with both teams short-handed.

McCollum finished with 25 points and Maurice Harkless added 19 off the bench for the Blazers, who were without starter Damian Lillard. It was Portland's fifth win in seven games, and third straight victory at home.

Former Blazer LaMarcus Aldridge had 30 points and 14 rebounds, while Manu Ginobili added 26 points, including six three-pointers, for the Spurs.

Heat 103, Jazz 102: Josh Richardson's layup with 5.1 seconds left capped a Miami rally from eight points down in the fourth, Donovan Mitchell missed what would have been the winner at the buzzer and the Heat beat visiting Utah.

Tyler Johnson and Goran

Dragic each scored 16 points for Miami, which has won four straight — all by single digits, the Heat's longest stretch of such games since November 2012.

Richardson and Hassan Whiteside each had 14 points, and Kelly Olynyk had 12.

Mitchell scored 19 of his 27 points in the second half, but couldn't save Utah from dropping its seventh straight on the road. He went into the backcourt to take the final inbound pass and wound up taking a jumper from the right side that missed as time expired.

Knicks 100, Mavericks 96: Kristaps Porzingis scored 29 points and Jarrett Jack made the tiebreaking basket with 31.2 seconds left as New York beat host Dallas.

Kyle O'Quinn had 15 points and 11 rebounds, and Enes Kanter added 13 points and 18 boards for the Knicks, who ended a three-game losing

streak and sent the Mavericks to their third straight loss — all at home.

Harrison Barnes scored 25 points and Devin Harris had nine of his 11 in the fourth quarter as the Mavericks made yet another rally on the night they honored their long-time point guard Derek Harper by retiring his jersey.

Lakers 132, Hawks 113: Brandon Ingram had 20 points and seven assists, and Los Angeles snapped a nine-game losing streak with a victory over visiting Atlanta.

Julius Randle had 15 points and nine rebounds in his sixth straight start, while Lonzo Ball finished with 13 points, 10 assists and six rebounds.

Dennis Schroder led the Hawks with 27 points on 10-for-23 shooting. Kent Bazemore and John Collins added 15 points apiece.

NHL roundup

Karlsson lifts Golden Knights over Rangers

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — The first time they met, the New York Rangers were introduced to an expansion Vegas Golden Knights team that was riddled with goaltender injuries and just 10 games into the season.

That was on Oct. 31, when New York erased rallied from two goals down to beat fourth-string goalie Max Lagace in a 6-4 victory. On Sunday night, the Rangers met a matured Golden Knights team that was looking to get even.

William Karlsson scored the tiebreaking goal midway through the third period to lift Vegas to a 2-1 victory over New York in front of a season-high 18,234 in attendance.

"At the beginning (of the season) we were having some collapses in the third, and that's not

happening anymore," Karlsson said. "I think we're a better team than we were at the start. I think we're more complete. We have a solid four lines and our D pairs are great. Obviously, the goaltending has been awesome, too. We're just a more complete team now."

James Neal also scored his 18th goal of the season, while Marc-Andre Fleury stopped 28 shots to improve to 9-2-1.

Now at the halfway point of their inaugural campaign, the Golden Knights own the top home record in the league, moving to 18-2-1 in the first 21 contests at T-Mobile Arena. Vegas is 9-0-1 in its past 10 at home, including seven straight wins.

"We're beating good hockey teams and we're playing good hockey," Vegas coach Gerard Gallant said.

Lightning 5, Red Wings 2: Dan Girardi had a goal and an assist in the first period before blocking a shot above the shoulders in the second period and leaving Tampa Bay's victory over host Detroit.

Penguins 6, Bruins 5 (OT): Evgeni Malkin got his second goal of the game at 2:51 of overtime to rally host Pittsburgh past Boston.

Capitals 4, Blues 3 (OT): Nicklas Backstrom scored at 4:17 of overtime and Alex Ovechkin had a power-play goal and an assist to help host Washington.

Blackhawks 4, Oilers 1: Anton Forsberg made 32 saves, and Nick Schmaltz and Alex DeBrincat scored in the first period in host Chicago's victory over slumping Edmonton.

Islanders 5, Devils 4 (SO): Jaroslav Halak made 42 saves and Brock Nelson scored the

only goal in the shootout and host New York beat New Jersey to snap a five-game losing streak.

Flyers 4, Sabres 1: Sean Couturier scored the go-ahead goal in the second period and added an empty-netter to help host Philadelphia beat Buffalo for its third straight victory.

Blue Jackets 3, Panthers 2 (SO): Josh Anderson scored the deciding goal in the eighth round of the shootout, lifting host Columbus past Florida.

Canadiens 5, Canucks 2: Brendan Gallagher broke a tie midway through the third period, and Carey Price made 34 saves for host Montreal.

Jets 4, Sharks 1: Mathieu Perreault scored twice, Connor Hellebuyck made 31 saves and Winnipeg beat San Jose to extend its home winning streak to five.

Bears hire ex-Chiefs coordinator Nagy

Associated Press

LAKE FOREST, Ill. — The Chicago Bears hired Kansas City Chiefs offensive coordinator Matt Nagy as their new head coach Monday, hoping he can help a foundering NFL franchise emerge from one of the worst runs in its history.

The Bears announced the move a week after firing coach John Fox, who went 14-34 in three seasons for a .292 winning percentage that is the second-lowest in team history. The Bears were 5-11 this past season and haven't finished above .500 since they let Lovie Smith go following a 10-6 finish in 2012, two years after their last visit to the playoffs.

Nagy, 39, spent the past 10 seasons working under Andy Reid in Philadelphia and Kansas City. He did not call plays until late this season, but drew praise for his work

with Chiefs quarterback Alex Smith. In Chicago, the former quarterback at Delaware and then the Arena Football League will be trying to develop No. 2 overall draft pick Mitchell Trubisky.

The Chiefs won the AFC West, only to blow an 18-point halftime lead in a playoff loss to Tennessee on Saturday. The Bears met with Nagy on Sunday and wasted little time hiring him.

Chicago also interviewed Philadelphia quarterbacks coach John DeFilippo, offensive coordinators Pat Shurmur (Minnesota) and Josh McDaniels (New England), Vikings defensive coordinator George Edwards and Chicago defensive coordinator Vic Fangio.

General manager Ryan Pace, who recently got a contract extension through the 2021 season, announced the decision and will have a lot riding on Nagy's

performance.

Pace has had some big hits in the draft such as star running back Jordan Howard (2016, fifth round) and notable misses such as oft-injured receiver Kevin White (2015, first round). Injuries have consistently exposed a lack of depth, and Pace's record in free agency has so far been shaky in trying to replace talented players such as receivers Brandon Marshall and Alshon Jeffery, tight end Martellus Bennett and kicker Robbie Gould.

Fox helped restore some of the professionalism that was missing under former GM Phil Emery and coach Marc Trestman. But Fox's conservative approach and some questionable decisions during games were sore spots.

The Bears were 3-15 against the NFC North under Fox and dropped all six division games this past season.

Top 25 roundup

Unranked Ohio State stuns No. 1 Spartans

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Keita Bates-Diop scored a career-high 32 points, and Ohio State stunned No. 1 Michigan State 80-64 on Sunday.

The overachieving Buckeyes put together an electrifying 12-0 run to finish the first half and kept their foot on the gas to give first-year coach Chris Holtmann a signature win, bringing the fans at Value City Arena streaming onto the court to celebrate.

"This is a moment our fans and our players will remember for a long time," Holtmann said. "It feels really good."

Ohio State (13-4, 4-0 Big Ten) won its third straight in taking down the best team it is likely to see this season.

The mistake-prone Spartans (15-2, 3-1), who came in leading the nation with a 53.3 field-goal percentage, shot just 39 percent for the game and committed a dozen turnovers.

"We all knew we could do it," said Ohio State forward Jae'Sean Tate, who scored 13 points. "And that's where it

all started. You can't go into a game against a team like Michigan State not believing that it's possible to win. I think that's the biggest factor of us winning tonight, just the belief that we could do it."

Bates-Diop hit 12 of 21 attempts from the floor. His previous career high was 27 points against Iowa three days ago.

C.J. Jackson had 14 points for Ohio State, and Jae'Sean Tate added 13.

No. 4 Arizona State 80, Utah 77: Shannon Evans scored 22 points, and visiting Arizona State held on for a choppy win to end a two-game losing streak.

Kodi Justice scored 20 points and carried the offensive load most of the night for Arizona State (13-2, 1-2 Pac-12), but Evans found a groove late, scoring 10 straight points down the stretch. Tra Holder, the league's leading scorer, added 11 points.

Justin Bibbins had 22 points and six assists to lead the Utes (10-5, 2-2).

No. 9 Wichita State 95,

South Florida 57: Shaquille Morris scored 15 points to lead a balanced scoring effort, and the host Shockers blew out South Florida.

Zach Brown had 13 points, and Markis McDuffie scored 12 for Wichita State (13-2, 3-0 American Athletic Conference). Darral Willis scored 11 points.

Morris, Brown and McDuffie were a combined 16-for-19 from the floor, helping the Shockers shoot 62.7 percent. Malik Martin led South Florida (7-10, 0-4) with 15 points. David Collins scored 12 points, and Terrence Samuel added 10 for the Bulls.

The Shockers had 48 points off the bench in their largest victory since beating Savannah State 112-66 on Nov. 12.

No. 15 Miami 80, No. 24 Florida State 74: Miami's 5-foot-7 freshman Chris Lykes scored a season-high 18 points, and the host Hurricanes withstood a late rally by the Seminoles.

Bruce Brown scored a season-high 23 points and Dewan Huell had 20 points and eight

rebounds for the Hurricanes (13-2, 2-1 Atlantic Coast Conference), who took the lead for good in the early minutes and made 13 of their first 14 shots.

Miami (13-2, 2-1 Atlantic Coast Conference) won at home for the first time since Dec. 5. Florida State (12-3, 1-2) lost for the third time in six games.

Florida State cut a 16-point second-half deficit to four with 24 seconds left. Braian Angola then made a backcourt steal but missed a 3-pointer that would have left the Seminoles trailing by one.

No. 19 Cincinnati 76, SMU 56: At Highland Heights, Ky., Jacob Evans III scored 18 points, and Gary Clark had a big second half as Cincinnati pulled away to extend the longest active home-court winning streak in the country.

The game matched the American Athletic Conference's top defensive teams, and it showed in the first half as they went a combined 15-for-52 from the field and the Bearcats led 34-20.