

STARS AND STRIPES®

Tuesday, January 9, 2018

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Koreas reach breakthrough at meeting

BY KIM GAMEL
AND YOO KYONG CHANG
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea agreed Tuesday to send athletes and officials to next month's Winter Olympics in the South and to discuss easing military hostilities in a diplomatic breakthrough following months of heightened tensions over the North's fast-moving nuclear and ballistic missile programs.

The breakthrough occurred during a meeting between the Koreas in the truce village of Panmunjom after the North Korean delegation walked across the Military Demarcation Line that has divided the peninsula since the end of the

1950-53 Korean War.

Seoul also said separately that it may consider temporarily lifting economic sanctions aimed at punishing the North for its nuclear weapons program to facilitate the participation in the Winter Games. It would be the first time North Korea has taken part in the Winter Olympics in eight years.

North Korea's chief delegate, Ri Son Gwon, shook hands with his South Korean counterpart, Unification Minister Cho Myoung-gyon, before a plenary session began with five officials from each side facing each other across a long, wooden table.

The delegates broke for lunch, then continued meeting into the evening before issuing

a joint statement that went further than many had anticipated by including an agreement to hold more talks on issues beyond the Olympics.

"I think we should be engaged in these talks in an earnest, sincere manner to give a New Year's first gift and precious results to the Korean people," Ri said at the start of the talks, according to a pool report.

A smiling Ri — a veteran negotiator and the head of the state agency that handles affairs with the South — proposed that the meeting be opened to the media, but Cho rebuffed the idea.

"These talks started after long-frayed inter-Korean ties," Cho said later. "Well begun is half done."

The main item on the agenda was the possibility that the

North will participate in the Feb. 9-25 Olympics, which will be held in the South Korean resort town of Pyeongchang — just 50 miles from the heavily fortified border.

But South Korea expressed a desire to use the opportunity to put the sides on the path to improved relations. The meeting was limited to the Koreas but was closely watched by the United States and other countries as a test for possible wider engagement with Pyongyang.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un were reportedly able to monitor the talks in real time, with a hotline at their disposal to intervene if necessary.

Marine honored for heroism after water rescue

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

CAMP SCHWAB, Okinawa — It didn't take long for diver Justin Kinjo to realize he had made a critical mistake after entering the surf last spring near Mermaid Grotto in Manzo-Mo, Okinawa.

Waves smashed over the Okinawan father of two as he made his way out, pushing him down and back toward shore, ripping his regulator out of his mouth and stripping him of everything but his wetsuit and oxygen tank.

At the same time, a rip current tugged at him from underneath the surface, pulling him out and ensuring he was stuck in place. Making matters worse, he got his leg stuck in the coral reef. The situation was dire. Two of his dive partners found themselves in equally precari-

ous situations.

As panic began to set in, Kinjo raised his hand and called for help in a last-ditch effort to save his life. He said people on shore just stood around and stared.

"I got you," came the simple, unflinching reply from a tall and thin American who was almost to shore, Kinjo recalled this week. The man then re-entered the treacherous surf and made his way for Kinjo and his party.

Marine 1st Lt. Aaron Cranford, 26, a supply officer from 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion, made repeated trips out into the danger zone. From Fort Worth, Texas, Cranford saved the lives of four people, including Kinjo, that day.

Cranford received the Navy and Marine Corps Medal — the Department of the Navy's highest award for heroism outside

of combat — Monday in a ceremony at Camp Schwab. Kinjo was on hand to thank him.

"I owe him my life, man," Kinjo said after Maj. Gen. Craig Timberlake, 3rd Marine Division commander, pinned the medal on Cranford's chest. "If it wasn't for him, all of us would be dead. My kids wouldn't have been able to enjoy Christmas as a family."

Timberlake called Cranford a "superb representative" of the Marine Corps.

"I'm sure when friends give Lt. Cranford some time to talk, he's gonna say, 'Hey listen, I only did what anybody else would do,'" Timberlake said during Monday's award ceremony. "I hear that a lot, but that's not necessarily true. What he did took a hell of a lot of guts and a hell of a lot of courage."

Cranford said he was honored by the award but shrugged off the praise. He credits the emergency rescue diver course he took at Texas A&M with preparing him to make the rescue and God for placing him in the right place at the right time.

"It's just a gut reaction," he said. "You know what to do and you go do it. I didn't really ever take into consideration whether it was a threat to myself or not ... receiving the award really comes down to honoring those who trained me and are still investing in the lives of others."

Kinjo sees it differently. Both he and his sons see Cranford as a hero, and they plan to return to Camp Schwab to thank him again.

"I owe you my life, man," Kinjo said to Cranford after Monday's ceremony. "Come out for a drink; I got you."

Airmen decorated for actions during airdrop in Afghanistan

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The MC-103J Commando II airplane rumbled low to the ground, nearing the intense firefight below where a team of American special operators and allied commandos were encircled by Taliban fighters in a remote part of Afghanistan.

One Green Beret had been killed and another soldier had been seriously wounded. The remaining force was out of water and nearly out of ammunition — each soldier with as little as one magazine of rounds left. They were in danger of being overrun.

The MC-130J crew refused to hesitate, even as insurgents turned machine guns and anti-aircraft artillery toward the burling turbo-prop transport plane. Taking heavy fire, the crew made life-saving calculations and decisions necessary to drop a combat load of water, food and ammunition to the American and allied fighters below, ultimately allowing them to hold off the attack and survive the Jan. 5, 2016, encounter, according to Air Force award citations and documents.

On Friday, exactly two years to the day of that mission, two of the six Air Force special operators manning the MC-130J that day were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for their heroic actions that ensured the success of the mission, said Air Force Brig. Gen. William Holt II, director of operations for Air Force Special Operations Command. All six members of the crew have been approved to receive the decoration, he added.

“They didn’t hesitate because there were friendly forces on the ground inside that compound that were under fire from 360 degrees,” Holt said Friday, moments before pinning the Distinguished Flying Cross on Capt. Charlotte Raabe and Staff Sgt. Gary Bjerke during a ceremony at Cannon Air Force Base, N.M. “The crew had to perform quickly, at low level, during mid-day, under intense enemy fire, and that’s exactly what they did.”

Raabe, then a first lieutenant, was serving as the combat systems officer aboard the MC-130J aircraft. She was credited for making on-the-fly calculations to direct the pilots away from incoming artillery rounds

and, eventually, into the proper position to make a precision airdrop, according to the citation for her award.

Meanwhile, from the rear of the aircraft, Bjerke, then a senior airman and the crew’s loadmaster, watched the incoming fire as he prepared to drop the supplies, which had to land within 50 meters of the American troops or risk falling into enemy hands, his award citation read.

In addition to the Distinguished Flying Cross awards, the MC-130J crew from the 9th Special Operations Squadron received the Lt. Gen. William H. Tunner Award for the most outstanding airlift crew in the Air Force, Holt said.

The Distinguished Flying Cross is the nation’s oldest award for military aviation accomplishment. The vast majority of the awards are received for extraordinary achievement, Holt said.

“Very, very few are awarded for heroism in combat,” the general said. “Both of these are valor awards for heroism in combat ... joining a very small group of military aviators. These are two exceptional Americans right here.”

Body found near scene of tanker collision

Associated Press

BEIJING — Rescuers found a body believed to be of a sailor from the Iranian oil tanker set ablaze after a collision in the East China Sea, China’s Ministry of Transportation said Tuesday, as the search continued for another 31 missing from the same ship.

The ministry said the body recovered Monday had yet to be identified but was wearing a protective suit designed to withstand cold seawater. There was no further word about the others missing since the Panamanian-registered Sanchi collided with a freighter late Saturday.

Chinese media said the tanker was still on fire Tuesday and at risk of exploding.

The tanker was carrying 136,000 metric tons (nearly 1 million barrels) of condensate, a type of gassy, ultra-light oil, when it collided with the Hong Kong-registered freighter CF Crystal. All 21 crew members of the Crystal, which was carrying grain from the United States to China, were rescued, the Chinese ministry said.

It wasn’t immediately clear what caused the collision.

Trump order eyes better veteran mental health care

BY NIKKI WENTLING
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump signed an executive order Tuesday afternoon paving the way for service-members to be enrolled automatically with the Department of Veterans Affairs for mental health care when they leave the military — an attempt to eliminate barriers for transitioning troops to get treatment during their first year after service.

The order, titled “Supporting Our Veterans During Their Transition from Uniformed Service to Civilian Life,” directs the VA, Department of Defense and Department of Homeland Security to develop a plan by March 9 on how to seamlessly provide mental health care to new veterans.

Surrounded by VA and Defense Department officials, Trump said the order was “a historic step to make sure veterans are taken care of in the

proper manner.”

He signed the order in a quick ceremony in the Oval Office.

The action highlights the issue of veteran suicide, which VA Secretary David Shulkin has named as his top clinical priority. Every day in 2014, an average of 20 veterans succumbed to suicide, according to the latest available VA data. According to a 2016 study from the Naval Postgraduate School, transitioning veterans are particularly at risk.

“People may not realize the highest risk for veteran suicide is in the 12 months following transition out of service,” Shulkin said. “That’s why we’re taking this unprecedented step.”

In the next 60 days, the departments will work out specifics of how to allow troops exiting after March 9 to be enrolled automatically in VA mental health care, with the option to opt out.

Source: Mueller's team interested in questioning Trump on Russia probe

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Special counsel Robert Mueller's team of investigators has expressed interest in speaking with President Donald Trump as part of a probe into potential coordination between Russia and the Trump campaign, a person familiar with the matter said Monday.

The prospect of an interview with the president has come up in recent discussions between Mueller's team and Trump lawyers, but no details have been worked out, including the scope of questions that the president would agree to answer if an interview were to take place, according to the person. The person spoke to

The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss the ongoing investigation.

When or even if an interview would occur was not immediately clear, nor were the terms for the interview or whether Trump's lawyers would seek to narrow the range of questions or topics that prosecutors would cover. Trump's lawyers have previously stated their determination to cooperate with Mueller's requests.

It's not surprising that investigators would ultimately seek to interview the president given his role in several episodes under scrutiny by Mueller. An interview of Trump would be a likely indication the investigation was in its final stages; investigators typically look to

interview main subjects in inquiries near the end of a probe.

Mueller for months has led a team of prosecutors and agents investigating whether Russia and Trump's campaign coordinated to sway the 2016 election and whether Trump has worked to obstruct an FBI investigation into his aides, including by firing FBI Director James Comey. Comey has said that several months before he was dismissed, Trump told him he hoped Comey would end an investigation into his former national security adviser, Michael Flynn. Four people have been charged so far, including Flynn, who pleaded guilty in December to lying to the FBI about his conversations with the Russian ambassador.

Speech sparks 'Oprah in '20' talk

Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa — Oprah Winfrey's impassioned call for "a brighter morning even in our darkest nights" at the Golden Globes has Democratic Party activists buzzing about the media superstar and the 2020 presidential race — even if it's only a fantasy.

Even so, for Democrats in early voting states, and perhaps for a public that largely disapproves of President Donald Trump's job performance, the notion of a popular media figure as a candidate is not as strange as it once seemed, given the real estate mogul and reality TV star now in the White House.

"Look, it's ridiculous — and I get that," said Brad Anderson, President Barack Obama's 2012 Iowa campaign director. While he supports the idea of Winfrey running, it would also punctuate how Trump's candidacy has altered political norms. "At the same time, politics is ridiculous right now."

Winfrey's speech as she accepted the Cecil B. DeMille lifetime achievement award on Sunday touched on her humble upbringing and childhood wonder in civil rights heroes. But it was her exhortation of the legions of women who have called out sexual harassers that got some political operatives thinking Winfrey, 64, might be just what the Democrats need.

"I think we need more role models like her that are speaking to young women and trying to restore some hope. The election of Donald Trump was a devastating setback for little girls," said Liz Purdy, who led Democrat Hillary Clinton's 2008 New Hampshire presidential primary campaign.

SpaceX launch mystery comes amid rivalry

The Washington Post

The United Launch Alliance, the joint venture of Lockheed Martin and Boeing created more than a decade ago to launch sensitive satellites for the Pentagon and intelligence community, has long been under fire from Elon Musk's SpaceX, the tenacious upstart that plowed its way into the market by waging war inside the Beltway.

For years, Musk proclaimed that SpaceX could save taxpayers millions by offering the Pentagon launches for far less than its chief rival. ULA, meanwhile, maintained that responsibility for national security satellites that cost hundreds of millions and help guide precision bombs and conduct surveillance should not just go to the lowest bidder.

Now with a launch for the National Reconnaissance Office scheduled for Wednesday, ULA is again poised to showcase its record of reliability with more than 100 consecutive launches without a failure. The launch comes as reports indicate that a highly classified satellite launched by SpaceX on Sunday may have suffered a failure once it reached space.

Known only by a codename, Zuma, the satellite was launched Sunday evening by SpaceX on its Falcon 9 rocket from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, Fla. The mission is so secretive that it is not known which government agency commissioned the launch, what the satellite cost or what it would do once in orbit.

The launch appeared to go smoothly, and SpaceX cheered a successful liftoff and then the touchdown of its first-stage booster back on land. Musk on Monday tweeted out a long-exposure picture of the launch showing its fiery tail to space — and then the return of the booster.

The Air Force's 45th Space Wing also congratulated the company in a tweet: "What an incredible way to start off 2018 w/the world's 1st successful launch and land of this year!"

As word spread on Monday that something may have happened to the Zuma satellite, SpaceX maintained that nothing went wrong with its Falcon 9 rocket, saying a review of the data showed it "performed nominally."

Northrop Grumman, which manufactured the Zuma satel-

lite, said in a statement that it could not comment on the mission because it was classified.

If something did go wrong with the mission, it's not clear what happened or who is to blame.

But even if SpaceX's Falcon 9 performed perfectly, it is not a good time for the company, founded by Musk in 2002, to have something happen to such an important payload.

For years, the company has been in a heated battle with ULA over lucrative contracts to launch national security payloads, long seen by Musk as a key source of revenue. SpaceX is also under contract from NASA to fly astronauts to the International Space Station, and it says the first test flights with humans on board could happen as soon as this year.

For nearly a decade, ULA had a monopoly on Pentagon launches. In 2014, SpaceX sued the Air Force, arguing that it should be able to compete for the contracts. In 2015, the parties settled, and SpaceX was granted the certification that allowed it to bid. Since then, SpaceX has won two of three competitively bid launches.

At least 5 dead as winter storm triggers mudslides in California

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A fire official said five people have been killed by mudslides that swept Southern California homes from their foundations as a powerful storm drenched recent wild-fire burn areas.

Santa Barbara County Fire Department Capt. Dave Zaniboni said the bodies were found in mud and debris during rescue operations Tuesday in Montecito northwest of Los Angeles.

Zaniboni said “multiple” homes were destroyed and residents are unaccounted for in neighborhoods below hillsides scarred by recent fires.

There were reports of injuries, but Santa Barbara County spokeswoman Amber Anderson didn’t immediately know how many or the extent. She said “multiple” residents had been rescued and more were calling for help. Thousands were without power.

Evacuation orders were issued Monday over fears of mudslides in those foothill neighborhoods where the state’s largest-ever fire raged last month.

Water and debris in lanes brought coastal U.S. 101 to a standstill, and traffic accidents on rain-

slicked roadways across the region slowed the morning commute to a crawl.

The first significant storm of the season soaked much of the state. Record-breaking rain fell on the San Francisco Bay region before the storm largely passed overnight, leaving diminishing showers there before dawn Tuesday. Stormy weather continued to the east in the Central Valley and Sierra Nevada.

Downtown San Francisco had a record 3.15 inches of rain on Monday, smashing the old mark of 2.36 inches set in 1872 and making it the city’s 16th-wettest day since 1849, the National Weather Service said.

A winter weather advisory was in place for mountain areas, where officials warned motorists to prepare for difficult travel conditions, including gusty winds, low visibility and snow-covered roads.

A yearslong drought eased in the state last spring, but Northern California had a dry start to winter and hardly any measurable rain fell in the south over the past six months. The extremely dry conditions and high winds last year led to some of the most destructive blazes on both ends of the state.

13K tourists stranded at resort in Switzerland

Associated Press

GENEVA — Unusually heavy snowfall and a high risk of Alpine avalanches stranded some 13,000 tourists Tuesday in the Swiss resort of Zermatt, at the base of the famed Matterhorn mountain.

With nearby roads, trains, cable cars, ski slopes and hiking trails into the town closed, Swiss authorities deployed helicopters to ferry some tourists to a nearby village to escape the snowbound Alpine valley.

A police official in Zermatt, a tourist magnet for backpackers and millionaires alike, said the helicopter journey to the village of Taesch takes about three minutes.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly about the matter, said the so-called air bridge can transport about 100 people an hour, conditions permitting.

Only tourists who requested the air bridge were being ferried out, the official said, insisting that it was not an official evacuation.

Romy Biner, the head of the Zermatt town council, told SRF the airlift was for guests who urgently needed to leave and to bring in supplies. She said the town hadn’t seen so much snow for several years. “It surprised us a bit this year, and we’re trying to make the best of it,” Biner said.

Switzerland’s WSL Institute for Snow and Avalanche Research said Monday afternoon that at least 31.5 inches of snow had been dumped on the Zermatt area over the last 24 hours, raising the avalanche risk to a maximum level of 5 on an avalanche-warning scale.

The intense snowfall in the Zermatt and Saas valleys was part of a broader weather pattern that was causing mudslides and intensifying the avalanche risk across a broad swath of southwestern Switzerland.

Gays in Australia marry at midnight

Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia — Same-sex couples married in midnight ceremonies across Australia on Tuesday after the country’s last legal impediment to gay marriage expired.

Marriage equality became law on Dec. 9 with overwhelming support in Parliament, but Australia’s requirement that all couples give a month’s notice for weddings made Tuesday the first possible date for gay marriages.

Athletes Craig Burns and Luke Sullivan married at a midnight ceremony near the east coast city of Tweed Heads.

“It’s another way to show your love and appreciation of your partner in front of the people in your life,” said Burns, 29, a sprinter who will compete in the Commonwealth Games in Australia’s Gold Coast in April.

In Newcastle, north of Syd-

ney, Rebecca Hickson, 32, married her partner of nine years, Sarah Turnbull, 34. Hickson described the divisive buildup to a gay marriage ballot preceding Parliament’s vote as “a horrible time.” She said the couple wanted to be part of history by becoming one of the first lesbian couples to marry in Australia.

Lainey Carmichael, 51, and Roz Kitschke, 46, married shortly after dawn before 65 guests at their home in the town of Franklin, in the island state of Tasmania.

The early ceremony was mainly to avoid the summer heat, Kitschke said. “New day; new era — and we don’t like the heat that much,” she said.

Wedding guest Rodney Croome, a longtime marriage equality advocate and spokesperson for Tasmanians United for Marriage Equal-

ity, said, “This morning’s wedding marked the start of a new chapter in the lives of the two brides, but also a new chapter in the life of the nation.

“Today, we are a more equal and inclusive country that treats all loving, committed couples the same,” Croome said in a statement.

The Australian Parliament overwhelmingly voted for same-sex marriage after a nationwide postal survey found that 62 percent of respondents wanted marriage equality.

The one-month waiting period was waived for some couples who wed in recent weeks. Those exceptional circumstances included a partner’s terminal illness and overseas-based relatives booking flights to Australia before the official start date for the new law was known.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Tourist attraction aims for historic designation

KS WEST MINERAL — Preservationists and volunteers are working to get a giant electric shovel in Kansas that weighs 5,500 tons on the National Registry of Historic Places.

The Joplin Globe reported that volunteers managed to get the orange-and-black shovel, called Big Brutus, on the Register of Historic Kansas Places in November. The board of directors of Big Brutus Inc. will be notified about the national nomination this month or next.

Big Brutus stands at 160 feet tall and operated from 1963 to 1974 in the once booming mining town of West Mineral. Volunteers said the landmark attracts more than 30,000 visitors per year.

State court to weigh legality of noose display

VA RICHMOND — The Virginia Supreme Court is scheduled to hear arguments this week over whether a man broke the law when he hung a black-faced dummy in his front yard.

The Richmond Times-Dispatch reported lawyers for Jack Eugene Turner, of Rocky Mount, will argue before the court Wednesday.

Turner was convicted in 2015 of violating a state law that prohibits hanging a noose to intimidate. Turner is white. He was upset at some black neighbors.

Turner got six months in jail. He argues his free speech rights were violated and that state law only bars displays of nooses on public land, not private property.

The Virginia Court of Appeals upheld Turner's conviction in 2016.

Codex rendered legible through X-ray scanning

NY NEW YORK — An ancient Coptic codex written sometime between 400 and 600 A.D. and housed in a New York City library is now legible thanks to state-of-the-art X-ray scanning.

The severely scorched early book, or codex, has been owned by the Morgan Library and Museum in New York since 1962, but has remained unopened for fear of destroying it. The New York Times reported the brittle parchment was singed together sometime in the past, rendering it unreadable through normal means.

Computer scientist W. Brent Seals has developed software that models the surface of a contorted piece of parchment through X-ray data and then assigns letters to their correct positioning. The scans were completed in December, and the museum team hopes to start producing readable pages later this month.

Find may be flower from Lincoln's casket

IL LOCKPORT — A northern Illinois historian has found what appears to be a pressed flower from Abraham Lincoln's casket.

Will County Historical Society President Sandy Vasko told The Daily Southtown she found it in a box belonging to the family of James Elwood, a Civil War soldier and former mayor of Joliet, which is outside Chicago.

Vasko found a handwritten note describing the flower as from the 16th president's casket when "the remains were lying in State ... in Washington, D.C. April 20, 1865."

James Cornelius, the Lincoln curator at the Abraham Lin-

coln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield, confirmed the flower appeared to be the "real deal."

Crews rescue man lost on Lake Winnebago

WI FOND DU LAC — Authorities rescued a man after he wandered out on Lake Winnebago in east-central Wisconsin.

According to the Fond du Lac County Sheriff's Office, the 42-year-old man called for help early Sunday, saying he was lost on the lake. First responders arrived within minutes and found the man about a quarter-mile off shore.

Officials said the man had been drinking and was not wearing enough clothing for the cold weather. He was taken to a hospital to be treated for exposure.

City may ban pet store sales of cats and dogs

MD BALTIMORE — A statewide push to ban the sale of cats and dogs at pet stores may find a foothold in Baltimore.

The Baltimore Sun reported a measure seeking the ban would be introduced at Monday's meeting of the Baltimore City Council.

Humane Society of the United States chapter Director Emily Hovermale doesn't believe pet stores adhere to the current state law prohibiting the sale of puppy mill-bred animals. Her group will seek a ban on a state level.

A pet store operator in Towson and Rockville, Mitch Thomson, said the proposed law's allowance of collaborations between stores and animal shelters isn't a viable option, as "the nonprofits don't have desirable animals" to sell.

Sea turtles stunned by unusual cold rescued

FL CAPE CANAVERAL — Rescuers are bringing cold-stunned sea turtles in Florida to warmer waters.

Young turtles often live in the shallow waters where waters get colder faster while bigger turtles swim into warmer water in the Gulf. When water temperatures fall below 50 degrees, the turtles can become stunned. They appear comatose, and it's hard to determine if they're alive or dead.

Some sea turtles are warming up in rehabilitation pools at Canaveral National Seashore. Most will be tagged and released as soon as weather conditions allow.

Baby Jesus stolen from church's Nativity scene

KS WICHITA — A Wichita church said "This is why we can't have nice things" after a baby Jesus statue was stolen from an outdoor Nativity scene.

The Wichita Eagle reported that the Church of the Blessed Sacrament in Wichita believes baby Jesus was taken the night of Jan. 3, or early morning on Jan. 4. The manger also was destroyed because the Jesus figure had been chained to it.

The theft came just a few days before the Epiphany, which is the day Christians observe the visit the Three Kings made to the baby Jesus.

A sign staked outside the nativity reads: "Baby Jesus was STOLEN! Please pray for his return." The church said it "can't have nice things" in smaller letters.

From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES

On a mission to provide credible reporting and daily news to America's military, wherever they serve.

Mobile apps available: www.stripes.com/apps.

Freshman QB rallies Tide to title in OT

Associated Press

ATLANTA — To add another championship to the greatest dynasty college football has ever seen, Alabama turned to its quarterback of the future, and Tua Tagovailoa proved that his time is now.

The freshman quarterback, who had played mostly mop-up duty this season, came off the bench to spark a comeback and threw a 41-yard touchdown to DeVonta Smith that gave No. 4 Alabama a 26-23 overtime victory against No. 3 Georgia on Monday night for the College Football Playoff national championship.

Tagovailoa entered the game at halftime, replacing a struggling Jalen Hurts, and threw three touchdown passes to give the Crimson Tide its fifth national championship since 2009 under coach Nick Saban.

“He just stepped in and did his thing,” Hurts said. “He’s built for stuff like this. I’m so happy for him.” The Tide might have a quarterback controversy ahead, but first Alabama will celebrate another title.

For the third straight season, Alabama played a classic CFP

final. The Tide split two with Clemson, losing last season on a touchdown with a second left.

What was Saban thinking as the winning pass soared this time?

“I could not believe it,” he said. “There’s lots of highs and lows. Last year we lost on the last play of the game and this year we won on the last play of the game. These kids really responded the right way. We said last year, ‘Don’t waste the feeling.’ They sure didn’t, the way they played tonight.”

Smith streaked into the end zone and moments later confetti rained and even Saban seemed almost giddy after watching maybe the most improbable victory of his unmatched career. A few hours later, Alabama was voted No. 1 in the final AP college football poll for the 11th time, three more than any other program.

After Alabama kicker Andy Pappanastos missed a 36-yard field goal that would have won it for the Tide (13-1) in the final seconds of regulation, Georgia (13-2) took the lead with a 51-yard field goal from Rodrigo Blankenship in overtime.

Tagovailoa took a terrible

sack on Alabama’s first play, losing 16 yards. On the next he found Smith, another freshman, and hit him in stride for the national championship.

Tagovailoa was brilliant at times, though he had a few freshman moments. He threw an interception when he tried to pass on a running play and all his receivers were blocking. He also darted away from pass rushers and made some impeccable throws, showing the poise of a veteran. Facing fourth-and-goal from the 7, down seven, the left-hander moved to his left and zipped a pass through traffic that hit Calvin Ridley in the numbers for the tying score with 3:49 left in the fourth quarter.

He finished 14-for-24 for 166 yards.

“After the sack, we just got up and took it to the next play,” Tagovailoa said. “I looked back out, and he was wide open. Smitty was wide open.” Freshmen were everywhere for the Alabama offense in the second half: Najee Harris at running back; Henry Ruggs III at receiver; Alex Leatherwood at left tackle after All-American Jonah Williams was hurt. It’s a testament to the relentless ma-

chine Saban has built.

But this game will be remembered most for his decision to change quarterbacks trailing 13-0.

“I just thought we had to throw the ball, and I felt he could do it better, and he did,” Saban said Tagovailoa. “He did a good job, made some plays in the passing game. Just a great win. I’m so happy for Alabama fans. Great for our players. Unbelievable.”

Saban now has six major poll national championships, including one at LSU, matching the record set by the man who led Alabama’s last dynasty, coach Paul Bear Bryant.

This was nothing like the others.

With President Donald Trump in attendance, the all-Southeastern Conference matchup was all Georgia in the first half before Saban pulled Hurts and the five-star recruit from Hawaii entered. The president watched the second half from Air Force One.

The Tide trailed 20-7 in the third quarter after Georgia’s freshman quarterback, Jake Fromm, hit Mecole Hardman for an 80-yard TD pass.

No more overtime magic left for Bulldogs

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Georgia had no reason to fear overtime with the national championship on the line.

Last week’s double-overtime win over Oklahoma in the Rose Bowl should have been the perfect setup for the Bulldogs. Georgia players had every reason to feel emboldened by their chances when facing overtime in Monday night’s championship game against Alabama.

That’s what made the 26-23 loss to the Crimson Tide even more crushing. Georgia’s wait for its first national championship since 1980 continues.

“Guys fought so hard all season long,” said cornerback Aaron Davis. “We really wanted this one bad and just came up

one play short. ... When it came down to that one play, I just hated to see it end like that.”

After a 51-yard field goal by Rodrigo Blankenship gave Georgia the lead, Alabama’s Tua Tagovailoa was sacked by Davin Bellamy and Jonathan Ledbetter for a loss of 16 yards.

Georgia’s confidence soared even higher.

“Yes, we are very confident in one another,” said tailback Sony Michel. “We’re confident in our coaches. We’re confident in our staff, and we’re confident in our players. So there was no doubt in our mind that we were going to go out there and win that game.”

The finish brought heartbreak for the Bulldogs.

On second down, Tagovailoa found DeVonta Smith for a 41-

yard game-winning touchdown pass. Malkom Parrish was trailing on the play and Dominick Sanders was supposed to provide safety support.

“I rerouted my guy and I just turned and looked and saw [Smith] catch the ball,” Davis said. “I don’t know what happened over there. I just looked up and saw him wide open like that. It was a communication issue, something we can’t have.”

Georgia players were emotional on the field and in the locker room. Quarterback Jake Fromm described the final minutes as “a total rollercoaster,” but said the players will recover.

“At the end of the day you take it and process and go out and try to make another play,”

Fromm said.

Georgia led 13-0 and 20-7 but couldn’t finish against a resilient Alabama team accustomed to success on the championship stage.

“That was a great defense we went up against,” said tailback Nick Chubb, who was held to only 25 yards rushing on 18 carries. “A lot of respect for what they do. A lot of big bodies up front, makes it hard to run. But at the end of the day, it just comes down to us not executing well.”

Michel led the Bulldogs with 98 yards rushing, but for much of the game Fromm was asked to carry a heavier load than normal. Fromm completed 16 of 32 passes for 232 yards with two interceptions and one touchdown.

Eagles aware of historic underdog status

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Quarterback Carson Wentz's value to the Philadelphia Eagles is reflected clearly in a historic betting line.

The Eagles (13-3) are the first No. 1 seed to be an underdog in their opening playoff game. The sixth-seeded Atlanta Falcons (11-6) are 2½-point favorites in Saturday's NFC divisional playoff.

"It doesn't really matter," wide receiver Torrey Smith said Monday. "We're better than that, but we have to show it."

After Wentz tore his ACL in Week 14, the Eagles went 2-1 with backup Nick Foles. But the offense was inconsistent.

Foles played well in his first five quarters after replacing Wentz and struggled in the next five. He sat out the final three quarters in Week 17 along with most of the starters.

Odds makers weren't impressed. Of course, players and coaches shrugged off the disrespect.

"I don't care what people say because what people say has never won a game for me and my teammates," linebacker Dannell Ellerbe said.

Defensive end Chris Long said it would be foolish for the team to use this as motivation.

"This is not the way we think," he said.

The Falcons are coming off

a 26-13 playoff win at the Los Angeles Rams after beating Carolina in a win-or-out regular-season finale. The defending NFC champions had their worst offensive performance during the 2016 season in a 24-15 loss at Philadelphia in Week 10.

Eagles defensive coordinator Jim Schwartz isn't drawing too much from that victory. Atlanta has a new offensive coordinator — Steve Sarkisian replaced Kyle Shanahan — and it took a while for them to get things on track.

"They are a little bit different than last year," Schwartz said. "Every team's going to be a little bit different from year-to-year. There's going to be some

things you do well, some things that you put in in the offseason, some things that maybe fit your personality a little bit more.

"There's still a lot of challenges with that team. I mean, it goes well beyond a player like Julio Jones. It goes well beyond the quarterback (Matt Ryan). Their tight end (Austin Hooper) is having a great year. Their running backs (Devonta Freeman and Tevin Coleman), if you combine the running back stats, you're talking about a first-team All-Pro — 1,500 yards, I think 12 touchdowns. So we have to look at it that way. There's going to be a lot of challenges this week."

Steelers set for rematch with Jaguars

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Even as he sat in the back of a police car racing to the hospital to get a precise prognosis on his injured left calf while the Pittsburgh Steelers played on without him during a loss to New England three weeks ago, Antonio Brown always believed he'd be back.

He just needed time.

When his teammates provided it by assuring the AFC North champions of a first-round bye, Brown pushed his rehab.

By last weekend video surfaced of Brown working out in Florida with former NFL wide receiver Chad Ochocinco.

And there Brown was on Monday, going through drills with the rest of the Steelers well on track for a return on Sunday against Jacksonville in the divisional round of the playoffs.

"I never count myself out regardless of circumstances," Brown said. "I know playing football you're going to have adversity. Just got to grow from it."

While stressing he's "still got a lot to test," the only unanimous selection on the 2017 All-Pro Team and the only player in NFL history with five straight seasons with at least 100 recep-

tions appeared to be relatively close to his old self.

"AB is nice," cornerback Joe Haden said. "If he's out there, I expect him to be AB. He's not going to be out there limping around. When he was running, he looked pretty good. You never know how it's going to feel afterward, but while he's out there, while he's running his routes, he looked like AB."

Brown left in the first half against New England on Dec. 17 when his legs got tangled with a pair of Patriots defenders while trying to haul in a touchdown pass.

The Steelers lost 27-23 before rebounding to close out the regular season with wins over Houston and Cleveland.

Still, their best chance at reaching the AFC championship game for a second consecutive season comes with Brown's No. 84 in the lineup.

The Jaguars have one of the NFL's top defensive backfields, though Brown still finished with 10 receptions and 157 yards on Oct. 8, the lone bright spot for the Steelers in a 30-9 loss in which Jacksonville scored the final 23 points and left Pittsburgh quarterback Ben Roethlisberger shaken after throwing five interceptions.

Roethlisberger hasn't shied away from talk of a rematch. That's fine by the Jaguars.

"Be careful what you wish for," Jacksonville cornerback AJ Bouye said. "This is what he wanted. This is what he's going to get."

What the Steelers are likely to get in return is a heavy dose of Jaguars rookie running back Leonard Fournette.

He was dominant with 181 yards and two touchdowns against Pittsburgh in October, including a backbreaking 90-yard sprint with 1:47 left that showcased the speed and the power that makes him so dangerous. Jacksonville finished with 231 yards rushing in all, the most given up by the Steelers all season.

It was perhaps the biggest upset in the NFL season at the time. In the rearview, not so much. The Jaguars have proven they're legit while reaching the playoffs for the first time in a decade.

Though Jacksonville cornerback Jalen Ramsey suggested Pittsburgh must feel like the loss was a "fluke," the Steelers insist that's not the case.

"We don't feel like it was a fluke," linebacker Bud Dupree said. "We actually saw the plays

they made and everything that was going on and the mistakes that we made and ... that's what happens. We let them get a couple of explosion plays."

Yet Steelers safety Mike Mitchell is quick to point out the blowout on the scoreboard didn't exactly reflect what happened on the field. Even with Fournette's closeout dash to the end zone, Pittsburgh outgained the Jaguars 373-313.

"If you watch that football game, it's not like their offense exploited us a ton," Mitchell said. "I don't think it was a dominant performance from that standpoint. I thought we played well enough to win the game. Obviously we didn't. We've got to do better Sunday as a complete team to win the game."

One of the reasons Roethlisberger wanted another shot at Jacksonville. The two-time Super Bowl winner facetiously wondered if he still "had it" after turning the ball over repeatedly back in October.

All he did over the second half of the season was throw 18 touchdowns against five interceptions while leading Pittsburgh to a second straight division title and fourth consecutive playoff appearance.

NBA roundup

T-wolves earn rare romp over Cavaliers

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — The Minnesota Timberwolves, like so many lesser opponents over the years, have been largely unsuccessful in trying to best LeBron James.

This time, they built a lead on Cleveland as big as 41 points before the end of the third quarter. It was just another example of the difference Jimmy Butler has made on this promising team.

Andrew Wiggins had 25 points in three quarters, Butler pitched in 21 points and tight defense on James, and the Timberwolves cruised to a 127-99 victory over the Cavaliers on Monday night.

“We did what we’re supposed to do at home,” Butler said. “We’re a really good team. They’re a really good team. They missed a lot of shots that they normally make. We all know that. We’ll see them again down the road and, hopefully, we play the same exact way.”

Karl-Anthony Towns (19 points, 12 rebounds) and Taj Gibson (16 points, 13 rebounds) were tenacious around the basket for the Timberwolves, who outrebounded the Cavs 56-37, their largest advantage of the season. The Wolves had a 60-42 edge in points in the paint, and every starter but Towns took the whole fourth quarter off.

With their 116-98 win over New Orleans on Saturday, the Wolves have enjoyed a ferocious start to this five-game

homestand.

“We just came out the last two games with a certain mentality, a certain focus,” Towns said.

James had just 10 points on 4-for-8 shooting, taking his first loss at Minnesota in 13 games since Feb. 17, 2005. He posted a career-worst minus-39 rating.

“I’ve won a game and had a bad plus-minus before, so what does that matter?” James said. “I don’t give a damn about no damn plus/minus.”

The deficit for the Cavs reached 41 points after a dunk by Wiggins set up by a driving pass by Tyus Jones, who had grabbed his own miss from three-point range.

Butler had plenty to do with that, contributing nine assists and eight rebounds before resting during the fourth quarter. The Wolves led 69-42 at half-time, matching their largest first-half score from just two nights ago, after a rainbow three-pointer from the top of the key by Butler brought the fans to their feet. That also tied the most points allowed by the Cavs in any half this season.

“What he’s doing every night, it’s amazing, but it’s also bringing the best out of everyone on the team, and to me that’s the true mark of greatness,” coach Tom Thibodeau said of his hand-picked leader and star who arrived last summer in a trade with Chicago.

Warriors 124, Nuggets 114: Stephen Curry scored 32 points and dished out nine assists in

another superb performance during his sensational recent stretch, and host Golden State avenged an ugly home loss to Denver in late December.

Draymond Green added a season-high 23 points and 10 assists in the defending NBA champions’ fifth straight victory on a night when Kevin Durant sat out his third consecutive game with a strained right calf.

Nikola Jokic had his first triple-double of the season with 22 points, 12 rebounds and 11 assists for the Nuggets.

Curry had his 12th 30-point game of the season. The two-time MVP has scored 29 or more points in seven straight games.

Spurs 107, Kings 100: LaMarcus Aldridge had 31 points and 12 rebounds, and visiting San Antonio came back from 13 down in the second half to beat Sacramento despite playing without Kawhi Leonard and Manu Ginobili.

Davis Bertans scored a career-high 28 points on 11-of-15 shooting with six three-pointers to help the Spurs to their 12th consecutive win over the Kings.

Raptors 114, Nets 113 (OT): DeMar DeRozan scored 35 points, including a go-ahead three-point play with 26.1 seconds left in overtime, and visiting Toronto shook off a late injury to Kyle Lowry to beat Brooklyn.

The Raptors lost a 10-point lead in the final 4½ minutes of

regulation and then lost Lowry after a hard fall in OT. Lowry finished with 18 points and 11 assists, but had to be carried off the court after landing on his lower back while going for a rebound.

Pacers 109, Bucks 96: Domantas Sabonis had 17 points and 10 rebounds and three of his teammates each scored 15 to lead host Indiana past Milwaukee.

Rockets 116, Bulls 107: Eric Gordon and Chris Paul each had 24 points and nine assists, Gerald Green scored 22 and visiting Houston beat Chicago.

Pelicans 112, Pistons 109: DeMarcus Cousins scored 16 of his 20 points after Anthony Davis left with an ankle injury in the third quarter, and host New Orleans held off Detroit.

Davis dominated before he left with 4:41 remaining in the third, scoring 30 points and grabbing 10 rebounds in 27 minutes. He walked to the locker room, favoring his right ankle, and never returned.

Clippers 108, Hawks 107: C.J. Williams hit a three-pointer from the left wing with nine seconds left to lift host Los Angeles over Atlanta.

Lou Williams led Los Angeles with 34 points but missed a late three that was rebounded by Wesley Johnson. He passed the ball out to C.J. Williams for a shot that snapped the Clippers’ two-game skid.

Panarin scores in OT to cap Blue Jackets’ rally

Associated Press

TORONTO — Columbus goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky had a hard time holding back his smile after a come-from-behind victory over Toronto.

Artemi Panarin scored 3:11 into overtime to help the Blue Jackets overcome a two-goal deficit and beat the Maple Leafs 3-2 on Monday night.

Bobrovsky made 35 saves, including a

handful of big ones to keep his team within 2-0 before a third-period rally. Columbus scored twice in the final 4:35 of the third period to set up Panarin’s OT goal, when he took a pass off his skate and kicked it to his stick for the winner.

“Those kind of wins make good atmosphere in the locker-room, lots of energy, lots of happiness,” Bobrovsky said.

Nick Foligno and Pierre-Luc Dubois scored in the third for Columbus. Foligno

scored after goalie Frederik Andersen lost a bouncing puck before it found its way behind him, then Dubois tied it with 2:47 left, snapping a wrist shot blocker side on Andersen from the slot.

“We knew if we scored one somehow that it changes momentum,” Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella. “The saves (Andersen) made during the game and that one goes in ... it’s a funny game.”