

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

## US gets no assurances on Kurds' safety

Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey — Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan accused the U.S. national security adviser of making “a very serious mistake” Tuesday by demanding that Ankara guarantee the safety of Kurdish fighters in northeastern Syria before the U.S. withdraws its troops from the war-torn country.

A strained morning of negotiation in Turkey ended without assurances of protection for forces that fought alongside U.S. troops against Islamic State, and indeed brought them fresh new threats from Turkey. The diplomatic setback raised fresh questions about how the U.S. would protect its allies in the fight against ISIS and about the pace of the drawdown of U.S. forces in Syria.

“John Bolton has made a very serious mistake. We cannot make any concessions in this regard,” Erdogan said Tuesday, just before Bolton left the country with tensions between the NATO allies at new highs. He added that Ankara’s preparations for a new military offensive against what the Turkish leader describes as terrorist groups in Syria are “to a large extent” complete.

Bolton had insisted that Turkey refrain from conducting any operation unless it was approved by and coordinated with the U.S. Turkey’s presidential spokesman fired back publicly that Turkey would not seek permission from its allies to conduct a military offensive against Syrian Kurdish fighters but was willing to coordinate operations.

A senior administration official said Erdogan’s comments did not reflect President Donald Trump’s understanding of his Dec. 23 conversation with the Turkish leader, days after the U.S. president announced his intent to withdraw American troops from northeastern Syria. Trump “thought he got a commitment from Erdogan” to protect the Kurds, the official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity because the official wasn’t authorized to speak on the record.

An official at Tuesday’s meeting between Bolton and senior Turkish officials said presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin stated that Erdogan committed that Turkey would not take offensive action while U.S. forces were there.

Bolton departed Turkey without meeting with Erdogan in an apparent snub by the

Turks — the meeting had been expected for days. A spokesman for Bolton said U.S. officials were told Erdogan cited the local election season and a speech to parliament for not meeting with him.

In the more than two-hour meeting with Kalin, Bolton outlined five U.S. principles for the Syria drawdown, including that “the United States opposes any mistreatment of opposition forces who fought with us against ISIS.”

In the high-stakes session in Ankara’s presidential complex, Bolton also rebuked Erdogan’s column in *The New York Times*, in which the Turkish leader restated his position that the Syrian Defense Forces were members of terrorist groups and criticized the U.S. air campaign against ISIS.

An official at the meeting said Bolton told Kalin that Erdogan’s op-ed was “wrong and offensive.”

The official added that the U.S. stuck by Trump’s request that the Kurds who fought with the U.S. not be mistreated, and the Turks stuck by their position that the Kurds “are terrorist groups and they’re free to go after them.”

## Reports: 3 being investigated in contractor’s death

By CHAD GARLAND  
*Stars and Stripes*

Two Marines and a Navy corpsman deployed to northern Iraq are being investigated in connection with the death of a U.S. contractor last week, according to media reports describing the latest in a series of incidents and allegations of misconduct involving special operations troops.

The contractor, who worked for Lockheed Martin, was wounded in a “physical altercation” on New Year’s Eve in Irbil, the capital of Iraq’s Kurdish region, *The New York Times* first reported Monday, citing two unnamed Defense Department officials.

The man, identified by an aunt to *The Daily Beast* as Rick

Rodriguez, a 20-year Army veteran and Green Beret, was evacuated to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany, where he was pronounced dead on Friday.

Rodriguez’s wife and four children, who live in Fayetteville, N.C., had been flown to Germany and decided to remove him from life support, an unnamed military source told the news website. Friends posted consoling messages on the Facebook pages of Rodriguez’s family members.

An employee “was fatally injured while supporting Special Operations Forces within the Operation Inherent Resolve area of operations in a non-combat related incident,” a Lockheed Martin statement said.

“We are supporting the Naval

Criminal Investigation Service as they conduct an investigation into the circumstances of his death,” said the emailed statement, which did not name Rodriguez. “Our thoughts are with his family and friends, and we are committed to supporting them during this difficult time.”

An NCIS spokesman confirmed that the matter was under investigation but declined to provide details.

Operation Inherent Resolve referred questions to Marine Special Operations Command, or MARSOC, where the two Marines and the sailor were reportedly assigned on a mission to advise Iraqi and Kurdish security forces. MARSOC confirmed with Stars and Stripes that a forward-deployed con-

tractor supporting one of their units had died.

“MARSOC is providing all requested support to investigators as they look into this incident,” MARSOC spokesman Maj. Nick Mannweiler said.

The Marines and sailor had not been detained and remained on duty in Iraq, NBC reported, citing unnamed U.S. officials.

The Marines were gunnery sergeants, *The Daily Beast* reported, citing unnamed sources. The altercation may have been spurred by events at a gym or in a shooting competition, in which bravado and trash-talking turned into a brawl that left Rodriguez beaten into unconsciousness. One unnamed military official told the outlet there were “lots of witnesses.”

# Military budget could take hit over wall

*The Washington Post*

WASHINGTON — If President Donald Trump declares a national emergency to force the military to build a wall on the U.S. border with Mexico, the Pentagon might have to figure out which military construction projects around the world to cancel, pare back or put on hold in order to free up money for the initiative.

The possibility that Trump will draw on military funds to build the wall using emergency powers comes amid an impasse with congressional Democrats that has led to a partial government shutdown now in its third week. Trump has refused to sign any funding bill to reopen the federal agencies that doesn't include \$5.7 billion to begin construction of the wall.

One possible workaround is for Trump to declare a national emergency and order the U.S. military to construct the wall. The president threatened to do so on Friday, saying he could declare a national emergency if he wants to and build the wall "very quickly."

But the law that authorizes the defense secretary to order

military building projects in the event of a national emergency requires the Pentagon to draw upon funds that Congress has already appropriated for military construction. The result is that the administration potentially could have to claw back money from projects Congress has debated and funded.

Trump has long touted his administration's spending increases on the U.S. military. During a visit last month to U.S. troops at al Asad Air Base in Iraq, he said his administration next year would spend even more than the \$716 billion it is spending on the military this year.

The president's suggestion that he can build the wall by declaring a national emergency would likely hinge on a little-known section of the U.S. Code governing the military. Section 2808 gives the defense secretary the authority to undertake military construction projects "not otherwise authorized by law" to support any troops deployed in a national emergency requiring the use of the armed forces.

The law limits the spending in such cases. The Pentagon can draw upon only the money that

Congress has appropriated for military construction projects but which has yet to be committed by contract to projects. These are known as unobligated funds. Sometimes, they are not all spent.

According to a congressional aide, there is about \$10 billion left in unobligated funds for military construction in the current fiscal year's defense budget, in addition to some \$13 billion that has rolled over from previous years. The money, however, has been appropriated for specific projects. This aide, and another one, spoke on the condition of anonymity because they are not authorized to speak publicly about the issue.

The Pentagon's leadership would be forced to decide which of the projects in various stages of completion should see their funds diverted or cut, according to the congressional aide and a defense official. The sorts of projects underway include child care centers on bases and weapons range complexes. Any decision to delay or scrap military construction projects on the home front could rankle local congressional delegations and cause political pain for

lawmakers.

The use of the national emergency powers for military construction theoretically could open up the administration to legal action. The language in the statute allows the defense secretary to order military construction projects deemed necessary to support armed forces deployed in a national emergency. Whether the wall would count as a construction project necessary to support armed forces is unclear.

Steve Vladeck, a professor at the University of Texas Law School, said the National Emergencies Act allows the president to use Pentagon money on construction projects, but he said there are caveats and limits. "It's not an unlimited pool of money, and the construction has to be for a military purpose," he said.

Rep. Adam Smith, D-Wash., chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, said Monday that the president has the legal authority but there's no clear legal history on the matter. "Can he do it?" Smith told CNN. "Yeah, he can. It would be wrong. It would be horrible policy."

## White House says tax refunds will not be delayed

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Taxpayers who are owed refunds will be paid on time despite the government shutdown that has closed many federal agencies, a Trump administration official said Monday as concern mounted over the risk that the payments could be delayed.

The acting director of the White House budget office, Russell Vought, said customary rules will be changed to make the payments possible. He told reporters that an "indefinite appropriation" was available for the refunds, which would go out as normal.

As it dragged through a third week, the partial government

shutdown could not have come at a worse time for the Internal Revenue Service.

Tax-filing season officially begins Jan. 28, and while those who owe Uncle Sam will still have to pay up by April 15, people who are due to receive money back have worried about whether the closure could postpone their payments.

About three-quarters of taxpayers receive annual refunds, giving them an incentive to file their returns early. Many lower-income people count on refunds as their biggest cash infusion of the year.

The IRS said late Monday that it will recall a large number of furloughed employees

to process returns. They will probably work without pay. Under the previous rules, hundreds of billions of dollars in refunds could be delayed because funding would not be available.

Some experts question whether the Trump administration has the legal authority to reverse those earlier policies to allow the government to issue refunds during a shutdown. Vought framed the move as part of President Donald Trump's goal to make the shutdown "as painless as possible."

The administration's announcement came as House Speaker Nancy Pelosi signaled her intention to begin passing individual bills to reopen feder-

al agencies in the coming days, starting with the Treasury Department, which includes the IRS, to ensure Americans receive their refunds.

Some Senate Republicans have been growing increasingly anxious about the extended shutdown and could support such legislation from the Democratic-led House.

With the White House announcement on refunds, "They're reversing a long-standing legal position," said Howard Gleckman, senior fellow and tax expert at the Urban Institute. But, he added, "Who's going to sue? It would be hard to show damages. ... So they might be able to get away with it."



# Mattis' deputy leaves Pentagon

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Retired Rear Adm. Kevin Sweeney, the chief of staff for former Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, resigned Saturday, becoming the most recent of several staff departures at the Pentagon.

"After two years in the Pentagon, I've decided the time is right to return to the private sector. It has been an honor to serve again alongside the men and women of the Department of Defense," Sweeney said in a statement released Saturday.

Sweeney had served under Mattis, who resigned Dec. 20, since January 2017, according to his Defense Department biography.

"The DoD does not have any personnel announcements," Pentagon spokesman Cmdr. Michael Cody said about a potential replacement for Sweeney.

In a series of tweets Sunday, acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan wrote: "I greatly appreciate Kevin Sweeney's service to our nation, first as a Navy officer of more than 30 years, and then as the Chief of Staff for the Secretary of Defense for the past two years. As he steps down to reenter the private sector, we're going to miss him here in the Pentagon. We know great things are in store for him and his family."

Sweeney graduated from the Naval Academy in 1982. He was named commander of the USS Cole in 2001 to oversee its repair and return to the fleet after the Oct. 12, 2000, terrorist attack in Yemen that killed 17 sailors. He retired in 2014.

After his military retirement, Sweeney was the vice president for Track Patch 1 Corp., a start-up that developed "a radio frequency patch to monitor the movements of loved ones afflicted with Alzheimer's dementia," according to his DOD biography.

# N. Korean leader visits China

By KIM GAMEL  
*Stars and Stripes*

SEOUL, South Korea — A week after saying he was ready to meet with President Donald Trump anytime, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un arrived in Beijing on Tuesday for his fourth summit with China's president in a reminder that he has other powerful friends.

The trip, which coincided with Kim's birthday, came days after Trump said the U.S. is negotiating with the North on a venue for a second summit between their countries to try to break a deadlock in nuclear negotiations.

China is North Korea's main ally and trading partner, and the high-profile visit offers him a chance to lobby President Xi Jinping for support in easing U.S.-led sanctions — a major sticking point in talks with Washington.

Kim left for China on Monday on a special train with his wife, Ri Sol Ju, and top officials, including main nuclear negotiator Kim Yong Chol, at Xi's invitation, state-run media reported. China's official Xinhua news agency also confirmed

the visit in a brief dispatch.

A motorcade that included motorcycle escorts was seen Tuesday leaving a Beijing train station shortly after the arrival of the North Korean train.

Kim later met with Xi for about an hour to discuss the possible summit with Trump and ways to strengthen ties, the Yonhap News Agency reported, citing unidentified sources. It said Kim and his wife also apparently attended a dinner hosted by Xi and his wife at the Great Hall of the People.

The third-generation leader, who is believed to have turned 35 on Tuesday, was due to remain in the neighboring country until Thursday.

South Korea, a U.S. ally that has moved toward improving relations with the North despite stalled nuclear talks, expressed hope that meetings between Xi and Kim would "contribute to the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the establishment of lasting peace."

"Particularly, we hope these exchanges between North Korea and China will be a steppingstone to the second Pyongyang-Washington summit," presidential spokesman Kim

Eui-kyeom told reporters.

Trump and Kim reached a vague agreement to work toward the "complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula" during their first meeting on June 12 in Singapore. But talks have since faltered over disagreements about how to accomplish that.

Bonnie Glaser, a senior adviser on Asia at the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies, said both Xi and Kim have an interest in showing solidarity amid delicate negotiations with Washington.

She said Kim is likely to ask Beijing for help in easing U.S.-led economic sanctions as well as advice in dealing with Trump.

"Kim is trying not to put all of his eggs in one basket," she said. "Obviously, showing that he has good relations with others, keeping China on his side and South Korea, to some extent, on his side, I think, is a good play."

"I think from Xi Jinping's point of view, there is a desire to remain relevant on the peninsula, to ensure that China's interests are being protected," she added.

# US ship sails near islands claimed by China

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS  
*Stars and Stripes*

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The USS McCampbell destroyer sailed within 12 nautical miles of the Chinese-claimed Paracel Islands in a freedom-of-navigation mission Monday, a Navy official said.

The exercise was meant to "challenge excessive maritime claims and preserve access to the waterways as governed by international law," 7th Fleet spokesman Cmdr. Clay Doss told Stars and Stripes in an email Tuesday.

China claims the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea as its own, building on and militarizing several of the islands and reefs in the archipelago. Taiwan and Vietnam also claim several of the islands. However, inter-

national law does not recognize their sovereignty.

The patrol sparked complaints from Beijing as Chinese and American officials began talks Monday on ending the trade battle between the two countries.

The Chinese military sent aircraft and a ship "to conduct verification and identification on the U.S. ship" in response to the McCampbell's patrol and "warned it to leave," Beijing's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Lu Kang, told reporters Monday, according to an official English translation of the press conference transcript published by the Defense Ministry.

Chinese officials' "stern" complaints with the United States claimed the McCampbell's action "violated Chinese laws and relevant international

laws, infringed upon China's sovereignty and undermined peace, security and order of the relevant waters," Kang said.

"The Chinese side firmly opposes the relevant action by the U.S. side and urges the U.S. to immediately stop such provocations," he said. "We will continue to take necessary measures to safeguard our national sovereignty and security."

Doss said the patrol was routine and emphasized that "all operations are designed in accordance with international law and demonstrate that the United States will fly, sail and operate wherever international law allows."

"We conduct routine and regular Freedom of Navigation Operations, as we have done in the past and will continue to in the future," he said in the email.



# Woman jailed as teen receives clemency

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Fifteen years after Cyntoia Brown was charged with murder, the woman who says she was a 16-year-old sex trafficking victim when she killed a man in 2004 is no longer under a life sentence.

Following years of national attention from criminal justice advocates, celebrities and politicians calling for mercy — and just days before Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam is to leave office — the governor on Monday granted clemency to Brown, now 30.

“Cyntoia Brown committed, by her own admission, a horrific crime at the age of 16,” Haslam

said in his statement. “Yet, imposing a life sentence on a juvenile that would require her to serve at least 51 years before even being eligible for parole consideration is too harsh, especially in light of the extraordinary steps Ms. Brown has taken to rebuild her life.”

Brown will remain on parole supervision for 10 years on the condition she does not violate any state or federal laws, holds a job and participates in regular counseling sessions.

While law enforcement officials had opposed clemency, arguing Brown was not justified in killing Johnny Allen, 43, celebrities like Kim Kardashian West and singer Rihanna spoke out for Brown. The governor’s

office received thousands of phone calls and emails from supporters.

“Thank you Governor Haslam,” Kardashian West tweeted soon after news of the clemency decision broke. Similar high-profile responses poured in from former Georgia Democratic gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams and actresses Alyssa Milano and Viola Davis.

Brown was convicted in 2006 of murdering Allen, a Nashville real estate agent. Police said she shot Allen in the back of the head at close range with a gun she brought to rob him after he picked her up at a drive-in theater in Nashville to have sex with her.

Brown’s lawyers contended she was a victim of sex trafficking who not only feared for her life but also lacked the mental capacity to be culpable in the slaying because she was impaired by her mother’s alcohol use while she was in the womb.

Brown expressed thanks in a statement released Monday by her legal team.

“I am thankful for all the support, prayers, and encouragement I have received,” she said. “We truly serve a God of second chances and new beginnings. The Lord has held my hand this whole time and I would have never made it without him. Let today be a testament to his saving grace.”

## Senators renew attempt to protect special counsel

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republicans and Democrats on the Senate Judiciary Committee are renewing their attempt to protect special counsel Robert Mueller’s job, sending a signal to President Donald Trump as he keeps up his criticism of Mueller’s Russia investigation.

The legislation, sponsored by incoming Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., and three other members, is expected to be introduced this week. The same bill was approved by the panel in April but later blocked by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who said it was unnecessary and who allowed the legislation to expire at the end of the year.

But there will be more pressure on senators this Congress as Democrats now have the House majority and have already introduced a similar bill.

Graham is a friend and ally of the president’s but has frequently warned him not to mess with Mueller’s job.

“I think this will serve the country well,” Graham said in

a joint statement ahead of the bill’s introduction.

Both Graham and North Carolina Sen. Thom Tillis, the bill’s other Republican sponsor, have said they don’t think Trump will move to have Mueller fired.

“I still believe that is true,” Tillis said in the statement. “However, I also believe this bipartisan legislation is good government policy with enduring value across the current and future administrations.”

The legislation would allow any fired special counsel to seek a judicial review within 10 days of removal and puts into law existing Justice Department regulations that a special counsel can be fired only for good cause. It would also order that staff remain and documents be preserved while the matter is pending.

Democratic Sens. Chris Coons, of Delaware, and Cory Booker, of New Jersey, are also sponsors of the bill.

“This is a time when Republicans and Democrats need to stand up and protect the rule of law in this country,” Coons said in the statement.

## UK won’t extend Brexit deadline

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — The British government on Tuesday ruled out seeking an extension to the two-year period taking the country out of the European Union as Prime Minister Theresa May continued to seek further concessions from the EU ahead of a crucial parliamentary vote next week on her Brexit deal.

In a move that has massive trade, business and political implications, Britain will leave the EU on March 29 when the two-year period that governs the process by which a country can leave the bloc times out, the so-called Article 50 of the EU’s governing treaty.

Without a withdrawal agreement, Britain faces the prospect of crashing out of the bloc on that date with no deal, a development that could see tariffs slapped on British exports to the EU, widespread disruption at ports and shortages of food and pharmaceuticals.

As things stand, May does not appear to have the numbers to win the support of enough lawmakers for the Brexit deal that she forged with the EU last November. That’s raised

concerns of a “no-deal” Brexit and prompted talk of an extension to the two-year process or even another referendum on Britain’s membership of the EU.

“Article 50 will not be extended. We are leaving the EU on the 29th of March this year, because that’s what Article 50 says, that’s what Parliament voted for, and that’s now what domestic British legislation says as well,” Britain’s minister of state for exiting the EU, Martin Callanan, told reporters in Brussels.

Britain can request an extension to the Brexit procedure, but all 27 other EU countries must agree, and the bloc’s leaders said last month that they would need good reasons to prolong it. Officials have said a second Brexit referendum could be one good reason to do so.

May is set to put the deal to lawmakers next week and has been in talks with several EU leaders about fresh guarantees. She postponed a scheduled vote on the deal in December after it became clear she would lose.

# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Fast food employees to strike after assault

**FL** ST. PETERSBURG — A group of Florida fast food workers planned to strike after a female colleague was attacked by a customer.

A video showed Daniel Taylor grabbing Yasmine James' shirt and attempting to pull her over the counter after he asked for a straw at a St. Petersburg McDonald's last week. James hit him several times in the face.

Taylor was charged with two counts of simple battery. Police say he kicked another worker as he was being escorted out.

The group Fight for \$15 said it would strike during the lunch rush Tuesday to demand McDonald's and other fast-food chains protect workers from safety threats.

## Police probe string of restaurant robberies

**NC** GREENSBORO — Police in a North Carolina city are investigating a series of robberies at restaurants or other businesses.

Late Saturday night, Greensboro police said a man with a gun robbed cash from a Dunkin' Donuts and fled. About an hour later, several men with handguns entered a convenience store in an attempted robbery but left empty-handed. About an hour after that, early Sunday, two males with handguns robbed a Pizza Hut delivery driver.

It's not clear if the crimes were connected.

## Police: Boy, 9, helped save his grandfather

**MA** SOMERSET — A 9-year-old boy was being credited for jumping into action as his grandfather

was suffering a life-threatening medical emergency in Massachusetts.

Police said Kazin Crisman was about to get pizza with his grandfather, Allan Crisman, 80, in Somerset on Saturday when the boy noticed something was wrong.

Kazin told WCVB-TV his grandfather was struggling to start the car, and he dialed 911 after his grandfather failed to respond to his questions. Police said Allan Crisman, who is diabetic, was experiencing hypoglycemia, or low blood sugar.

Police bought the boy a pepperoni pizza for his efforts.

## Dispute between dog walkers ends in death

**PA** PHILADELPHIA — Authorities said a dispute between two people who were walking dogs at a Philadelphia park ended when one punched the other, causing a fatal injury.

Police said Drew Justice, 38, and his fiancée were walking their dog at Gold Star Park when Justice asked another man not to let his unleashed dog run free.

The other man became angry and punched Justice in the face, causing him to fall backward and hit his head on the ground.

Justice was taken to a local hospital where he was pronounced dead.

Police spokesperson Jeff Chrusch said authorities were interviewing a person of interest in connection with the assault.

## City to become home to Quidditch team

**MN** MINNEAPOLIS — Minneapolis will soon be home to a major league Quidditch team. The sport was inspired by the "Harry Potter"

book series and is gaining popularity among Muggles around the world.

Minnesota Public Radio reported that the Major League Quidditch expansion team in Minneapolis will hold tryouts in April.

Quidditch began as an intramural sport at a handful of high schools and colleges. More than 500 teams in 39 countries are now trying to emulate the fictional magical sport.

Players run around with poles instead of brooms between their legs while they try to score with a volleyball "quaffle," avoid dodgeball "bludgers" and catch a person acting as the "golden snitch."

## Dogs saved from meat farm adjust to new life

**IN** MUNSTER—Five dogs saved from a South Korean dog-meat farm are finding safety through a northwest Indiana animal shelter.

The (northwest Indiana) Times reported that the pooches are still acclimating to their new surroundings.

They were taken to the Munster-based Humane Indiana shelter in July.

One of the dogs has been adopted. Another is going to a behavioral training program in Pittsburgh. The remaining three are in foster care to prepare them for domestic life.

According to Humane Society International, South Korea is the only Asian country where dogs are regularly farmed as food, though their culinary appeal is dwindling.

## TV news co-anchors announce engagement

**OH** CINCINNATI—Two journalists who co-anchor news broadcasts at a television station in Ohio now

plan to also co-anchor a life together as husband and wife.

The Cincinnati Enquirer reported Sheree Paoello and Mike Dardis, of WLWT-TV in Cincinnati, announced their Dec. 28 engagement on Friday.

The couple said they had immediate chemistry when Dardis joined the broadcast team in 2012 and they started dating in 2017.

## Orchestra member to play alongside teacher

**FL** TAMPA — A 23-year-old recent college graduate landed a coveted spot with the Florida Orchestra, and she's sitting in the most unlikely spot — next to her childhood teacher.

French horn player Kaitlyn Resler beat out nearly 60 other horn players in a blind audition.

She had her first rehearsal with the prestigious orchestra last week and was seated next to Carolyn Wahl, 67. Wahl taught Resler from fourth grade through high school.

Wahl has been a horn player with the orchestra since 1974.

## Couple reunited with engagement ring

**NY** NEW YORK — Police in New York City said they helped a couple ring in the new year by reuniting them with their missing engagement ring.

NBC New York reported the diamond ring was dropped down a sewer grate Thursday near Times Square.

Officers noticed the ring in a grate on Eighth Avenue and 48th Street and recovered it with the help of the FDNY and a police emergency services unit.

From wire reports

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# Clemson routs No. 1 Alabama, claims title

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Dabo Swinney kissed the championship trophy and proclaimed this Clemson team the greatest of all time.

He's got a case.

With stunning ease — and a freshman quarterback — Clemson toppled college football's greatest dynasty again to become the first perfect playoff champion.

Trevor Lawrence passed for 347 yards and three touchdowns and the second-ranked Tigers beat No. 1 Alabama 44-16 on Monday night in the College Football Playoff national championship game.

In the fourth consecutive playoff meeting between the Tigers and Tide, Clemson evened the series and beat 'Bama for the national championship for the second time in three years. Clemson is the first college football team to finish 15-0 since the 1800s, and the first team since the playoff started five seasons ago to get through a season unscathed.

"I mean, our guys had the eye of the tiger, but I'm so proud,

and then for our seniors to be able to go out 15-0 and truly be the best ever — there was a lot of talk about best ever all year long," Swinney said, talking about Alabama. "We were never in that conversation. But tonight, there's no doubt. First 15-0 team, to beat Notre Dame and to beat Alabama to do it, this team won 13 games by 20 points or more and led by an unbelievable group of seniors, amazing group. I'm just thankful to be a part of it."

Alabama coach Nick Saban and the Tide (14-1) were looking for a sixth national championship in 10 years, trying to add to an already unprecedented run in the sport. Instead, Clemson crushed Alabama, becoming the first opponent to beat the Tide by more than 14 points since Saban became coach in 2007.

Swinney's Tigers sealed their status as a superpower, no longer just 1A to Alabama's 1.

"We're 15-0, we beat the best team ever, nobody's taking that away from us," Clemson All-American defensive tackle Christian Wilkins said.

Two seasons ago it was Deshaun Watson dethroning the Tide with a last-second touchdown pass. Clemson's new star quarterback didn't need the late-game heroics. The long-haired Lawrence cut through Alabama's defense with the help of another fabulous freshman. Justyn Ross made a juggling grab, a one-handed snare and broke a 74-yard touchdown about midway through the third quarter that made it 37-16 and had Swinney high-stepping down the sidelines.

Ross, who scored two touchdowns in the semifinal rout of Notre Dame, had six catches for 153 yards against his home-state team.

Swinney takes a different approach than Saban, running a more fun-loving program than Alabama's all-business organization. But the results have been every bit as good. And on Monday night at Levi's Stadium, in a championship game played more than 2,000 miles away from Clemson's South Carolina campus, the Tigers were way too much for an Alabama team that had spent the season maul-

ing its opposition. The Tide won their first 14 games by an average of 31 points.

Alabama's Tua Tagovailoa threw two crucial interceptions in the first half, the first returned 44 yards for a touchdown by A.J. Terrell to put Clemson up 7-0. The Tide came in scoring 48 points per game, but were shut out over the final 44 minutes by an opportunistic Clemson defense.

Saban lamented numerous mistakes: blown coverages on third down (Clemson was 10-for-15), stall-outs in the red zone and special teams mishaps, including a fake field goal that flopped on the first possession of the second half.

He laid the blame on himself. The Alabama program has set a championship-or-bust standard under Saban, but he didn't want this season looked at as a failure.

"One game doesn't define who you are," Saban said. "But I also told the players that sometimes we learn more when things don't go well, when we lose."

## Tigers' big plays key to topping typically solid Tide

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Clemson needed a big performance to unseat defending champion Alabama. The Tigers got plenty of them from start to finish.

From freshman Justyn Ross and Trevor Lawrence on offense to an experienced defensive front and turnover-hungry secondary, Clemson stacked up big play after big play to overwhelm typically unflappable Alabama 44-16 on Monday night for its second national title in three seasons.

"It was more than everything I expected it to be," said Ross, the 6-foot-4 receiver who had six catches for 153 yards.

Ross dazzled the crowd with several acrobatic receptions. His 74-yard catch and run put Clemson ahead 28-16 in the

second quarter while his one-armed grab in the third quarter kept Alabama from getting the ball back and regaining momentum.

"It was unbelievable," he said. "I'm still shocked about everything."

So is defending champion Alabama (14-1), which figured to have more than enough playmakers to up with the Tigers. Instead, it was Clemson that seized every opportunity.

Cornerback A.J. Terrell got it rolling with a 44-yard pick six on Tua Tagovailoa's third pass of the game and Clemson's defense shut down hopes of a Crimson Tide rally with three unlikely stops on downs in the second half.

"That set the tone," Clemson All-American defensive end Clelin Ferrell said of Terrell's TD. "There was no Plan B.

There was no sitting back waiting as a defense. We were just going to try and attack. That's all."

It was an unexpected 'Bama beatdown by the Tigers (15-0), who showed poise, strength on the offensive line and speed on defense to manhandle Nick Saban's Tide.

"We came in with the mindset that we were going to play on the balls of our feet and we were going to attack. And we did. We attacked the whole night," coach Dabo Swinney said.

The two teams swapped big plays early, something of a surprise with the two stout defenses on the field. Lawrence hit Tee Higgins with a 62-yard pass on third-and-14 deep in Tiger territory and Travis Etienne followed with a 17-yard TD run. Tagovailoa's second

interception in the first half, this one by Trayvon Mullen, led to another Clemson score and a 28-16 lead.

In the second half, Ross and the defense took over.

Ross, an Alabama native who spurned his home state school for Clemson, made several outstanding and timely grabs. He broke free for a 74-yard TD catch and run that put the Tigers ahead 37-16. On a third-and-12, Ross grabbed the ball with just his right hand for 37 yards a Tide-deflating first down.

Lawrence said he knew the Tigers were in charge "when Justyn made that crazy catch down there, I said 'We got this. It's over.'"

And Alabama was going nowhere against Clemson when it mattered most.

# Titans' OC LaFleur to take Packers job

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — The Green Bay Packers are turning to fast-rising offensive whiz Matt LaFleur to aid Aaron Rodgers and end a two-year absence from the postseason.

LaFleur accepted an offer Monday to become the next head coach of the Packers, according to a person familiar with the decision. The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because neither the Packers nor the Titans had announced the decision.

The 39-year-old LaFleur spent this season as offensive coordinator for the Titans, his first calling plays in the NFL. He takes over for Mike McCarthy, who was fired during the season following a stunning home loss to Arizona on Dec. 2. Offensive coordinator Joe Philbin went 2-2 to close out the season as the Packers failed to reach the playoffs for the second straight year with a 6-9-1 record.

He was offensive coordinator with the Los Angeles Rams in 2017, leading a group that paced the NFL in scoring and was 10th in total offense under coach Sean McVay, who called the plays on offense. LaFleur

was the quarterbacks coach in Atlanta for two seasons, including when Falcons quarterback Matt Ryan was the NFL MVP in 2016. LaFleur also has coached with Washington and Houston, and was the quarterbacks coach for Notre Dame in 2014.

He will be charged with returning the Packers to the playoffs on a regular basis. McCarthy's tenure of 12-plus seasons was by and large successful, highlighted by the 2010 Super Bowl season and nine playoff appearances.

Still, the once potent offense that could make up for other deficiencies slowed in 2018, a tumultuous year that began with Rodgers leading a stirring comeback victory in the opener over the Bears. The two-time NFL MVP returned after half-time from a left knee injury that nagged him the rest of the season.

Rodgers' 62.3 percent completion rate was his lowest since 2015 (60.7) and his 25 touchdown passes were a low for a season in which he played at least 15 games, though so were his two interceptions. Injuries to Randall Cobb and Geronimo Allison forced the Packers to turn to rookies perhaps earlier

than expected, though Davante Adams emerged as an elite receiver.

The relationship between LaFleur and Rodgers will be closely watched after the sometimes tenuous moments between the star QB and McCarthy. They characterized their relationship as close, but with ups and downs that come with two headstrong competitors who had worked together for more than a dozen years.

The Packers reportedly interviewed several candidates with head-coaching experience, including Philbin, Chuck Pagano, Adam Gase and Jim Caldwell. They instead opted for LaFleur, who had never called plays before this season and until now has never been in charge of an entire roster.

It is just one element of an offseason of change ahead in Green Bay.

Clay Matthews, one of the last remaining links to Green Bay's Super Bowl-winning season, is a free agent after finishing with a career-low 3½ sacks in his 10th season with the Packers but the first under the tweaked 3-4 scheme installed by first-year coordinator Mike Pettine.

Cobb is also a prominent free agent for Green Bay, and

a steady, experienced target for Rodgers — if he returns.

The running game could be a strength next season behind Jamaal Williams and Aaron Jones, who led the NFL in yards per carry before suffering a knee injury in mid-December. The coordinator's job could be in flux, too. Philbin is well-liked by Rodgers and the 16-year NFL coaching veteran won respect from players for his even-keeled and straightforward demeanor in the transition following McCarthy's firing.

Pettine's defense showed flashes in his first year on the job. First-round draft pick Jaire Alexander displayed the potential of playing like the top cornerback the Packers desperately need. Injuries struck the defensive line, which was one of the team's strengths coming into the season, and the Packers lacked a consistent rush at outside linebacker outside of surprise sacks leader Kyler Fackrell (10).

Tennessee has changes coming, too. The Titans went 9-7 and missed the playoffs, ending the season ranked 27th in scoring and 25th in total offense while injuries took a toll.

## NFL: Parkey's field goal attempt was partially blocked

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Cody Parkey got an excuse he probably won't use.

Parkey's missed 43-yard field goal in the final seconds that gave the Philadelphia Eagles a 16-15 upset win over the Chicago Bears in Sunday's wild-card playoff game was officially ruled a block by the NFL.

Video showed Philadelphia's Treyvon Hester tipped the ball, which bounced off the upright and hit the crossbar.

Parkey was booed by Bears fans as he ran off the field after kneeling down with teammates and opponents for a postgame prayer. He accepted responsi-

bility for the loss afterward.

"There's really no answer to it," Parkey said. "I thought I hit a good ball. Unfortunately, I didn't make it. I feel terrible, 100 percent take that loss on me. It is what it is. Sun is going to shine tomorrow. Life is going to go on. Unfortunately, it's going to sting for a while."

Eagles coach Doug Pederson on Monday praised Hester, who began the season on the practice squad, for having "a big hand in the game" and the team posted on Twitter it was the first blocked field goal in the franchise's postseason history.

The Eagles took a one-point

lead when Nick Foles threw a 2-yard touchdown pass to Golden Tate with 56 seconds remaining. Mitchell Trubisky drove the Bears into position to win the game, but Parkey's kick didn't go through. Philadelphia plays at New Orleans on Sunday.

Hester's block should absolve Parkey from blame, though Bears fans certainly won't let him forget it anytime soon. Parkey's teammates stood by him after the game and players around the country quickly expressed their support on social media.

Eagles kicker Jake Elliott wrote: "This is a standup guy

that a lot of young players can look up to. This is how you handle adversity like a pro. Cody is a heck of a kicker and will be for a long time. No reason to be taking the heat he is especially when that ball was tipped. #ClassAct"

The Philadelphia Flyers poked fun at Parkey during Monday night's game against St. Louis. Gritty, the team's googily-eyed mascot, kicked a field goal blindfolded in the stands during a "Cody Parkey Challenge" and fans roared, breaking into the "Fly! Eagles! Fly!" fight song when the missed kick was shown on the video screen.



## NHL roundup

## Binnington earns shutout for St. Louis

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Brayden Schenn and Vladimir Tarasenko scored and Jordan Binnington stopped 25 shots in his first NHL start to lead the St. Louis Blues past the Philadelphia Flyers 3-0 on Monday night in a listless game between two of the worst teams in the league.

The Blues' win gave them 38 points and moved them past Los Angeles out of last place in the Western Conference. Only Ottawa has fewer points than the Flyers (36) in the East after Philadelphia's seventh straight loss. Both teams fired their coaches this season.

Schenn scored his ninth goal of the season on a rebound off Carter Hart's pads 41 seconds into the second period for a 1-0 lead. Tarasenko scored midway through the third to become the 20th active player to score against 30 other teams while playing for one franchise.

Binnington, a third-round

pick in the 2011 draft, made the lead stand and needed to make only eight saves in the third. David Perron scored an empty-netter in the final minutes.

The 25-year-old Binnington had played just two games in mop-up duty this season behind Jake Allen. He was sent to the minors in December to keep fresh and earned three wins with a shutout to earn AHL player of the week honors. He was called up — and got the call to start against the hapless Flyers.

**Predators 4, Maple Leafs 0:** Pekka Rinne made 18 saves for his third shutout of the season and the 54th of his career as visiting Nashville blanked Toronto.

Mattias Ekholm, Kevin Fiala and Colton Sissons each had goal and an assist for Nashville, and P.K. Subban also scored.

Rinne is now tied with Marc-Andre Fleury, Bernie Parent and Ed Giacomin for 21st on the all-time shutout list.

Michael Hutchinson stopped 28 shots for the Maple Leafs, who hit the post three times and had a goal called back for offside.

**Wild 1, Canadiens 0:** Mikael Granlund scored and Devan Dubnyk stopped 32 shots for his first shutout of the season for visiting Minnesota.

The Wild have won three straight games, all on the road.

Carey Price stopped 24 shots for the Canadiens, who have dropped two in a row.

Montreal lost Shea Weber to injury. The Canadiens' captain was hit in the face by a puck while blocking a shot six minutes into the first period. He played seven more shifts in the period, but did not return for the second.

**Flames 4, Blackhawks 3:** Johnny Gaudreau scored two goals, David Rittich made 32 saves and visiting Calgary edged Chicago.

Sean Monahan had a goal and an assist as Western Con-

ference-leading Calgary closed out a 3-1 trip with its second straight win. Garnet Hathaway scored an empty-net goal with 50 seconds left, and Elias Lindholm finished with two assists.

Gaudreau extended his goal-scoring streak to five games.

Patrick Kane had a goal and an assist for the Blackhawks in the opener of a three-game homestand. Alex DeBrincat and Brandon Saad also scored, and Collin Delia made 39 stops.

**Sharks 3, Kings 1:** Erik Karlsson had three assists, Tomas Hertl scored the go-ahead goal midway through the second period and surging San Jose defeated visiting Los Angeles.

Joonas Donskoi and Joe Thornton also scored for San Jose. Martin Jones made 22 saves as the Sharks won their fifth in six games.

Anze Kopitar had a goal and Jack Campbell turned back 26 shots for the Kings, who have lost three of four.

## NBA roundup

## Spurs' Popovich ties Sloan for third in career wins

Associated Press

DETROIT — San Antonio was down eight points when the Spurs took a timeout around the midway point of the first quarter.

Then, after a turnover led to a Detroit dunk, Spurs coach Gregg Popovich called another timeout, 14 seconds after the first.

"Just mental errors, mental errors defensively, and gave them some easy buckets," San Antonio guard Bryn Forbes said. "I don't know if it was to slow the run, but kind of get our head on right — kind of slow their pace there."

The Spurs responded well after those early problems, taking the lead by halftime

and cruising to a 119-107 victory over the Detroit Pistons on Monday night. DeMar DeRozan scored 26 points, and Popovich moved another step higher on the NBA's career wins list.

Popovich now has 1,221 victories. He's tied with Jerry Sloan for third place, trailing only Don Nelson and Lenny Wilkens.

It was the 518th road victory for Popovich, breaking a tie with Nelson for second on that career list. He's now two behind leader Pat Riley.

**Rockets 125, Nuggets 113:** James Harden scored 32 points, and Clint Capela added a career-high 31 as host Houston beat Denver.

P.J. Tucker made a career-

best seven three-pointers and scored a season-high 21 to help Houston win for the 12th time in 14 games.

**Bucks 114, Jazz 102:** Giannis Antetokounmpo had 30 points and Malcolm Brogdon scored 21 to lead host Milwaukee past Utah. Thon Maker added a season-high 15 points off the bench for the Bucks.

**Celtics 116, Nets 95:** Kyrie Irving returned after missing two games with an eye injury and scored 17 points to lead eight players in double figures as Boston beat visiting Brooklyn.

**Pelicans 114, Grizzlies 95:** Anthony Davis had 36 points, 13 rebounds and three blocked shots as host New Orleans pulled away from reeling Mem-

phis down the stretch. Second-year pro Frank Jackson scored a career-high 17 points for the Pelicans.

**Lakers 107, Mavericks 97:** Brandon Ingram scored 29 points and Lonzo Ball added 21 as Los Angeles handed Dallas a rare home loss. The two young Lakers responded to coach Luke Walton's demand for more passion after a blowout loss to Minnesota on Sunday.

**Trail Blazers 111, Knicks 101:** Jusuf Nurkic had 20 points and eight rebounds as Portland beat visiting New York.

**Kings 111, Magic 95:** De'Aaron Fox had 20 points as host Sacramento snapped a four-game losing streak with a victory over Orlando.