

# STARS AND STRIPES®

Thursday, January 2, 2020

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

## Esper: More militia attacks expected in Iraq

By COREY DICKSTEIN

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Mark Esper said Thursday that the Pentagon expects more attacks on American positions in Iraq from the Iran-backed militia forces that attempted to overrun the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad.

“There are some indications out there that they may be planning additional attacks,” Esper told reporters Thursday at the Pentagon. “If that happens, then we will act. And, by the way, if we get word of attacks or some kind of indication, we will take preemptive action to protect American forces — American lives.”

“The game has changed. And, we are prepared to do what is necessary to defend out personnel and our interests and partners.”

U.S. forces are well-positioned in the region to respond to further provocations from the Kataeb Hezbollah militia,

Esper said, blaming the Iranian group for a deadly attack on an American base in northern Iraq’s Kirkuk last week and the breach of the embassy grounds Tuesday. The United States has more than 60,000 troops throughout the Middle East, including some 5,200 in Iraq, as it has increased its presence in the region by some 14,000 troops in recent months following Iranian provocations.

On Tuesday, the militiamen — many waving the yellow flags of Iran-backed Shiite groups known as Popular Mobilization Forces — spent hours tossing Molotov cocktails and rocks at the embassy’s outer walls and chanting anti-American slogans. During the riot, Esper rushed 100 Marines to the Baghdad grounds from Kuwait. Later Tuesday, he ordered about 750 82nd Airborne Division soldiers to Kuwait.

On Thursday, thousands more American troops — including other 82nd soldiers

— remained on alert to deploy, if necessary, a U.S. official said on the condition of anonymity.

Those soldiers could be used to bolster defenses of American positions throughout the Middle East, said Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. For now, the 82nd Airborne Division soldiers who deployed Tuesday remain in Kuwait ready to respond anywhere in the region, he said.

Milley added they could be returned to their home at Fort Bragg, N.C., if tensions die down quickly.

Tuesday’s embassy assault was a response to five American airstrikes Sunday on Kataeb Hezbollah locations in western Iraq and eastern Syria. The strikes, which killed at least 25 militiamen, came after a rocket attack on the U.S.-Iraqi outpost in Kirkuk, which killed a U.S. contractor and injured four American troops and several Iraqis.

Milley called Tuesday’s inci-

dent at the embassy “a show.” The main buildings of the more than 100-acre compound were never threatened, he said, and no evacuation order was given for embassy staff, which include some 50 to 100 U.S. troops.

Esper on Tuesday was critical of the Iraqi government’s relationship with Iran, and urged the country to do more to protect the U.S. Embassy after Iraqi security forces guarding the heavily fortified Green Zone in Baghdad did little to stop militiamen from reaching the compound.

By Thursday, security had tightened, Esper said, adding the United States maintained a good relationship with the Iraqi military.

Despite Iraq’s warning that it would reconsider its relationship with the U.S. military after the Sunday airstrikes, of which it did not approve, Esper said the Iraqi government had given no indication it would ask American troops to leave.

## Ex-SEAL rebrands after being acquitted of war crimes

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS

*Stars and Stripes*

Eddie Gallagher, the former Navy SEAL acquitted this summer of murdering an Iraqi captive, is cashing in on his newfound notoriety with an apparel line.

Gallagher in September 2018 faced 10 charges including premeditated and attempted murder based on accusations that he shot at Iraqi civilians and stabbed a captured teenaged Islamic State fighter to death a year earlier.

He was ultimately convicted of one charge, posing with the teenager’s corpse in a photo he

sent to friends. Gallagher was reduced in rank after his conviction, a decision President Donald Trump reversed.

Now, the square-jawed, tattooed former chief petty officer poses in photos of a different kind: advertisements for his new clothing line through the veteran-owned Nine Line Apparel online store.

Gallagher briefly met Nine Line CEO Tyler Merritt during a deployment. When the news of Gallagher’s prosecution broke, Nine Line reached out to support him and later “came up with the idea of a brand and to create a partnership,” Gallagher said in a statement on the

Nine Line website.

The collaboration created Gallagher’s Salty Frog Gear brand under Nine Line.

The company describes the apparel as “a coastal lifestyle brand with an edge.”

“SFG provides functional, versatile, and affordable apparel solutions for your next outdoor adventure with specialty garments flexible enough for a fishing trip at sea or a weekend afternoon on the range,” the company wrote on its website.

On the website, Gallagher is seen flexing in T-shirts reading “Unleash the Tempest” and “Stay Salty.”

In another photo, he models

a hoodie with a logo featuring a trident, a design similar to the trident pin that SEALs wear, juxtaposed with a star and five stripes. On its right sleeve is a reversed American flag, how service members wear their flag patches in uniform. Its front pocket features a special compartment to hold a beer bottle.

The apparel company is not the only product to which Gallagher is lending his endorsement. His social media pages are also dotted with sponsorships from other veteran-owned businesses, such as Black Rifle Coffee Co.

# USS Abraham Lincoln bound for new home

*The San Diego Union-Tribune*

SAN DIEGO — More than nine months after embarking on what was supposed to be a seven-month round-the-world deployment, the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln is finally on course for its new home port of San Diego.

The ship, which has been operating in and around the Middle East since May, left the region in mid-December and is bound for home.

When the carrier left Norfolk, Va., on April 1, its crew knew it was in for a deployment that was outside the norm. Not only was it deploying to the Middle East, but it also was switching home ports from the East Coast to the West, originally due in San Diego around Halloween. Many Lincoln family members moved across the country over the summer in order for children to start school in time for the new school year.

World events — and mainte-

nance issues on another carrier — led to the ship's mission being extended well beyond its original return date.

In August, the aircraft carrier Harry S. Truman, which was slated to replace the Lincoln in the Middle East, experienced an electrical failure that resulted in an extra three months of repairs. The Lincoln would need to remain on station until relieved.

The delay came at a time of heightened tensions with Iran and a subsequent boost of military resources in the region.

Exacerbating the stress of the deployment was the relative inexperience of the crew, according to Gina Swaim, a command ombudsman for the Lincoln. Ombudsmen serve as liaisons between the ship's commanders and family members.

For many Lincoln families, this deployment is their first. Beginning in 2013, the ship spent four years in the Newport

News shipyards for midlife reactor refueling and maintenance. Almost two years of sea trials and qualifications followed, so by the time it left Virginia in April, many on board had never deployed.

"It's a hard lifestyle," Swaim said. "It's not easy having your loved one be gone, and it's not easy going through the extensions."

Command ombudsmen, Swaim said, helped families connect with Navy resources to help them with relocation, including housing and job searches.

Jaiden Chase married a Lincoln sailor in March — her high school sweetheart, she said — just before the ship left Virginia. She moved to Chula Vista, Calif., at the end of the summer.

"I didn't start the process until August," Chase said. "House searching by myself, it was kind of stressful — you want to make sure you make

the right decision."

Cmdr. Ron Flanders, a spokesman for Naval Air Forces in San Diego, said a new Navy deployment model — Dynamic Force Employment — means that less predictable deployments will become more routine.

"The length of this deployment is not ideal or something that's going to become a regular thing, (but) they are not going to be as predictable as they were in the past," Flanders said. "In the case of the Abraham Lincoln, it was extended due to circumstances related to maintenance and availability, but as a rule, going forward ... our crews and their families should, prior to deployment, discuss the possibility of something like this."

Navy officials would not comment on when the Lincoln will arrive in San Diego but it is expected sometime this month.

## Army next to ban TikTok from military devices

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Army has banned the use of TikTok, a popular video app, on government phones, following a similar ban by the Navy amid growing concerns about its potential security risks to users.

The app, which allows users to share short videos, is owned by ByteDance, a Chinese company. The Army is following guidance from a Defense Department cybersecurity awareness message issued Dec. 16 that "identifies TikTok as having potential security risks associated with its use," Lt. Col. Robin Ochoa, an Army spokeswoman, said in a statement.

The Army's ban only applies to government phones, according to Lt. Col. Crystal Boring, an Army spokeswoman.

The DOD guidance rec-

ommends that TikTok be uninstalled so that personal information is not exposed to "unwanted actors," Lt. Col. Uriah Orland, a Pentagon spokesman, said in a statement.

"The Department of Defense generally does not provide policy on individual social media platforms, but routinely issues guidance to proactively address existing and emerging threats," he said.

Two weeks ago, the Naval Network Warfare Command directed sailors not to download TikTok on government mobile devices, including phones and tablets, citing "cybersecurity threat assessments," Cmdr. David Benham, a spokesman for U.S. Fleet Cyber Command and U.S. 10th Fleet, said in a statement.

In the past several months, Congress has raised concerns about the app's potential risk to

national security.

In a letter dated Oct. 24 to acting Director of National Intelligence Joseph Maguire, Sens. Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., and Tom Cotton, R-Ark., requested that the intelligence community conduct an assessment on the risks posed by TikTok and other China-based social media platforms that are used in the U.S.

"Security experts have voiced concerns that China's vague patchwork of intelligence, national security, and cybersecurity laws compel Chinese companies to support and cooperate with intelligence work controlled by the Chinese Communist Party," the letter stated.

In November, Schumer also sent a letter to Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy about his concern regarding the use of TikTok and other content plat-

forms by Chinese companies to target and reach young Army recruits.

"While I recognize that the Army must adapt its recruiting techniques in order to attract young Americans to serve, I urge you to assess the potential national security risks posed by China-owned technology companies before choosing to utilize certain platforms," he wrote.

In response to congressional concerns, TikTok released a statement Oct. 24 that its U.S. user data is stored in the U.S. with a backup in Singapore, and it denied that its data is subject to Chinese law.

Officials for the Marine Corps and the Air Force did not respond Tuesday to questions about whether the services also are taking actions to stop the use of TikTok.



# Navy vet takes a run at suicide prevention

By JOHN VANDIVER

*Stars and Stripes*

STUTTGART, Germany — Navy veteran Dustin Johnson was in despair.

He was already struggling with his transition into civilian life, and a fire burned his Missouri home to the ground in January 2019. It was the final straw for Johnson, who said he attempted suicide in the aftermath of the blaze.

"I lost everything that I owned, and that was like my rock bottom," Johnson said.

A year later on New Year's morning, the 25-year-old began an attempt at setting a record for the longest nonstop journey on foot — a 420-mile sleepless trek from Stuttgart to Berlin that will take about six days to finish. The endurance test is just one part of a broader effort by Johnson to raise awareness about preventing veteran suicides by running extraordinary

distances.

Since April, Johnson also has been on a quest to become the first American to circumnavigate the globe on foot. So far, he's run more than 6,000 miles. When he is finished, the trip will add up to 16,400 miles across four continents. He estimates that his run, which will end in his home state of Missouri, will be completed by late November.

He averages about 30 miles of running per day and has already completed a stretch across part of the U.S. and South America and is now crossing Europe. After that, he will run across New Zealand and Australia before finishing in the western part of the U.S.

In Germany, Johnson, a former Navy plane captain responsible for making sure aircraft were fit for flight, has been joined for parts of his run by members of the military community. In Kaiserslautern

and Stuttgart, he's also met with troops to talk about suicide awareness.

The suicide rate among veterans is about 1.5 times the rate of those who never served in the military, according to Department of Veterans Affairs data.

"It was pretty inspirational in terms of someone who hit his low and found a way to turn his life around in a year. And then to put all that toward bringing awareness to suicide, particularly veteran suicide, it is pretty incredible," said Stuttgart garrison commander Col. Jason W. Condrey, who was part of a group of Americans gathered at Stuttgart's Killesberg Park on Wednesday morning to see Johnson off to Berlin.

Many military members have connected with Johnson during his journey — the Facebook page Dustin Johnson's World Record Run posts regular updates on his journey.

Johnson said he often hears directly from veterans who share stories about their struggles.

Johnson said that during his own physical struggles on the road, what keeps him going is the idea of other veterans who are having a hard time.

"I put a lot pressure on myself. People can see me doing this. If I was looking at somebody when I was going through my hard time, and saw them give up, it would make me feel even worse," Johnson said. "If I quit, then they may quit."

The drive to run around the world traces back to a childhood dream when Johnson first heard stories about a small group of runners who completed the world run. After his suicide attempt last year, a doctor suggested he put his talent for running to use, Johnson said. That's when the idea of attempting the world run came together in his mind.

## Navy chief pleads guilty to child sexual abuse

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — A Navy chief petty officer has been confined to the Pearl Harbor brig after pleading guilty to charges of child sexual abuse and possessing child pornography, according to a Navy spokeswoman.

Matthew Lee Richardson, a cryptologic technician (collection) at U.S. Pacific Fleet, pleaded guilty at a Dec. 10 court-martial to two counts of sexual abuse of a child and one count for possessing child pornography, according to Lydia Robertson, a spokeswoman for Navy Region Hawaii.

A redacted charge sheet from Navy Region Hawaii states that between October 2018 and March 2019 on Oahu, Richardson encouraged a child

younger than 16 years old "to take her underwear off and walk around the room." The charge sheet also states that in March he intentionally touched the genitalia and buttocks of a child younger than 16 years old "with an intent to gratify his sexual desire."

Richardson was sentenced to eight years of confinement, a reduction in rank to E-1, and a dishonorable discharge by military judge Capt. Ann Minami, Robertson said.

As part of a pre-trial agreement, Richardson's confinement was reduced to five years. Where Richardson, 37, will serve the bulk of his confinement has not been determined, Robertson said.

Upon his release, Richardson will be required to register as a sex offender.

## Navy's 2nd Fleet command is now fully operational

*Stars and Stripes*

The Navy's 2nd Fleet, reestablished to counter Russia in the north Atlantic, has reached "full operational capability," the Navy said.

The Norfolk, Va.-based unit, which operated from 1950 until 2011, was reestablished in 2018.

Second Fleet is now responsible for overseeing ships, aircraft and landing forces on the East Coast and the north Atlantic, reaching up into the Arctic.

"Combined with the opening of waterways in the Arctic, this competitive space will only grow, and 2nd Fleet's devotion to the development and employment of capable forces will ensure that our nation is both present and ready to fight in the region if and when called upon," Vice Adm. Andrew Lewis, 2nd Fleet commander,

said in a statement Tuesday.

Achieving full operational capability means that 2nd Fleet can sustain command and control over its assigned forces. They work with the forces and ships belonging to other fleets as they maneuver through 2nd Fleet's area of responsibility.

The fleet's main focus is on forward operations and "the employment of combat ready naval forces in the Atlantic and Arctic," the Navy said.

In a sign of how the High North has grown in strategic significance, 2nd Fleet in September established a Maritime Operations Center in Keflavik, Iceland, where 30 staff members now are based.

As ice melts in the Arctic, there is the potential for new shipping lanes in the region and greater competition for resources between allies and Russia.

# Border medical plan is set for immigrants

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. Customs and Border Protection on Tuesday formalized a medical plan formed in the wake of a massive surge of migrant families to the U.S.-Mexico border and a series of deaths in immigration custody.

The goal was to increase medical care and efficiency. According to the directive, the codified plan includes a sustainable proposal for triage, plus screenings for respiratory systems, instructions to isolate sick migrants to prevent the spread of disease, vaccines for staff and a supply of face masks and hand sanitizer. More than 500 medical professionals are on contract to help administer care.

The outcry over medical care began when two children died in Border Patrol custody in December 2018, followed by the deaths of others this year. A year later, Homeland Security's watchdog found no misconduct or wrongdoing in the deaths of the two Guatemalan children, a 7-year-old girl and an 8-year-old boy.

At the height of the crisis, tens of thousands of migrant families crossed into the U.S. and were held in cramped, overcrowded conditions. A flu outbreak in May sickened more than 30 migrants. A 16-year-old boy died from the illness, and video later obtained by ProPublica showed the teen collapsed on the floor for hours, alone, before he died. The video threw into question Border Patrol's version of the teen's death.

An investigation is ongoing.

Over the budget year that ended Sept. 30, there were 859,510 apprehensions by Border Patrol, plus an additional 110,000 encounters of people who tried to enter legally but were deemed inadmissible. There were nearly 1 million crossings from the early 2000s, but those were mostly single men from Mexico who were easily returned, not families from Central America who require much more care.

Immigration officials were involved in more than 20,000 hospital visits this year.

Homeland Security worked with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on creating and implementing recommendations. The department set a goal of formalizing the policies by the end of the year.

## Recreational marijuana now legal in Illinois

Associated Press

CHICAGO — The sale of marijuana for recreational purposes became legal Wednesday in Illinois to the delight of pot fans — many who began lining up hours early at dispensaries.

About 500 people were outside Dispensary 33 in Chicago. Renzo Mejia made the first legal purchase in the shop shortly after 6 a.m., the earliest that Illinois' new law allowed such sales.

"To be able to have (recreational marijuana) here is just mind-boggling," Mejia told the Chicago Sun-Times after buying an eighth of an ounce called

"Motorbreath."

Illinois already allowed medical marijuana, but it is now the 11th state to allow its use and sale for recreational purposes. The law approved by the Democratic-controlled Legislature and signed by Democratic Gov. J.B. Pritzker allows people 21 or older to possess up to 1.06 ounces of cannabis flower and up to 0.17 ounces of cannabis concentrate.

Pamela Althoff, executive director of the Springfield-based Cannabis Business Association of Illinois, told The Associated Press that she spent much of Wednesday morning in Chicago and the city's northwestern

suburbs. She said wait times of up to three hours were getting shorter as the day progressed.

"It has been joyous and well-run," she said. "People are extraordinarily courteous and civil."

Police were on-hand at most shops mostly to control traffic.

Althoff cautioned that recreational marijuana may not be consumed in public and added that like all new products, it may be a little expensive.

"We hope that down the line it will become less expensive," she said. "The message from the industry is not promoting or opposing, it's the state of Illinois made it legal and we're here to

provide a safe and a quality product for those who wish to consume. We encourage our customers to be responsible."

Mary Yazel-Muska, 65, told the Chicago Tribune that she planned to celebrate her purchase from a dispensary in suburban Mundelein with champagne and edibles at home with her boyfriend.

"I'm a responsible human being," Yazel-Muska said. "I own a home. I worked for a bank as a fraud investigator for 20 years. I rescue dogs. I volunteer. I take care of my 93-year-old mother. It's not like we're all a bunch of hippies."

## Trump suggests temporary ban on some vape flavors

Associated Press

PALM BEACH, Fla. — President Donald Trump said Tuesday that the federal government will soon announce a new strategy to tackle underage vaping, promising, "We're going to protect our families, we're going to protect our children, and we're going to protect the industry."

Trump was vague about what the plan would entail, but suggested "certain flavors" in cartridge-based e-cigarettes would be taken off the market

"for a period of time."

The Wall Street Journal reported Tuesday that the Food and Drug Administration would ban the sale of most flavored e-cigarettes, such as those sold by Juul and NJOY. E-cigarette pods formulated to taste like tobacco or menthol would still be allowed.

The Journal also reported that tank-based vaping systems, which are less popular among teenagers, would still allow users to custom-mix fla-

vors. The Journal report cited anonymous "people familiar with the matter."

In September, Trump and his top health officials said they would soon sweep virtually all flavored e-cigarettes from the market because of their appeal to young children and teens. But that effort stalled after vaping lobbyists pushed back and White House advisers told Trump the ban could cost him votes with adults who vape.

Beginning in May, all e-cig-

arettes will need to undergo FDA review. Only those that can demonstrate a benefit for U.S. public health will be permitted to stay on the market.

On Tuesday, Trump suggested a ban of flavored e-cigarettes might be temporary. "Hopefully, if everything's safe, they're going to be going very quickly back onto the market," he told reporters at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida, where he was hosting a New Year's Eve party.



# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Sex offender's name change denied by court

**MN** MINNEAPOLIS — A man indefinitely committed as a sexual predator can't rename himself "Better Off Dead" even when he claims he's doing it for religious reasons, the Minnesota state Court of Appeals ruled.

Hollis John Larson has been committed since 2008 as a sexually dangerous person under the Minnesota Sex Offender Program that allows for indefinite confinement for predators.

Larson "professes a religious belief involving Hinduism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Agnosticism," the court said. His desired name change is "in accordance with that religious belief and to express his freedom of speech."

A three-judge panel of the state Court of Appeals agreed with a lower court ruling denying the name change in part because "Better Off Dead" is an idiomatic expression, contains no pronouns and is "inherently misleading."

## Firefighters: Naked man tried to douse house fire

**AZ** CAVE CREEK — Fire department officials in Arizona responding to a house fire in Cave Creek found a naked man on the roof with a garden hose.

Flames were coming from the roof of the two-story house and a man who lives at the home was on the roof, KPHO-TV reported.

The naked man initially refused to come down, and when he did, he tried to run back into the burning home, Rural Metro Fire Department officials said.

Fire crews fought the fire for more than two hours before it was brought under control.

## Graceland plans auction for Presley's birthday

**TN** MEMPHIS — Elvis Presley's Graceland plans an auction of artifacts to be held during the late entertainer's 85th birthday celebration Jan. 8.

All the items up for auction come from third party collectors but have been thoroughly researched and certified by Graceland Authenticated, according to a news release from Elvis Presley Enterprises Inc. The mansion and all artifacts in the Graceland Archives continue to be owned by Lisa Marie Presley and are not for sale.

The 288 artifacts include a golf cart, clothing, jewelry, autographs, concert memorabilia and Hollywood items.

## 'Breaking Bad' store to cater to fans of series

**NM** ALBUQUERQUE — A store will open in Albuquerque that will cater to fans of the AMC-TV hit series "Breaking Bad."

A co-owner of The Breaking Bad Store ABQ said local artists have been commissioned to create unique items inspired by the long-running series and its cast of characters.

The store's grand opening is Jan. 4.

"Breaking Bad" followed an Albuquerque high school chemistry teacher turned meth lord, Walter White, who was played by Bryan Cranston.

## Boy, 6, rescued after falling through ice

**ME** SCARBOROUGH — A 6-year-old boy who fell through the ice on a frozen pond was rescued by a neighbor who pulled him to safety, officials said.

The boy, who sunk to his waist in icy water and was shivering, was taken to a hospital for treatment for mild hypothermia, but his rescuer did not need medical treatment, Scarborough Fire Capt. Nate Contreras said.

The boy had been playing with friends at the edge of the pond when he ventured onto the ice and broke through, Contreras said.

## Loop Trolley breaks down on final ride

**MO** UNIVERSITY CITY — The Loop Trolley's star-crossed 13-month run has ended, with a breakdown on the final ride.

The trolley that operates on a 2.2-mile route in St. Louis and University City is ceasing operation. It broke down in front of Peacock Diner on its final run, stranding riders for 45 minutes.

The trolley has faced numerous mechanical problems since it started operating in late 2018.

## Police: Man threw knife during road rage incident

**MA** AUBURN — Massachusetts State Police arrested a Connecticut man they said threw a knife through the open window of another vehicle during a road rage incident, striking and injuring two people.

Two vehicles were traveling on the Massachusetts Turnpike in Auburn when one cut off the other, police said in a statement.

The folding pocket knife entered an open window, striking the 22-year-old man driving, and a 23-year-old woman in the passenger seat. Both sustained minor injuries.

A state trooper caught up with

the other driver, Joshua Garey, 26, of Wethersfield, Conn., and charged him with assault and battery with a dangerous weapon and other offenses.

## Police: Dead geese, ducks found in bags

**OR** CLOVERDALE — Authorities are searching for information after three garbage bags full of the remains of ducks and geese were found near the Oregon coast.

Oregon State Police said in a release that a person walking their dog near the Neskutumpah River in Tillamook County reported the gruesome discovery.

Eight geese and five ducks were found in the garbage bags, with the breast meat removed from three of the geese.

## Cat reunited with owner 2 years after hurricane

**FL** TAMPA — A cat that went missing two years ago in Florida during Hurricane Irma has been reunited with its owner.

The Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office tweeted that the cat showed up at one of its offices in the Tampa area and deputies were hoping to find the owner.

"The cat seems very domesticated, and may be from a house or apartment nearby," deputies posted.

The sheriff's office said that the owner had been traced via microchip after deputies took the cat to a local veterinarian. The sheriff's office didn't identify Eva's owner but said the cat went missing during the 2017 hurricane whose path cut through the middle of Florida.

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](http://www.stripes.com/apps).

# Texans' path paved by Watson's drive

Associated Press

Deshaun Watson doesn't remember a time when he wasn't competing.

Whether it was trying to outrun his older brother while taking out the trash as a child or running away from defenders during a game of flag football, he had the same mentality.

"It's definitely in my DNA to go out there and compete and try to win in everything I do," Watson said.

Years later, the Houston Texans quarterback has maintained that same mindset, and when you ask almost anyone about him that's one of the first things they'll bring up. As the Texans prepare to host the Buffalo Bills in the first round of the playoffs on Saturday, coach Bill O'Brien reminisced about his early interactions with Watson and when he knew he was special.

"He's a winner, cares about winning, will do whatever it takes to win," O'Brien said. "That came across in the first two meetings, so I would say it was way before he got here and on the practice field."

As O'Brien has gotten to know

Watson better and watched him lead the Texans, he's only become more impressed with him.

"He's got great poise," O'Brien said. "Anybody that's been around him for a long time, (knows) he doesn't have any fear. He has a lot of fun playing, you see the smile on his face, he loves playing football and he loves being out there with his teammates."

Watson takes great pride in being a leader and knows how he carries himself will rub off on the rest of the team and impact how others perform.

"You're the face of the franchise and everyone is looking (at) you," he said. "So regardless if you're down, if you're up, you're facing that adversity (or) you're having success too, people want to still see that fight and that will to continue to finish what you started and try to win the game or what you're competing in. Everyone is going to follow that and everyone will see it."

Receiver DeAndre Hopkins loves that quality in Watson and thinks that's one of the reasons why he's so successful.

"Everybody in this locker room, offense and defense, feeds off of his game and how he never feels like we're out of a game no matter what the score is," Hopkins said. "He's a winner. He's won his whole career and it shows every day in everything he does."

Watson has a penchant for shining in the biggest moments. He did it when he helped Gainesville High School to a Georgia state title and at Clemson when he led the Tigers to a national championship in the 2016 season. Watson has continued that success with the Texans, where he's helped them to consecutive AFC South titles and had some of his biggest games when Houston was playing in prime time.

But in perhaps the biggest game of his NFL career, Watson came up short. Last season in his playoff debut Watson threw an interception and struggled to move the offense effectively in a 21-7 loss to the Indianapolis Colts.

He believes the experience in that game will help him on Saturday when he gets another chance to notch his first post-

season win.

"Just knowing that ... the game is going to go by faster, the plays, the players play a little bit faster than the regular season. Everything just speeds up," he said. "So, just being able to be prepared and see how the energy and everything changes in a playoff game, it really helps out to get that firsthand look last year. I know it didn't go our way, but we've got another opportunity this year."

He has thrown for 3,852 yards with 26 touchdowns and 12 interceptions and has run for 413 yards with seven more scores this season. Watson, who sat out last week with Houston's playoff spot set, threw five interceptions in his last three games played after only being picked off twice in Houston's previous five games. He said those miscues are a big reason the offense hasn't been as powerful recently.

"My turnovers," he said. "That's pretty much it ... if I don't turn two balls over in Tennessee that's 14 extra points and who knows how the game goes. It's something that we corrected."

## Pats' D, Titans' offense and defense shine in red zone

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — With a few exceptions, the Patriots' defense demoralized opposing offenses this season by limiting big plays and opportunities in the red zone.

It will face a Titans offense in Saturday's wild-card round that was the best in the league in both categories.

Tennessee comes into the postseason with one of the NFL's hottest offenses. Quarterback Ryan Tannehill led the NFL with a career-best 117.5 passer rating. He joined Sammy Baugh and Joe Montana as the only quarterbacks to complete at least 70% of their passes (70.3%) and average at least 9 yards per pass attempt (9.6).

The Titans also forced defenses to keep tabs on running back Derrick Henry, who had a league-best 1,540 rushing yards to pace the league's third-ranked rushing offense (138.9 yards per game).

The efficiency of Tannehill and Henry helped open up the field for a unit that was tops in the league with nine plays that went for 50 yards or more and scored touchdowns on a league-best 75.6% of its trips inside the 20-yard line.

Tennessee only had 45 drives in the red zone this season, ranking 25th in the league. But when the Titans get there, Patriots coach Bill Belichick said they showed an ability to get into the end zone in multiple ways.

"They do a good job of getting the ball to everybody and they have, obviously, the best running game in the league," Belichick said. "When you combine those two things and the quarterback — the quarterback can move down there, too. But, honestly, they've skipped over the red area a lot."

The Patriots have allowed only three passing plays of more than 50 yards this season, but safety Devin McCourty said

players such as Titans rookie receiver A.J. Brown have shown a unique ability to turn plays such as reverses or short catches into big gains.

"Obviously, they've got a lot of guys that can beat you vertical. But you watch them, it's a quick slant or a slim post and A.J. Brown catches it, now he breaks a tackle and now you're trying to catch a guy that you're not going to catch," McCourty said.

Brown has four touchdown catches of at least 50 yards this season, joining Isaac Curtis (five in 1973), Willie Gault (four in 1983) and Hall of Famer Randy Moss (five in 1998) as the only rookies with at least four such TDs since the merger.

In addition to players such as Brown and Henry, McCourty said they'll also have to account for tight end Jonnu Smith, who had a 57-yard run against Houston in Week 15 and caught a 41-yard TD pass in Week 16 against New Orleans.



# Ducks look to build on Rose Bowl win

Associated Press

PASADENA, Calif. — Justin Herbert scored his third rushing touchdown of the 106th Rose Bowl on a thrilling 30-yard run with 7:41 to play Wednesday night, and No. 7 Oregon held off No. 11 Wisconsin 28-27 to win its third straight trip to the Granddaddy of Them All.

Brady Breeze returned a fumble 31 yards for an early touchdown for the Ducks (12-2). Herbert then made his go-ahead rambling run on the next snap after Breeze forced another fumble.

As long as Mario Cristobal is coaching at Oregon, his players say greater success is possible.

“The best thing Oregon football has ever done is hire Coach Cristobal as their head coach because I feel like this football team embodies everything that he’s about,” senior left guard Shane Lemieux said. “And he’s bringing in these offensive and de-

fensive linemen that are SEC-type and are physical football players, and I think he’s changing the Pac-12 with the way he coaches, the way he recruits, because we play a different way. And you’re seeing it.”

The changes at Oregon are a reflection of Cristobal’s personality, background and experience.

As an offensive lineman at Miami, he played on two national championship teams. After an up-and-down stint as head coach at Florida International, Cristobal worked as an assistant under Nick Saban at Alabama, where he was a key cog in a relentless recruiting machine.

In his two seasons at Oregon, Cristobal has stressed the need to dominate up front and has worked tirelessly to bring in the caliber of players to fulfill that goal.

The early results of that aim were on the Rose Bowl field in freshman defensive end Kayvon Thibodeaux and sophomore left tackle Penei Sewell. Thibodeaux, the top

player in the 2019 recruiting cycle and a Los Angeles native, had one tackle against Wisconsin but pressured quarterback Jack Coan on several key third downs. Sewell anchored a line that did not allow a sack.

Wisconsin dominated the game statistically, including holding the ball for more than 38 minutes, but Oregon was able to assert itself up front in the critical moments.

Thibodeaux said the ability to execute when the game was on the line was a reflection of the atmosphere Cristobal has instilled.

“It’s different,” Thibodeaux said. “It’s the mentality, the culture, everything is different.”

The Ducks signed another touted recruiting class, including the top player in California for the second straight year in linebacker Justin Flowe. That influx of talent should keep even established veterans locked in during spring practice, summer workouts and training camp.

## Johnson lifts Minnesota over Auburn in Outback

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — With the clock winding down on a dominating performance in the Outback Bowl, Minnesota fans broke into a chant of “Row The Boat, Row The Boat, Row The Boat.”

The never-give-up mantra coach P.J. Fleck used to help change the culture of Golden Gophers football continues to inspire a program determined to recapture its glory days.

“We challenged everyone of our players, you want to be a blue blood you’ve got to beat the blue bloods,” Fleck said Wednesday after No. 16 Minnesota beat No. 9 Auburn 31-24 in a game that wasn’t as close as the final score.

“We used to be a blue blood back in the ’30s, ’40s, ’50s and ’60s,” Fleck added. “We’ve talked about the word of the year is restore. We want to restore that tradition.”

Tyler Johnson had 12 receptions for 204 yards and two touchdowns to become the Gophers’ career receiving leader and Minnesota outrushed the

Tigers 215 yards to 56 while dominating time of possession.

“We didn’t overlook them. I think our guys were ready to play. I think our guys played hard but they made the plays, we didn’t,” Auburn coach Gus Malzahn said.

Johnson broke Eric Decker’s school record for receiving yards on his second catch of the day and became Minnesota’s all-time leader for scoring receptions on a one-handed, 2-yard TD catch that put the Gophers (11-2) up 24-17 at halftime. The senior’s 73-yard catch-and-run put his team ahead for good early in the fourth quarter.

“Coach Fleck says all the time, that this program is going up, and as you see today it’s definitely going in the right direction,” Johnson said. “Just having the right guys in the locker room is very important and everyone buying in.”

Minnesota finished with more than 10 wins for the first time since 1904. Auburn (9-4) concluded a season in which all four of its losses came against opponents in the Top 25.

## Bowl roundup

## Tide swamps Michigan

Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — Mac Jones threw three touchdown passes, Jerry Jeudy became the first Alabama player to top 200 receiving yards in a bowl game and the ninth-ranked Crimson Tide topped No. 17 Michigan 35-16 on Wednesday in the Citrus Bowl.

Jones connected with Jeudy for an 85-yard score on Alabama’s first snap, DeVonta Smith and Miller Forristall added touchdown grabs in the second half for the Crimson Tide (11-2), which trailed 16-14 at the break. Najee Harris ran for 136 yards and two touchdowns for Alabama.

Jeudy finished with six catches for 204 yards. His previous career-high for yards was 147 set last season against Missouri, and the Alabama bowl record had stood for more than a half-century — Ray Perkins had 178 yards against Nebraska in the 1967 Sugar Bowl.

Jones — who took over as Alabama’s starter when Tua Tagovailoa was lost for the sea-

son with an injury in November — completed 16 of 25 passes for 327 yards.

Tagovailoa said on Twitter that he will announce Jan. 6 whether he will enter the NFL draft or return to college for another season.

**No. 5 Georgia 26, No. 8 Baylor 14:** Georgia freshman receiver George Pickens left behind his regrettable ending to the regular season and put the rest of college football on notice that he will be an exceedingly tough cover in 2020.

Pickens caught 12 passes for 175 yards and a touchdown in a Sugar Bowl win Wednesday in New Orleans.

**Navy 20, Kansas State 17:** Bijan Nichols kicked a 23-yard field goal with two seconds remaining and the No. 21 Midshipmen capitalized on a fourth-down gamble in the final minute in the Liberty Bowl on Tuesday.

A Navy team with the nation’s top-ranked rushing attack set up the winning score by completing a halfback option pass with less than 30 seconds left.

# Stars rally, down Preds in Winter Classic

Associated Press

DALLAS — Dallas Stars interim coach Rick Bowness had just seen a very similar comeback by his team, though the surroundings for this one were drastically different.

While pigs raced during timeouts next to the outdoor rink, which was built in the middle of a historic football stadium and framed to appear as if it was under an oversized ranch entry, the Stars scored four goals in a span of just under eight minutes in a 4-2 win Wednesday over the Nashville Predators in an NHL Winter Classic that felt like a state fair.

Well, it was played at the site of the annual State Fair of Texas, with the rides and games on the midway open just outside Cotton Bowl Stadium known for hosting big football games.

“Let’s look at it from two sets of eyes. From a coaching perspective, we won the game. We battled back. We survived those early penalties and the guys kept battling and believing and doing what was necessary to get us back in the game” Bowness said.

“From a fan’s perspective, that was great

hockey,” he said. “If I was out there watching that game and I was watching us on television, that was an awesome game. The whole thing was awesome.”

Alexander Radulov scored the tiebreaking goal on a one-timer with just under 15 minutes left and Andrej Sekera quickly added another goal for Dallas, which was down 2-0 after an extended Predators power play in the opening minutes when Stars forward Corey Perry got a game misconduct and was ejected for an elbow to the head of defenseman Ryan Ellis.

“It was an awkward play. It was very unintentional,” Perry said after the game. “I didn’t mean to do it. I hope he’s OK.”

Dallas reached the midpoint of its 82-game regular season with its third win in a row and in third place in the Western Conference. The Stars also overcame a 2-0 deficit in their previous game, with four goals in the third period of a 4-2 win at Arizona on Sunday.

Nashville has lost three in a row, and is 11th in the West after making the playoffs last season — and losing in a six-game, first-round series against Dallas.

“You’re involved in a game like this and you want a different outcome so that

you can really take the day in for what it’s worth,” Predators coach Peter Laviolette said.

The Stars got their first goal with 1:08 left in the second period, when Jason Dickinson skated around the back of the net and passed across the front of goalie Pekka Rinne to Blake Comeau for the shot that made it 2-1. Dallas then scored three goals in a short span to start the third period before 85,630, the second-largest crowd to attend an NHL game.

“It was awesome. You don’t really know what to expect when you walk out for the start of the game, but the atmosphere, the fans, everything they had going on with the fireworks, the flyover, everything, was just awesome,” Comeau said. “It was nice to have a Texas feel.”

Radulov scored from the right circle on a power play, and Mattias Janmark had a goal and an assist in the third. John Klingberg assisted on both power-play goals to start the third before Sekera’s first goal in nearly three years.

The Predators led 2-0 after Matt Duchene scored a goal and assisted on another by Dante Fabbro after Perry’s penalty.

## NBA roundup

# Knicks best Blazers, spoil Carmelo’s return

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Mitchell Robinson made all 11 shots and had 22 points, Julius Randle added 22 points and 13 rebounds, and the New York Knicks spoiled Carmelo Anthony’s return to Madison Square Garden by beating the Portland Trail Blazers 117-93 on Wednesday night for their season-high third straight victory.

Anthony scored 26 points, his most since returning to the NBA, and was cheered before and during the game at the arena where he played 6½ seasons. But he was on the bench at the start of the Knicks’ 14-0 run early in the fourth quarter that broke open the game.

Reggie Bullock made two three-pointers during the spurt and scored 11 points in his Knicks debut. He signed with

the team during the summer but hadn’t played because of a herniated disk.

Portland’s Damian Lillard was held to 11 points on 5-for-20 shooting after scoring 30 or more in the previous three games. The All-Star guard did have 10 rebounds and eight assists, but he missed his first six three-pointers before making his only one of the game as the final shot of the third quarter.

**Lakers 117, Suns 107:** LeBron James had 31 points, 13 rebounds and 12 assists for his eighth triple-double of the season, Anthony Davis had 26 points and 11 rebounds, and West-leading Los Angeles beat visiting Phoenix.

James had double-figure points and assists by halftime as the Lakers won their third straight.

The Suns rallied in the fourth,

getting within seven points after trailing by 36 earlier in the game. That forced the Los Angeles starters back in, and James steadied them with eight points to close out the win.

Devin Booker scored 32 points and Kelly Oubre Jr. added 26 for Phoenix. The Suns had won two in a row after losing eight straight.

**Magic 122, Wizards 101:** D.J. Augustin scored a season-high 25 points, Nikola Vucevic added 20 points and 12 rebounds and Orlando snapped a four-game road losing streak.

Bradley Beal, who missed the previous two games with soreness in his right leg, led Washington with 27 points.

The Magic, who entered the game with the NBA’s poorest offense, took the lead midway through the second quarter and led 62-58 at halftime. Orlando

steadily increased its lead in the second half.

Evan Fournier had 18 points for the Magic. Markelle Fultz scored 16 and Terrence Ross 15.

**Bucks 106, Timberwolves 104:** Giannis Antetokounmpo had 32 points and 17 rebounds, and host Milwaukee held off a strong challenge from short-handed Minnesota.

Antetokounmpo got his 30th double-double in 33 games this season and Khris Middleton added 13 points despite shooting 5-for-18 as the Bucks hit just 42.6% of their shots overall and only 9 of 36 from three-point range.

Shabazz Napier had 22 points to lead the Timberwolves, Gorgui Deng scored 15, Josh Okogie added 12 and Jarret Culver 10.