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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

US knew missiles were coming in advance

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The Iranian missile strike on American locations in Iraq on Tuesday was a calibrated event intended to cause minimal casualties, give the Iranians a face-saving measure and provide an opportunity for both sides to step back from the brink of war, according to senior U.S. officials in Washington and the Middle East.

White House officials were bracing as early as Tuesday morning for Iran to respond to the U.S. killing last week of Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the head of Iran's elite Quds Force.

U.S. officials said they knew by Tuesday afternoon that Iran intended to strike at American targets in Iraq, although it was not immediately clear exactly which they would choose.

The early warning came from intelligence sources as

well as from communications from Iraq that conveyed Iran's intentions to launch the strike, officials said.

"We knew, and the Iraqis told us, that this was coming many hours in advance," said a senior administration official, who like others spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive intelligence and diplomatic communications.

"We had intelligence reports several hours in advance that the Iranians were seeking to strike the bases," the official said.

At the Pentagon, the most senior levels of U.S. military leadership gathered in a room and waited for the Iranian missiles to head toward their targets.

"It was literally like right before" the Iranians launched their missiles, one senior defense official said. Defense Secretary Mark Esper had convened the meeting with

Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, along with senior civilian leaders of the Defense Department. Esper was pulled out of the meeting when military officials received notification that strikes were underway.

The advance warning gave military commanders time to get U.S. troops into safe, fortified positions at the bases. According to military officials, troops at bases in Iraq were ordered into bunkers, donned protective gear and were told to "shelter in place."

The troops remained in their protected positions for hours, including after the strike. One official said at least some left al Asad Air Base in western Iraq before the attack. That base was targeted, along with a facility in Irbil, in northern Iraq.

"It's not luck that no one got killed," a second senior defense official said. "Luck always

plays a role. But military commanders on the ground made good judgment and had good response."

In an address from the White House on Wednesday morning, President Donald Trump credited an "early warning system" for helping prevent loss of life. A defense official later said the president was referring to the radar network the military has searching for potential enemy missiles.

At least two sources of intelligence gave the U.S. time to prepare.

Even with the advance notice, U.S. military officials were still scrambling after the attack to assess the damage and determine Iran's intentions. U.S. forces in the region remained on high alert after the strikes, but no significant troop movements have been made in Syria or elsewhere, according to military officials.

IG says military should get tough on moving companies

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Nearly half of military household goods shipments arrive late and one in five are damaged in transit or lost, an audit by the Defense Department Inspector General has found.

Some Defense Department personnel, meanwhile, may be venting their frustration with what they say are poor moving services by filing wildly inflated damage estimates, the audit suggested.

One person filed a claim of \$1 million for a busted trash can and another tried to claim \$1 trillion for unspecified damages, the IG report said. Both claims were denied.

The IG made many recommendations on how the military can improve moving services, which have vexed service members for years.

The IG reviewed 9,852 shipments han-

dled by four joint shipping offices in 2018 to determine the extent of problems with household goods shipments and whether proper actions were taken when goods were damaged, lost or arrived late during a move.

More than 4,000 of those shipments, or 41%, didn't arrive by the agreed-upon delivery date, the audit found. The delays were caused by problems with scheduling and equipment at the moving companies, the IG said.

Those late deliveries alone cost the military \$33.1 million, the IG said.

"Additionally, moving companies did not provide an explanation for delivering some of the shipments after the delivery date," the IG said.

That meant DOD personnel and their families had the hassle of filing claims for lodging, food, rental and other costs, the IG reported.

At least one claim was filed in 21% of all domestic household goods shipments, the IG said.

A review of 311 of those shipments found that the moving companies resolved 94% of the claims for around \$8.4 million. Forty claims remained unresolved because they weren't filed through the proper channels, the IG said.

The Defense Department is the largest customer in the personal property shipping industry, representing about 15% of all domestic and international moves, the IG said. U.S. Transportation Command is in charge of administering the military's household moves.

The IG suggested issuing warnings or letters of suspension to moving companies within 14 days of a missed delivery date. Warning letters would impact moving company ratings, which determine what future shipments will be offered, it said.

New jackets for surface warfare officers

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON— Navy surface warfare officers will soon be issued new leather jackets to wear and show their expertise and create a sense of pride.

The new jacket is similar to the famous aviation bomber jacket and is “meant to build esprit de corps” and symbolize the “tactical warfighter expertise” of being a qualified

surface warfare officer, the Navy said in an announcement Thursday. The jacket will be available starting in June.

“The surface warfare community has a long-standing history of excellence and an uniquely identifiable item is one way to signify the outstanding achievement and professionalism of our surface warfare officers,” Vice Adm. Richard Brown, commander of

Naval Surface Forces, said in the announcement.

The jacket is black leather and features knitted cuffs and waistband, a pointed collar and will be fully lined. It also has two front pockets with flaps and a Velcro name tape patch on the left side.

Surface warfare officers will primarily wear the jacket while at sea with their at-sea uniforms, according to the Navy.

They can be worn when officers are ashore as an optional outer jacket but only with the service uniform.

Active, Reserve, and full-time support officers who have earned the surface warfare officer qualification will be allowed to wear the jacket. Officers who move to a different job specialty can still wear the jacket and can also wear it when they leave the Navy.

Brain injuries in combat linked to PTSD

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

Service members who suffered moderate to severe traumatic brain injury in combat have significantly higher incidence of mental health disorders in following years as compared to warfighters who sustained other traumatic injuries, a study found.

The study, published in the current issue of the journal *Military Medicine*, examined almost 5,000 cases of traumatic injury experienced by Marines, soldiers, airmen and sailors during combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan from February 2002 to February 2011.

Among the study’s findings is a clear relationship between

moderate and severe brain injury and a greater risk for post-traumatic stress disorder, a link that contradicts a theory posited by some previous researchers.

Traumatic brain injury has been the scourge of U.S. combatants during the extended war on terrorism, particularly the decade after the September 2001 World Trade Center attack. Improvised explosive devices were the weapon of choice by enemy guerrilla fighters in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Improvements in body armor and medical treatment saved the lives of many blast victims who would have died in earlier conflicts. By 2010, 7,832 warfighters had survived severe traumatic brain injury, the

study said.

The new research compared two groups — one that sustained moderate to severe brain injury, the other experiencing general, critical injury — and looked for associations with anxiety and mood disorders, adjustment reactions, schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders, cognitive disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD.

The study found that 70.6% of these patients were diagnosed with at least one of those five mental health conditions during multiyear follow-up periods.

That is “considerably higher” than the 42% found in a much smaller 2012 study, “even though our mental health diag-

noses were defined more narrowly,” the study said.

However, patients who suffered traumatic brain injury were at “consistently greater” risk for diagnosis of those five conditions than the group of patients suffering general trauma, the study found.

“If you have severe TBI, you are at risk of having something undesirable,” said David Chin, the study’s co-author and a professor at the School of Public Health and Health Sciences, University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

The new study includes patients from all four service branches and examines mental health outcomes over longer periods of time, a median length of just over four years.

Airstrike in Afghanistan kills Taliban faction leader

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — A U.S. drone strike killed a regional leader of a breakaway faction of the Taliban in western Afghanistan on Wednesday and may have killed several civilians, officials and militants said.

“U.S. Forces-Afghanistan, at the request of Afghan Security Forces, conducted a co-

ordinated defensive airstrike in support of Afghan forces in Shindand, Herat on January 8, 2020,” said a statement sent to Afghan media by U.S. military officials.

The statement did not comment on casualties and a spokesman for U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan directed questions to the Afghan defense ministry.

The ministry confirmed that airstrikes had occurred in the

province, which borders Iran, and said an investigation has been launched to determine if any civilians were killed.

The strikes killed Mullah Mohammad Nangyalai, a regional commander of an insurgent faction led by Mullah Mohammad Rasoul that split from the mainline Taliban in 2015, the breakaway militant group said in a statement.

The splinter group’s fighters will continue to fight against

“the U.S. and other foreigners” in Afghanistan, the statement said.

The attack began at 4 p.m. Wednesday in an area controlled by the government, Tolo News reported.

The drone strikes were launched as the Rasoul faction was planning to attack a government checkpoint, said Abdul Hakim, a resident of the district.

Pelosi will send impeachment articles 'soon'

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Thursday she will “soon” transmit the articles of impeachment against President Donald Trump, but warned that Senate Republicans are rushing to acquittal without a fair trial.

Pelosi brushed back GOP claims that Democrats are afraid to send the impeachment case to the Senate. And she said she has no concerns about the anxiety some House and Senate Democrats are showing over the standoff with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell over the terms of the delayed trial.

It's now more than three

weeks since the House impeached Trump on charges of abuse and obstruction.

“I’m not holding them indefinitely,” Pelosi told reporters at the Capitol. “I’ll send them over when I’m ready. That will probably be soon.”

Pelosi said she’s waiting for what she wanted from the start — “to see the arena” and “terms of the engagement” that McConnell will use — before sending her House managers to present the articles of impeachment in the Senate.

“We are proud of our defense of the Constitution of the United States,” Pelosi said. “We are concerned the senators will not be able to live up to the oath

they take.”

The standoff over Trump’s impeachment trial deepened this week as McConnell said there will be “no haggling” with Democrats as Pelosi demands for more details and witnesses.

McConnell said on Thursday if Pelosi and House Democrats are “too embarrassed” to transmit the articles of impeachment, the Senate will simply move on next week to other business.

“They do not get to trap our entire country into an unending groundhog day of impeachment without resolution,” McConnell said as he opened the Senate.

McConnell’s Senate majority

has the leverage Republicans need to launch Trump’s trial toward swift acquittal of the charges, but Pelosi’s reluctance to transmit the articles of impeachment leaves the proceedings at a standstill.

What started as a seemingly minor delay over process and procedures is now a high-stakes showdown between two skilled leaders facing off over the rare impeachment trial, only the third in the nation’s history.

As Pelosi headed toward a morning meeting Thursday, Pelosi told reporters, “I know exactly when” she plans to send the impeachment articles over, but, “I won’t be telling you right now.”

Facebook again declines to limit political ad targeting

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Facebook has decided not to limit how political ads can be targeted to specific groups of people, as its main digital-ad rival Google did in November to fight misinformation. Neither will it ban political ads outright, as Twitter did last October. And it still won’t fact check them, as it’s faced pressure to do.

Instead, it is announcing much more limited “transparency features” that aim to give users slightly more control over how many political ads they see and to make its online library of political ads easier to use.

These steps appear unlikely to assuage critics — including some of the company’s rank and file employees — who say Facebook has too much power and not enough limits when it comes to its effects on elections and democracy itself.

Since last fall, Facebook has insisted that it won’t fact-check political ads, a move that critics say gives politicians license to lie in ads that can’t be easily monitored by outsiders. CEO Mark Zuckerberg has repeatedly argued that “political speech is important” and that Facebook doesn’t want to interfere with it.

Google, the digital ads leader, is limiting

political-ad targeting to broad categories such as sex, age and postal code.

Facebook said in a blog post Thursday that it considered limiting the targeting of political ads. But the social network said it learned about their importance for “reaching key audiences” after conducting outreach with political campaigns from both U.S. parties, political groups and nonprofits.

The company said it was guided by the principle that “people should be able to hear from those who wish to lead them, warts and all, and that what they say should be scrutinized and debated in public.”

Justice Department says it is too late to pass ERA

Associated Press

BOSTON — The Justice Department has thrown a roadblock into efforts to revive the Equal Rights Amendment, finding that an expired pair of deadlines imposed by Congress on ratification of the measure means it’s too late for additional states to ratify it now.

The memo by Assistant Attorney General Steven Engel comes as Virginia is poised to become the decisive 38th state to approve the ERA nearly four decades after Congress sent it

to states in 1972, attaching a 1979 ratification deadline to it.

That deadline was later extended to 1982. During that time just 35 states ratified it — three short of the 38 needed.

“Because three-fourths of the state legislatures did not ratify before the deadline that Congress imposed, the Equal Rights Amendment has failed of adoption and is no longer pending before the States,” Engel wrote.

“Accordingly, even if one or more state legislatures were to ratify the proposed amend-

ment, it would not become part of the Constitution,” he added.

Engel’s finding is unlikely to be the last word on the amendment.

Democratic Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring said Wednesday he’s going to make sure the will of Virginians is carried out and the ERA is added to the Constitution.

“Women in America deserve to have equality guaranteed in the Constitution,” Herring said in a statement. “The fact that Republican attorneys general are suing to block the ERA, and

that they now have the support of the Trump Administration, is absolutely repugnant.”

On Tuesday, supporters of the ERA filed a federal lawsuit in Massachusetts aimed at clearing a legal path for adoption of the amendment.

The lawsuit argues that because the deadline was set forth in legislation authorizing states to ratify the amendment — and not in the three-sentence amendment itself — it’s not constitutionally binding and Virginia’s vote would put the amendment over the top.

US official: 'High confidence' that Iran downed Ukrainian jet

The Washington Post

MOSCOW — U.S. officials have “high confidence” that an Iranian anti-aircraft missile brought down a Ukrainian passenger jet near Tehran, killing all 176 aboard, a U.S. official said.

The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said U.S. authorities believe the plane was hit by a Russian-made SA-15 surface-to-air missile.

The official gave no other details on the circumstances that led to the possible missile firing on Wednesday, which came about four hours after Iran launched ballistic missiles into Iraq against U.S. targets in retaliation for the killing of Iranian Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani.

The SA-15 system dates back to the Cold War and can be used to down planes, helicopters, drones or incoming missiles. Russia has exported the system to a number of countries, including Iran.

Earlier, Ukrainian investigators said they were considering

the possibility that an anti-aircraft missile brought down the Kyiv-bound passenger jet. Iran said the plane was on fire while still in the air and was turning back toward Tehran's airport because of a “problem” when it went down.

Ukrainian investigators said they were also looking into engine failure or a terrorist attack as possible causes of the crash. Several independent aviation experts have noted that, based on video and the wide debris field, it appeared that the Boeing 737 800 was breaking apart in the air.

A team of 45 experts and search-and-rescue personnel from Ukraine arrived in Tehran early Thursday to participate in the probe, as well as to identify and repatriate the bodies of the 11 Ukrainians on board, including all nine crew members.

Oleksiy Danilov, secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, wrote on Facebook that his team wants to search for possible debris of

a Russian missile after seeing online reports about the discovery of possible fragments of one near the crash site. The reports could not be independently confirmed.

He added that Ukraine's commission includes specialists who helped investigate the July 2014 downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 in Ukraine. The government in Kyiv has also suspended all Ukrainian flights over Iranian and Iraqi airspace.

The Ukraine International Airlines flight departed Tehran at 6:12 a.m. Wednesday and was approaching 8,000 feet when it abruptly lost contact with ground control, officials said.

The report from Iran's Civil Aviation Organization said witnesses — on the ground and among the crew of another flight in the vicinity — reported seeing a fire while the Boeing 737 800 was still in the air, followed by an explosion when it slammed into a field near an amusement park.

California won't fill Hunter seat until 2021

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — California Gov. Gavin Newsom will not call a special election to fill the unfinished term of U.S. Rep. Duncan D. Hunter, who resigned after pleading guilty to a corruption charge, a spokeswoman for the governor said Wednesday.

His decision means the solidly Republican, San Diego-area district will not have a vote in the House of Representatives until January 2021, when Hunter's successor takes office. Three Republicans and one Democrat face off in a March 3 primary, with the top two finishers advancing to a November runoff, regardless of party affiliation.

The Democratic governor won't call a special election “based on the timing of the resignation,” said Vicky Waters, a spokeswoman.

Hunter, 43, tendered his resignation Tuesday, more than a month after he pleaded guilty to siphoning campaign funds for personal expenses. It takes effect Monday.

Newsom was under no obligation to call a special election after Dec. 6, the filing deadline for California's March primary.

Hunter's seat is being sought by three Republicans with strong local name recognition. They are former U.S. Rep. Darrell Issa, one of the wealthiest lawmakers to serve when he represented a neighboring district; Carl DeMaio, a talk-radio host and former San Diego city councilman; and state Sen. Brian Jones, who highlights that he's the only major Republican candidate who lives in the district.

Democrat Ammar Campa-Najjar, a 30-year-old former Obama administration official who nearly defeated Hunter in 2018, is widely expected to emerge from the March primary for a November showdown.

EU: No-deal more harmful for Britain

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — The European Union's chief Brexit negotiator said Thursday that if Britain wants as much access as possible to the bloc's market after it leaves, it won't have unfettered freedom to subsidize its industry.

Michel Barnier also insisted that the state aid rules in any future trade deal would be more stringent than with nations like Canada or Japan, simply because of the physical proximity of the departing EU nation.

“If the U.K. wants an open link with us for the products — zero tariffs, zero quotas — we need to be careful about zero

dumping at the same time,” Barnier told a conference in Stockholm.

“I hope that this point is, and will be correctly understood by everybody. We will ask necessarily certain conditions on state aid policy in the U.K.,” Barnier said, adding that if that is not the case, access to the lucrative EU market will be negatively affected.

The EU has been stressing the need for a level playing field in the upcoming trade deal negotiations, meaning that access will be strictly linked to commitments to social welfare and environmental standards, among others. On Thursday, he stressed the need for state aid limits too.

As a member state, Britain was bound by strict state aid rules enforced by the powerful European Commission to make sure there would be no unfair competition among EU nations in its vast single market. Third countries aren't immediately bound by such strictures.

Britain has decided to leave the EU by Jan. 31, partly because it doesn't want to be tied down by EU rules, which it feels impedes its sovereignty. But negotiating a trade deal will still involve many compromises on rule setting.

Barnier also insisted that Britain's goal to have a full free trade deal by the end of the year was unrealistic.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

2 men accused of trying to scam lottery

MS FLOWOOD — Authorities in Mississippi said two men attempted to scam the state lottery commission by submitting a losing ticket that had the winning numbers glued onto it.

Odis Latham, 47, and Russell Sparks, 48, were charged with offenses including uttering counterfeit instrument over \$1,000.

The state lottery commission called Flowood police about the fake ticket Monday morning, Sgt. Adam Nelson said. Officers were told the suspects presented an altered \$100,000 ticket.

Corn spill forms path on railroad tracks

MN CRYSTAL — Bushels and bushels of corn spilled from a freight train and formed a smooth, yellow path for more than a third of a mile on railroad tracks in a northern Minneapolis suburb.

The spill happened in Crystal on the Canadian Pacific line. The Star Tribune reported the corn stretched for about 2,000 feet.

Assuming the corn was about 1.5 inches deep the entire way, the Tribune estimated the spill would amount to about 900 bushels.

Twins born in different decades

IN CARMEL — Twin siblings born in an Indiana hospital around the New Year's holiday have birthdays in different decades.

Dawn Gilliam delivered one baby, Joslyn, at 11:37 p.m. on Dec. 31, 2019, and a second baby, Jaxon, 30 minutes later at

12:07 a.m. on Jan. 1, 2020.

The babies weren't due until February, but Gilliam made a New Year's Eve trip to the hospital when she had a concern about a lack of fetal movement. Gilliam said hospital staff told her she would have to deliver much sooner.

Man sought jail time to support girlfriend

KY LANCASTER — Authorities in Kentucky said they've arrested a man who wanted to go to jail to support his jailed girlfriend.

Raymond Pace, 47, was charged with offenses including possession of methamphetamine, heroin and drug paraphernalia, news outlets reported.

Pace called authorities to report a stolen laptop, according to a statement by Garrard County police. Officer Steven Debord arrived to find an intoxicated Pace requesting to be jailed for several months to support his girlfriend, who Pace said was serving five months in jail.

Witness detains hit-and-run driver

MT BUTTE — A Butte man used zip ties to detain a hit-and-run driver, Butte-Silver Bow law enforcement officers said.

Dispatchers received two reports of hit-and-run crashes Jan. 2. A man who witnessed the suspect rear-end a car and drive away called police and followed the suspect.

The suspect was driving on three wheels due to damage sustained in the hit-and-run, according to police reports.

The suspect got out of the car and jumped over a fence, but fell.

The witness followed and used zip ties to detain the

suspect until police arrived and swapped the zip ties for handcuffs.

Police: Suspect lured gulls, ran them over

MD LAUREL — Police in suburban Washington are investigating an apparent animal cruelty case involving seagulls that officers say were lured with popcorn and then run over with a vehicle.

The Laurel Police Department said at least 10 seagulls were killed in a shopping center, The Washington Post reported.

Husband, wife married in '53 die on same day

MI PORT HURON — A Michigan man and woman married over 60 years died within hours of each other on New Year's Day, family members said.

Robert and Janet Perry married in 1953 and remained in the Crosswell area until their deaths of natural causes, according to The (Port Huron) Times Herald.

He was 84 and she was 85. Their son, Bart Perry, said they met in high school because his father had a horse trailer and his mom needed a horse taken to a saddle club.

Big rig carrying trash overturns on highway

GA ATLANTA — A tractor-trailer full of trash overturned on an Atlanta highway, spilling its cargo and closing the road for hours.

No injuries were reported in the wreck on Interstate 285 crash near Interstate 75, Georgia State Patrol Lt. Stephanie Stallings said.

She said the cause of the accident was not yet known, and she did not know whether the driver was cited.

6 teens arrested in melee at skating rink

AZ MESA — Six teenagers were arrested after several fights broke out at a crowded indoor skating rink in Mesa, authorities said.

Mesa police said they were called to Skateland in response to a report of teens fighting.

Officers said they had to deal with fighting and other disruptive behavior amid a crowd of roughly 1,000. Hundreds of people fled as more police arrived. Yet, fights continued to erupt inside and outside.

In a statement on its Facebook page, Skateland said the melee began when a customer became angry about not being allowed to go in and out of the building with her rental skates. According to the facility, she attempted to charge at an employee. The incident escalated with others in her group getting unruly.

School: Everyone OK after firework ignites

TX HOUSTON — Officials evacuated a Houston-area high school after reports that a firework was ignited inside the campus cafeteria.

It wasn't immediately known if anybody was injured during the incident at Klein Forest High School in Klein, Texas.

In a tweet, the Harris County Fire Marshal's Office said one person might have been injured.

But the Klein school district said in a separate tweet that all students and staff were safe.

From wire reports

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Revised draft: Seattle's Metcalf catches on

Associated Press

RENTON, Wash. — Amid an avalanche of attention following the best game of his career, DK Metcalf allowed himself a little bit of reflection.

What would have happened if he hadn't unexpectedly slid out of the first round of the NFL Draft last April? What if all the hype that surrounded his performance at the NFL combine had led to hearing his name called on the first night of the draft and not a day later when the Seattle Seahawks swooped in to grab the wide receiver with the 64th overall pick.

"It was a perfect situation for me," Metcalf said on Wednesday. "At the moment I was mad, but after everything was said and done looking back at it I'm just happy that I landed here. Great quarterback. Great offense. Great team. Great organization. We're in the playoffs still playing while a lot of teams are at home."

Metcalf is hoping he has a few more weeks before giving full reflection on his rookie season. He may have a significant role

in whether that happens when Seattle travels to Green Bay on Sunday in the NFC playoffs.

He played a major part in Seattle getting to this point. Metcalf set an NFL postseason record among rookies with 160 yards receiving on seven catches and a touchdown in last week's 17-9 win over Philadelphia to open the postseason. His 53-yard touchdown catch in the third quarter gave Seattle a 17-6 lead, and his 36-yard catch on the final drive clinched the victory.

His performance drew attention and accolades from all over, even a shout out from LeBron James on social media. It was a breakout game because of the stage and the importance. But it wasn't an outlier based on how the second half of the season has gone.

"It was cool, but like I said it's time to focus in," Metcalf said of the attention. "Can't harp on just that one moment."

Metcalf was the star of the NFL combine last year, but his draft slide was a running headline until the Seahawks finally

took him off the board late in the second round. He was criticized for his route-running and some evaluators believed his ceiling would be as a big target who could only run straight down the field.

"When he came in, I was pretty confident he was able to do a lot of things that a lot of people weren't giving him credit for," Seattle wide receivers coach Nate Carroll said.

Metcalf's season turned in Week 9 when he had six catches for 123 yards against Tampa Bay. Up to that point, Metcalf had 23 receptions, four touchdowns and was averaging about 17 yards per catch.

In the nine games that followed — including that Week 9 win over the Bucs — Metcalf has 42 receptions for 658 yards while his responsibilities within Seattle's offensive scheme have expanded. While the game against the Eagles was the best of his young career, Metcalf had been building toward that kind of performance for weeks.

Seattle coach Pete Carroll

said Metcalf had disappointment from the Seahawks' earlier meeting against the Eagles — which also finished 17-9 — and wanted a chance to atone for the previous game.

"He didn't play the game he wanted to play last time we were there," Pete Carroll said. "It was important to him to put that to rest. He was very competitive about it."

Metcalf knows as his numbers increase so will the attention he receives from opponents. He was shut out by Arizona in Week 16 in his only game of the season without a catch.

"He wants to run through everybody, which I love that part of him, and we all do and it gets us all going," Nate Carroll said. "But at the same time, you've got to make sure that the ball safety is paramount. That's the next evolution right there is just understanding when to and when not to. I think that's been the coolest thing is just seeing him be able to just feel comfortable out there and just play fast every chance he gets."

Harris a secondary success story for Vikings

Associated Press

EAGAN, Minn. — Over Minnesota's past six games, Anthony Harris has picked off Russell Wilson, Aaron Rodgers and Drew Brees, owners of three of the four lowest interception percentages in the NFL this season.

The fifth-year safety has come a long way from undrafted practice squad player, as some of the league's best quarterbacks have been reminded recently. Harris, who became a full-time starter last year, tied for the regular-season league lead with six interceptions in 2019.

"Every time he got an opportunity, he stepped up," Vikings defensive coordinator George Edwards said.

The tandem Harris has formed with Harrison Smith in the secondary has been a significant part of the success the Vikings defense has had this season, a value that will be scrutinized at team headquarters in the coming months with his contract set to expire which will make him an unrestricted free agent. Harris and Smith

will be an integral part of the plan to stop San Francisco's versatile offense in the divisional round game on Saturday.

"The scheme they play in is very good. It puts a lot of pressure on them, but it allows them to make a lot of plays, too," 49ers coach Kyle Shanahan said.

All three of those statistically improbable interceptions led to touchdowns for the Vikings. When Wilson's pass for Seattle was swatted at the line of scrimmage, his ill-fated attempt to knock the ball to the turf let it hang in the air long enough for Harris to snag it and run it in for a 20-yard score to break a second-quarter tie.

Harris helped break a second-quarter tie against Green Bay, too, when he darted in front of Davante Adams to grab an underneath throw by Rodgers and return it 10 yards. The Vikings were in the end zone three plays later.

Then at New Orleans, with the Vikings trailing 10-6 just before the two-minute warning, Harris hung on to the deep ball from Brees after landing on his back with

a leaping catch, climbed to his feet and returned it 30 yards to reach Saints territory. The Vikings scored the go-ahead touchdown seven plays later and, with Harris helping hound star wide receiver Michael Thomas and keep Brees from doing his usual damage, pulled out a 26-20 victory in overtime to oust the Saints and advance in the playoffs.

Rodgers is the least likely quarterback to be picked off in league history, with a career interception rate of just 1.4%. He dropped that to 0.7% in 2019, with Kansas City's Patrick Mahomes, Wilson and Brees right behind him on the leader board.

Harris tied for the league lead with six interceptions in 2019. The Vikings have 17 takeaways over their past six games.

"It's been a long journey, but I look at it as a continuous thing," the 6-foot-1, 202-pound Harris said. "It's not just something like, 'Now I'm here. Now I've arrived.' It's going to be a continuous process for me. It's just been embracing the opportunity that I have."

College basketball roundup

Duke continues dominance of Jackets

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Tre Jones hit two key baskets down the stretch and No. 2 Duke extended its decade-long domination of Georgia Tech, holding off the Yellow Jackets 73-64 on Wednesday night.

The Blue Devils (14-1, 4-0 Atlantic Coast Conference) extended their winning streak to eight and their firm hold on this series goes back much further. Georgia Tech (7-8, 2-3) has lost 13 straight to Duke since its last victory over the Blue Devils on Jan. 9, 2010 — almost 10 years ago to the day.

The Yellow Jackets rallied from a double-digit deficit but couldn't make a basket in the closing minutes, missing 14 of their last 15 shots.

Jones led the Blue Devils with 16 points, including a pull-up jumper that snapped a 61-all tie and another floater in the lane that made it 68-64. Cassius Stanley and Vernon Carey Jr. added 14 apiece.

Joe Alvarado paced Georgia Tech with 18 points. James Banks scored 14 points, grabbed a season-high 15 rebounds and swatted away seven shots.

No. 3 Kansas 79, Iowa State 53: Devon Dotson had 20 points and six assists, David McCormack added 16 points and seven rebounds and the visiting Jayhawks routed the Cyclones.

Kansas (12-2, 2-0 Big 12) closed the first half with a 21-3 run to take a 20-point lead. The Jayhawks shot 52% from the field while limiting Iowa State (7-7, 0-2) to 34%.

Ochai Agbaji added 16 points for the Jayhawks. They handed Iowa State its most-lopsided loss in the series since an 89-66 setback Feb. 12, 2011, in Lawrence.

No. 5 Auburn 83, Vanderbilt 79: Freshman Isaac Okoro scored 17 of his season-high 23 points in the first half and the host Tigers held off the Commodores.

Ranked in the Top 5 for the first time in nearly 20 years, Auburn (14-0, 2-0 Southeastern Conference) withstood a late challenge by Vanderbilt (8-6, 0-1) after blowing a 13-point lead. The Tigers and No. 7 San Diego State are the last unbeaten teams.

Saben Lee scored a career-high 27 points for the Commo-

dores, making 10 of 14 shots and all three three-point attempts. Vanderbilt failed to win an SEC game last season.

No. 7 San Diego State 72, Wyoming 52: Malachi Flynn scored 19 points, Yanni Wetzell added 17 and the visiting Aztecs beat the Cowboys to remain undefeated.

San Diego State (16-0, 5-0 Mountain West) continued its hottest start since 2010-11, when it opened 20-0 behind Kawhi Leonard and reached the Sweet 16 for the first time, finishing a school-record 34-3.

Jordan Schakel added 11 points. The 16-game winning streak is the longest in the country.

No. 10 Florida State 78, Wake Forest 68: Devin Vassell scored 17 points and the visiting Seminoles pulled away in the final 10 minutes to beat the Demon Deacons.

M.J. Walker scored 12 of his 15 points in the first half for Florida State (14-2, 4-1 Atlantic Coast Conference). The Seminoles trailed early in the second half before going ahead for good on RaiQuan Gray's three-pointer at the 14:04 mark. They have won seven straight and 14

of 15.

Brandon Childress scored 20 points for Wake Forest (8-6, 1-3).

American 68, Army 60: Mark Gasperini posted 19 points as the visiting Eagles topped the Black Knights.

Jamir Harris had 12 points for American (6-8, 2-1 Patriot League). Sa'eed Nelson added 12 points. Jacob Boonyasith had 11 points for the Eagles.

Matt Wilson had 16 points for Army (5-9, 0-3), which has lost four straight games. Lonnie Grayson added 13 points. Alex King had 13 points.

Navy 60, Bucknell 56: Cam Davis had 20 points as the visiting Midshipmen narrowly defeated the Bison.

Greg Summers had 13 points and seven rebounds for Navy (8-6, 2-1 Patriot League). John Carter Jr. added six rebounds.

John Meeks had 18 points for Bucknell (6-10, 2-1). Avi Toomer added six rebounds.

Jimmy Sotos, who led the Bison in scoring heading into the matchup with 14 points per game, was held to five points on 2-for-10 shooting.

Andrews shines as Jackson's favorite target for Ravens

Associated Press

OWINGS MILLS, Md. — The Baltimore Ravens were preparing for the 2018 NFL Draft when coach John Harbaugh began studying tape of a pretty good tight end at Oklahoma by the name of Mark Andrews.

"He always got open. He always made catches. He had a knack," Harbaugh recalled. "You're like, 'Is he going to be able to get that open and make those plays in the NFL?'"

The answer: Undoubtedly, yes.

Following a modest rookie season, Andrews led the Ravens this year with 64 catches, 852 yards receiving and 10

touchdown receptions. He also earned an invitation to the Pro Bowl and is one big reason why Baltimore (14-2) will bring a 12-game winning streak into its playoff opener Saturday night against the Tennessee Titans.

Sure, the Ravens are known for their ability to run. But when dual-threat quarterback Lamar Jackson decides to throw, more often than not he will start his progression with Andrews.

"Mark does a great job of reading the defense, knowing when they're zoning," Jackson said. "He finds a way to get open. I just call it street ball."

Andrews was targeted 98 times this season, 27 more than runner-up Marquise Brown

and at least twice as often as anyone else. In addition, his 10 TD catches were only one fewer than the combined total of everyone else on the squad.

Andrews is the biggest threat among the receivers, and that's not just because of his 6-foot-5, 256-pound frame.

"The quarterback has a lot of confidence in him," Tennessee coach Mike Vrabel said Tuesday. "He's got great length, good body control, good hands, catches it in traffic and can create space with his body. It looks like the quarterback really trusts him and likes him and knows where he's going to be."

Andrews was a receiver in high school and was recruited

by Oklahoma to be a wideout before making the switch early in his career with the Sooners. In his final college season, he had 62 catches for 958 yards and eight TDs to earn the John Mackey Award as the nation's top tight end.

And yet, Andrews was the second tight end drafted by the Ravens in 2018, behind Hayden Hurst. Andrews finally went in the third round, but that doesn't mean the scouts — and Harbaugh — did not appreciate his body of work.

Hurst and Nick Boyle give Jackson a couple of options in terms of tight ends to target. But it's clear who is the No. 1 choice.

NBA roundup

Spurs start quickly, hold off Celtics

Associated Press

BOSTON — DeMar DeRozan scored 30 points to lead the San Antonio Spurs to a 129-114 defeat of the Boston Celtics on Wednesday.

The Spurs scored 22 of the first 25 points and held on through a slightly more competitive — and controversial — second half.

Kemba Walker returned after missing three games with the flu and was ejected with back-to-back technical fouls when he argued a non-call in the third quarter. A full bottle or cup was thrown from the stands, landing in front of the San Antonio bench; no one was hit. The game was delayed briefly while the court was cleaned.

The hubbub — Celtics coach Brad Stevens also was given a technical — slowed a Boston rally that cut what had been a 22-point deficit to 76-69.

Raptors 112, Hornets 110 (OT): Serge Ibaka made two free throws with 5.1 seconds

left in overtime and finished with 23 points and 11 rebounds as banged-up Toronto won at Charlotte.

Terence Davis also had 23 points and 11 boards, OG Anunoby added 19 points and Kyle Lowry had 15 points and nine assists while having to play 43 minutes due to injuries. Patrick McCaw added 13 points and 11 assists as the Raptors avoided taking losses on back-to-back nights for the first time since Dec. 26-27, 2017.

Heat 122, Pacers 108: Tyler Herro had 19 points, Duncan Robinson scored 11 of his 17 points in a decisive third quarter and seven Miami players scored in double figures in a win at Indiana.

Bam Adebayo and Derrick Jones each scored 18 points, Goran Dragic and Kendrick Nunn added 15 each and Jimmy Butler pitched in 14 for the Heat.

Magic 123, Wizards 89: Nikola Vucevic scored 29 points, Evan Fournier added 19, and host Orlando beat

Washington.

Admiral Schofield scored 18 points, and Troy Brown, Jr. had 16 points and 11 rebounds for the Wizards.

Nuggets 107, Mavericks 106: Nikola Jokic scored 26 of his 33 points in the second half, including the winning basket with 7.9 seconds left, and Denver pulled out a win at Dallas.

Jokic backed down Dorian Finney-Smith on the right side of the lane and got a favorable bounce on his left-handed layup.

Pelicans 123, Bulls 108: Brandon Ingram had 29 points, 11 assists and eight rebounds, and host New Orleans dealt Chicago its fifth straight loss.

JJ Redick hit six three-pointers on his way to 24 points, while rookie Jaxson Hayes had 14 points, 12 rebounds and four blocks to help the Pelicans win for the seventh time in 10 games.

Jazz 128, Knicks 104: Emmanuel Mudiay scored a season-high 20 points against his former team, and Rudy Gob-

ert added 16 points and 16 rebounds to power host Utah past short-handed New York.

Mudiay, who played for the Knicks last season before signing with the Jazz in the summer, made 8 of 12 shots and added four assists.

Bucks 107, Warriors 98: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 30 points and 12 rebounds while leading four of his team's starters in double figures, and NBA-best Milwaukee won at Golden State.

Khris Middleton added 21 points, seven rebounds and six assists for Milwaukee.

Rockets 122, Hawks 115: James Harden scored 41 points, including 22 in the first quarter, to lead visiting Houston over Trae Young and Atlanta.

Harden had 10 assists and 10 rebounds for his second straight triple-double. He had 44 points, 11 rebounds and 11 assists for his first triple-double of the season in a 118-108 win over Philadelphia on Friday night.

Young had 42 points, 13 rebounds and 10 assists.

NHL roundup

Hayes' short-handed goal propels Flyers past Capitals

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Kevin Hayes scored the go-ahead goal late in the second period short-handed to lead the Philadelphia Flyers to a 3-2 victory over the Washington Capitals on Wednesday night.

Robert Hagg and Travis Konecny also scored for the Flyers, who improved their NHL-best home record to 14-2-4. The team returned home after losing five of six games on a disappointing road trip.

Carter Hart made 26 saves for Philadelphia while upping his home mark to 12-1-2.

The Flyers, who were home for the first time in 16 days, play the next two and five of six

in Philadelphia.

Jakub Vrana and Nicklas Backstrom scored for Washington, and Braden Holtby finished with 24 saves. The Capitals, who entered with an NHL-best 65 points, had won three straight and 14 of 19.

Jets 4, Maple Leafs 3 (SO): Blake Wheeler scored the winner in a shootout and visiting Winnipeg beat Toronto, spoiling a milestone performance by star Auston Matthews.

Nikolaj Ehlers, Mason Appleton and Mark Scheifele scored in regulation for the Jets, who won their second straight. Connor Hellebuyck made 25 saves.

Matthews had two goals, including the tying score with 14

seconds left in the third period. Dmytro Timashov also had a goal.

Matthews joined Washington's Alex Ovechkin as the only active players to start their NHL careers with four consecutive seasons with 30 goals or more. He's also the first player in Maple Leafs history to accomplish the feat.

Jason Spezza and Matthews had goals in the shootout for Toronto. Patrik Laine, Scheifele and Wheeler gave Winnipeg the 3-2 edge in the shootout.

Frederik Andersen stopped 25 shots two days after being pulled in the second period of Toronto's 6-4 loss to Edmonton.

Stars 2, Kings 1: Jamie Benn and Blake Comeau scored 37 seconds apart during the second period as visiting Dallas extended its winning streak to five with a victory over Los Angeles.

The Stars have come from behind for all the wins on their current streak, and this was only the second time they didn't trail going into the third period.

Anton Khudobin gave up a goal to Anze Kopitar on the Kings' first shot before making 30 saves.

Jonathan Quick stopped 30 shots for Los Angeles, which has dropped three straight and six of eight.