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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Foreign trainees under increased scrutiny

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Foreign students in military training programs in the U.S. will face continuous monitoring of their activities and new restrictions on off-duty travel in the wake of a deadly shooting last month at Naval Air Station Pensacola in Florida, defense officials said Friday.

The new constraints on the thousands of military students from allied and partner nations also include measures meant to bar them from purchasing firearms in the United States and additional training on detecting potential security threats, said Garry Reid, the Pentagon's defense intelligence director.

The new policies follow a review of security procedures initiated after a Royal Saudi Air Force officer in aviation training killed three Navy sailors and wounded eight others in a Dec. 3 attack at the Pensacola base. The Department of Justice announced this week that they had determined the incident was a terrorist act.

The Pentagon determined none of the other Saudi or other foreign military troops in the United States contributed to or knew of the attack, but the Defense Department said better vetting procedures and the new security procedures could have helped thwart the shooting.

"We will never forget those that perished in this attack," Reid said Friday. "As we honor their memory, so must we plan to resume our military training missions at Pensacola and around the country. But, getting back to work does not mean getting back to business as usual."

An FBI investigation determined the shooter, Saudi 2nd Lt. Mohammed Saeed Alshamrani, had posted anti-American, anti-Israeli and jihadist messages on social media ahead of the shooting. As a result of that review, the United States also expelled 21 other members of the Saudi military who were found to have "derogatory information" that fell short of the bar for federal prosecution. Those troops were later removed from the Saudi military, officials said this week.

Once the new security procedures are in place at installations that host foreign troops throughout the United States, the programs can then restart. The foreign military training programs have all been stalled since the shooting last month. Senior defense officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said they had no estimate of when the procedures would be in place, allowing the training programs to resume.

It could vary greatly from installation to installation, they said.

"All current and future students will be required to acknowledge their willingness to abide by these [new] standards, committing to full compliance with all U.S. laws on- and off-duty, as a condition of their enrollment," Reid said.

The Defense Department hosts more than 5,000 foreign military troops as part of its training programs, which vary from flight training to language training to participation in specialized schools, including the elite Army Ranger School.

Ex-Gitmo commander convicted of hiding affair fight

The Washington Post

A former commander of the U.S. Navy's outpost in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, was convicted Friday of covering up that he fought with a civilian over an alleged extramarital affair two days before the man was found dead.

A federal jury in Jacksonville, Fla., found John Nettleton, 54, guilty of obstructing justice, concealing information, falsifying records and making false statements in connection with the death of Christopher Tur, who worked at Guantanamo's Navy-operated general store.

Nettleton's sentencing date has not been set, the Justice Department said.

"Capt. Nettleton dishonored his oath and impeded the investigation into a civilian's tragic death, preventing much needed closure for the family and friends of the deceased," Assistant Attorney General Brian Benczkowski said in a statement.

The Navy removed Nettleton from his post a few days after Tur's death in 2015

"due to loss of confidence in Nettleton's ability to command." Nettleton, who had served as the base's commanding officer since 2012, was reassigned to Jacksonville.

His attorneys did not respond to a request for comment Friday.

Tur's sister, Aline Byrnes, said after the verdict was declared that the trial had created more questions for her family, First Coast News reported.

"While this trial has come to an end, this is far from over," Byrnes told the newspaper. "We will not stop ... until we know what happened to Christopher."

On Jan. 9, 2015, Tur confronted Nettleton outside a party at the Guantanamo officer's club and alleged that he and Tur's wife had an affair, according to Nettleton's indictment. The pair had been standing near each other during the gathering, in view of other guests. Tur, his wife and Nettleton had been drinking.

Tur, 42, also went to Nettleton's home that night, the indictment says. He called

another civilian resident of the base and said that he had "just knocked the Skipper out." In the background, Nettleton said that Tur had injured him.

Nettleton's teenage daughter came downstairs to see her father lying on the ground and Tur standing near him while trying to use a cellphone, according to the indictment. She sent a text message to a friend: "Um well my dad's really drunk and some other dude is here and they're like getting into a fight downstairs and I'm hiding."

The next day, two Guantanamo residents asked Nettleton if he knew where Tur was. He acknowledged when pressed that Tur had shown up at his house, but he said that he sent Tur away. Nettleton declined the residents' request to look in his backyard.

Nettleton did not tell anyone about Tur's accusation of an affair or about the altercation at his home, according to the indictment. A U.S. Coast Guard boat found Tur's body in the waters of Guantanamo Bay on Jan. 11, 2015.

Navy to name carrier for Pearl Harbor hero

Associated Press

HONOLULU — The U.S. Navy is expected to honor a World War II hero when a new aircraft carrier is named for Mess Attendant 2nd Class Doris Miller.

The announcement is expected to be made at Pearl Harbor on Monday, The Honolulu Star-Advertiser reported Friday.

Miller was the first African American to receive the Navy Cross for valor.

Miller was recognized for manning a machine gun on

the USS West Virginia and returning fire against Japanese planes during the Dec. 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor.

USS Miller, a destroyer escort, was previously named in his honor.

"I think that Doris Miller is an American hero simply because of what he represents as a young man going beyond the call of what's expected," said Doreen Ravenscroft, a team leader for the Doris Miller Memorial.

An African American was not allowed to man a gun in

the Navy in 1941, Ravenscroft said.

"Without him really knowing, he actually was a part of the Civil Rights movement because he changed the thinking in the Navy," Ravenscroft said.

Two of Miller's nieces are expected to be at Pearl Harbor for the announcement on Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

Miller, then 22, was collecting laundry when the attack alarm sounded. His normal battle station in an anti-aircraft battery magazine was destroyed by a torpedo. He went on deck and

carried wounded soldiers to safety before receiving orders to aid the mortally wounded captain on the bridge.

"He subsequently manned a 50-cal. Browning anti-aircraft machine gun until he ran out of ammunition and was ordered to abandon ship," the Navy said, noting Miller was not trained to operate the gun.

Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, the commander in chief of the Pacific Fleet, presented the Navy Cross to Miller in Pearl Harbor in May 1942.

US receives Taliban offer to reduce Afghan violence

The Washington Post

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan — The Taliban has presented the U.S. special representative for Afghanistan with a proposal to reduce violence and restart long-stalled peace talks, according to Pakistani and Taliban officials, as negotiators met in Doha, Qatar, for what the Taliban said was expected to be "several days" of informal talks.

"In response to the demands of the U.S., our Qatar office has put the proposal of reduction in violence on the negotiating table," a Taliban official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to brief the media.

A Pakistani Foreign Ministry official confirmed that the proposal was handed over to Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. envoy. The "Americans are looking into it," he said, also speaking on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

In a meeting with reporters in Washington, Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi hailed what he called an announcement that the "Taliban gave a nod of approval to an Afghan cease fire, and that could lead to an agreement."

He said hoped there would be a "reduction of violence pointing toward a cease fire."

Peace talks between the United States and the Taliban have been stalled for months. Talks were scuttled in September with a tweet from President Donald Trump, and Khalilzad has been working for months to bring both sides back to the table.

Negotiations resumed in December but were paused days later following a Taliban attack on the highly fortified U.S. Bagram air base, north of Kabul.

This round of informal discussions has been "fruitful" and is expected to continue for "several days," Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen said Friday.

The two sides "discussed the signing of the agreement and the ceremony for it," he tweeted. It's unclear what agreement Shaheen is referring to. He did not respond to requests for comment.

For the Afghan government, a reduction in violence is insufficient.

"A ceasefire is the only way to achieve a lasting and dignified peace," Sediq Sediqqi, the spokesman for Afghanistan's president, tweeted Friday.

DOD restarts bid for food contract for troops in Iraq

The Washington Post

The Pentagon has quietly restarted the bidding process for a lucrative contract to provide food and water for thousands of U.S. troops deployed in Iraq after its primary supplier was allegedly evicted from an important warehouse the company uses to store food.

The supplier, a Kuwaiti company called KGL, faces political and legal pressure at home from an embezzlement scandal that landed two of its former executives in prison. And the security situation in Iraq has further complicated matters, a company representative said, as the company has been forced to airlift supplies into the country to avoid dangerous riots happening on the ground.

The Defense Logistics Agency, which oversees the contract, estimated to be worth about \$138 million per year, communicated its decision in a series of letters sent to potential bidders shortly before the holidays. The letters were in turn disclosed in a court filing.

The decision is meant as a form of "corrective action" to comply with a September 2019 court decision in a bid protest brought by Anham, a Dubai-based company that handled

the lucrative troop supply work before KGL.

The Pentagon's decision to restart the bidding process is the latest unexpected turn for a long-troubled defense contract to provide food and water for thousands of U.S. troops in Iraq, Syria, Kuwait and Jordan. Anham is one of several previous suppliers that paid to resolve civil and criminal fraud charges, with settlements climbing well over \$500 million.

The continued challenges facing the program, which is called Subsistence Prime Vendor, highlight how the U.S. military still struggles to find suitable partners on the ground after close to two decades at war in the Middle East. And it hints at an increasingly volatile security situation in Iraq, which has been a theater for a long-running and increasingly hostile conflict between the U.S. and Iran.

In early January a rocket attack organized by an Iran-backed militia killed a U.S. contractor and several others, while riots threatened the security of the U.S. embassy. Soon afterward the U.S. killed Iran's top military official in a drone strike at an airport in Iraq.

Court to consider religious school funding

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A Supreme Court that seems more favorable to religion-based discrimination claims is set to hear a case that could make it easier to use public money to pay for religious schooling in many states.

The justices will hear arguments Wednesday in a dispute over a Montana scholarship program for private K-12 education that also makes donors eligible for up to \$150 in state tax credits. Advocates on both sides say the outcome could be momentous because it could lead to efforts in other states to funnel taxpayer money to religious schools.

Montana is among 37 states that have provisions in their

state constitutions that bar religious schools from receiving state aid.

The Legislature created the tax credit in 2015 for contributions made to certain scholarship programs for private education. The state's highest court had struck down the tax credit as a violation of the constitutional ban. The scholarships can be used at both secular and religious schools, but almost all the recipients attend religious schools.

Kendra Espinoza of Kalispell, Montana, the lead plaintiff in the Supreme Court case, said the state court decision amounts to discrimination against her religious freedom. "They did away with the entire program so that no one could

use this money to send their kids to a religious school," said Espinoza, whose two daughters attend the Stillwater Christian School in Kalispell, near Glacier National Park.

She said she could not afford to keep her daughters enrolled without financial aid from the school, where tuition this year is \$7,735 for elementary and middle school and \$8,620 for high school. But Espinoza said she has never received money from the scholarship program and only began the application process late last year.

For Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, the Montana program is part of a nationwide, conservative-backed campaign against public schools. "This

is a ruse to siphon off money from public education," Weingarten said. Teacher unions generally oppose school choice programs.

Montana is one of 18 states that offer scholarship tax-credit programs, according to EdChoice, an organization that promotes school-choice programs. Most have more generous tax credits, one of several ways states have created programs to boost private schools or defray their tuition costs.

When the Montana Supreme Court considered the scholarship program, it found that allowing public money to flow to religious schools, even indirectly, ran afoul of the state constitution and struck it down.

Some schools in Puerto Rico to reopen after quake

Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico — Puerto Rico's government is opening public schools in late January without knowing if they can withstand a big earthquake as concerns grow about weakened infrastructure that is displacing thousands of students.

By Friday, engineers had inspected 561 out of the island's 856 public schools and found that 9% are unsafe as a result of damage caused by a recent 6.4 magnitude quake and strong aftershocks. The inspections, however, are not to determine whether the schools can survive another strong earthquake

or if they were built using short columns, considered a risk factor, said engineer Carlos Pesquera, whom the governor recently named as a risk mitigation adviser.

"We are trying to be clear that this is an issue of managing risk," he told The Associated Press, adding that the likelihood of another large quake is minimal. "It's important that our students are educated. Even though our facilities have issues, they are safer than (the students') homes."

Of the 326 schools that passed inspection, only 224 of them will open now, the island's Department of Education announced

Friday evening. The schools are located in only five of the island's 78 municipalities. None of the schools in Puerto Rico's southern and western regions will open for now.

In the meantime, officials are considering alternate spaces such as modules, outdoor tarps and private buildings for thousands of other students unable to immediately return to their schools.

Parents, teachers and legislators have said they worry about the safety of buildings as Puerto Rico's Education Department stresses that only those schools deemed as safe will reopen on Jan. 27 and 28,

nearly three weeks later than the initial start of classes.

"Let's be honest, we're all worried after seeing how the Agripina Seda school in Guanica collapsed," said Puerto Rico Rep. Jose Torres, who is part of a legislative commission analyzing the ongoing school inspections.

The 6.4 magnitude quake flattened two floors in the three-story school in the city of Guanica on Jan. 7, two days before classes were to start.

Schools will automatically be re-inspected following any quake of a 3.0 magnitude or higher, per Puerto Rico's Infrastructure Financing Authority.

Midwest, Northeast hit with heavy snow and ice

Associated Press

CHICAGO — A winter storm that has already caused trouble at airports in Chicago and Kansas City was expected to bring blizzard conditions to the Plains and Midwest on Satur-

day and could dump up to a foot of snow in parts of the Northeast on Sunday.

National Weather Service forecasters issued winter weather advisories affecting much of the Midwest and into the Northeast, including heavy

snow that could make travel difficult in some areas.

Forecasters also warned of blizzard conditions expected Saturday afternoon in parts of North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota and Iowa, including wind gusts topping 50 mph.

For southern New England, it would be the first significant snowfall of the year, with up to half a foot expected in many areas of Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts. Parts of New York state could get up to a foot of snow.

Court upholds firearms ban at Virginia rally

Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. — Virginia's highest court on Friday upheld a ban on firearms at an upcoming pro-gun rally in the state's capital, an event that authorities feared could erupt in violence at the hands of armed extremists.

The Virginia Supreme Court's decision came a day after gun-rights groups sued to overturn the ban that Gov. Ralph Northam issued earlier this week, citing what he called credible threats of "armed militia groups storming our Capitol."

The lawsuit and court rulings came as the FBI arrested six men whom authorities linked to a white supremacist group known as The Base. At least three of them were planning to attend the pro-gun rally Monday on the grounds of the state Capitol in Richmond, according to an official

who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss an active investigation.

Virginia has become Ground Zero in the nation's raging debate over gun control, as a new Democratic majority in the state legislature has promised to pass an array of restrictions, including universal background checks and a red-flag law.

Gun-rights groups argued Northam's ban would violate their Second Amendment right to bear arms and their First Amendment freedom of speech. But a Richmond judge upheld the ban on Thursday, citing rulings from the U.S. Supreme Court and other courts that the Second Amendment is not unlimited.

The state Supreme Court did not say whether it agreed with the lower court's assessment. In a terse, two-page ruling, the

court said it did not have enough information "to discern whether the circuit court abused its discretion" in rejecting the gun-rights groups' request to lift the ban.

The court noted that it did not have a transcript of the hearing or a written statement of facts describing details of the hearing.

Northam praised the ruling, saying in a written statement that keeping the ban in place would "help to ensure the safety of all Virginians" during the rally on Monday, which is also a federal holiday honoring Martin Luther King Jr.

Philip Van Cleave, president of the Virginia Citizens Defense League — the group sponsoring the rally — called the Richmond judge's ruling "mind-boggling." The group did not respond immediately to the Supreme Court ruling.

3 more linked to neo-Nazi group arrested in Georgia

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Three men linked to a violent white supremacist group known as The Base were charged with conspiring to kill members of a militant anti-fascist group, police in Georgia announced Friday, a day after three other members were arrested on federal charges in Maryland and Delaware.

A senior FBI national security official said police and federal agents intentionally moved to arrest the men ahead of Monday's rally because they believed some of them intended to commit violence there. It was unknown if the men arrested in Georgia planned to attend the rally in Richmond.

The Base, a collective of hardcore neo-

Nazis that operate as a paramilitary organization, has proclaimed war against minority communities within the United States and abroad, the FBI has said. Unlike other extremist groups, it's not focused on promulgating propaganda — instead the group aims to bring together highly skilled members to train them for acts of violence.

There's an intensified focus on The Base after the three members were arrested Thursday in Maryland and Delaware on federal felony charges.

A criminal complaint included details of how some of the men built an assault rifle using parts, purchased thousands of rounds of ammunition and traded vests that could

carry body armor.

"A big reason why we disrupted it now was based on the timing of the rally on Monday and the intent of some of the individuals to potentially conduct violent acts down in Richmond," said Jay Tabb, the executive assistant director for national security at the FBI.

Speaking at a homeland security event in Washington, he said the FBI has "got a fair sense of worry" because agents "can't account for everybody and everything."

"We have a degree of interest of some individuals that we know are at least saying that they will be there and we have no way to predict where rhetoric turns to violence," Tabb said.

California teachers sue after fuel dump on schools

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Four teachers from a Los Angeles-area school sued Delta Air Lines on Friday, saying they were exposed to jet fuel when a plane with engine trouble dumped its fuel over a densely populated area, including several schools, while making an emergency return to the airport.

At a news conference, the teachers described the fuel as drizzling down like raindrops with "overwhelming" fumes. They said their panicked students screamed and cried.

"The plaintiffs could feel the fuel on their clothes, their flesh, their eyes and their

skin," said the teachers' attorney, Gloria Allred, who noted that her firm may add teachers or students to the lawsuit.

"Fuel penetrated their mouths and noses as well, producing a lasting and severe irritation, and a lasting and a noxious taste and smell," Allred said.

Officials have said nearly 60 schoolchildren and teachers were exposed to the smelly vapor Tuesday and were examined for minor skin and lung irritations and told to wash with soap and water. No one was taken to a hospital.

The teachers said they sought medical treatment after the incident and suffered physical and emotional pain.

The lawsuit filed in Los Angeles County Superior Court by the four teachers at Park Avenue Elementary School in Cudahy seeks unspecified damages.

The plaintiffs, Lisette Barajas, Laura Guzman, Mariana De La Torre and Anabel Samperio, appeared at the news conference with their attorney but declined to be identified individually when they spoke.

Delta declined to comment on the pending litigation.

Also on Friday, the South Coast Air Quality Management District — the governmental agency that monitors air pollution for parts of Southern California — issued a violation to Delta for the fuel dump.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Pigeon wearing tiny sombrero discovered

NV RENO — A pigeon wearing a tiny sombrero in Reno was discovered following sightings of its cowboy hat-wearing cousins in Las Vegas, a city manager said.

Reno City Manager Sabra Newby tweeted about the bird, saying it's quirky and fun but still inhumane, KOLO-TV reported.

The sighting comes after a pigeon in Las Vegas with a miniature cowboy hat glued to its head died earlier this week, animal officials said.

"Reno cares about our animals," Newby said. "They need protection and don't need to become a punchline."

School bus driver charged with DUI

WV CHARLESTON — A Kanawha County school bus driver has been charged with a DUI after the vehicle was involved in a four-car collision that sent two students to the hospital.

The Charleston Police Department officers responded to the crash to find six children on the bus, two of whom were hospitalized with non-life-threatening injuries.

Bus driver Susan Ann Lipscomb, 58, has been arrested and charged with three counts of a DUI that caused bodily injury and one count of a DUI with a minor in the vehicle.

State stops condoms with cheeky slogans

UT SALT LAKE CITY — An HIV-awareness campaign featuring condom wrappers with cheeky slogans that put a sexy spin on state pride met a quick end in Utah

as the governor ordered the health department to stop distributing them.

Utah Gov. Gary Herbert's intervention came hours after the designs became public. Herbert, a Republican, said he understands the importance of educating residents about HIV prevention, but he does not approve of using sexual innuendo as part of a taxpayer-funded campaign.

Man charged in killing in sunglasses dispute

CT HARTFORD — A Connecticut man charged with shooting and killing another man in a dispute over a pair of high-end sunglasses has been convicted of manslaughter.

William Coleman was found guilty by a Superior Court jury of first-degree manslaughter with a firearm for the July 4, 2017 killing of Victor Millan, 25, in Hartford.

Prosecutors: Officer wrote a fake ticket

MA BOSTON — A Boston police officer so infuriated after a confrontation with another driver on an area highway sent the man a fake \$790 citation and a curt note that read "Try fighting this. I dare you!" prosecutors said.

Officer Christopher Curtis was released on personal recognizance after pleading not guilty to forgery, witness intimidation, and misleading an investigation.

The other driver told investigators he was driving when he saw a white pickup truck coming close to the back of his car.

The driver said the pickup driver honked at him, sped toward his car, merged into the lane on his right and then veered back into the left lane,

nearly forcing him into the median barrier, according to court records.

Police: Same suspect likely blew up 3 ATMs

FL TAMPA — Three strikes, and he's in.

A thief who authorities in Florida said likely blew up three ATMs was able to take money from a Regions Bank in Valrico. The first two blasts didn't yield cash, news outlets reported.

The other explosions happened at a BB&T in Oldsmar in November, and a Pilot Bank in Tampa in December. All three locations are in the Tampa Bay area. In the Valrico and Tampa explosions, Hillsborough County Sheriff Chad Chronister said the suspect painted the lenses of surveillance cameras black just before the blasts.

Woman sues after being filmed in towel

RI EAST PROVIDENCE — A Rhode Island woman has asked her hometown for \$1 million to settle her complaint that local police allowed a reality television show to film her wearing nothing but a towel.

The complaint, filed in November and first reported by WPRI-TV, said East Providence police allowed "Live PD" to film Desiree Spitaleri when she came to her door fresh from the shower last July.

Officers had responded to her home after getting a 911 call from a child asking for help with homework.

"Little did she know that her entire interaction with the East Providence police officers was being recorded," the complaint said.

Police say woman attacked manicurists

OKLAHOMA CITY — An angry Oklahoma City woman is accused of slapping a nail salon worker and punching and threatening another with a knife because the workers were speaking Vietnamese, police said.

Candace Nicole Muzny, 43, was arrested on complaints of assault with a dangerous weapon and assault and battery on a police officer after the incident at the Creative Nail salon, said Oklahoma City police Sgt. Megan Morgan.

Muzny was getting a pedicure when one employee began speaking Vietnamese to another, at which point Muzny began yelling at the workers and slapped one in the face, according to a police report. When another employee tried to call police, she pulled out a pocket knife and punched him in the face, the report said.

Man pulled knife on Taco Bell workers

VA FALMOUTH — A Virginia man has been charged with lunging at Taco Bell employees with a knife after becoming upset about the type of taco they gave him, a police spokeswoman said.

Octavious N. Hodges, 39, entered the Taco Bell and tried to order from the dollar menu, Stafford County Sheriff's spokeswoman Amanda Vicinanza said. The man only had 70 cents, so employees gave him a taco for free.

When Hodges unwrapped his food, he became upset about the type of taco he received, eventually pulling a knife and threatening them with it, Vicinanza said.

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STARS AND STRIPES®

Chiefs, Titans brimming with confidence

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Andy Reid rarely digs into his own past, preferring to stay in the moment or focus squarely on the future. It's an approach that has served him well during a coaching career that might someday land him in the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

Yet when his Kansas City Chiefs faced a seemingly insurmountable hole in the divisional round of the playoffs, Reid caught himself thinking back almost four decades to his final game as an offensive lineman at BYU. It was the Holiday Bowl and SMU had taken a 45-25 lead in the fourth quarter. Just about everybody in Jack Murphy Stadium that night thought it was over, only to watch, stunned, as the Cougars rallied to win on three late touchdowns.

"That kind of stuck in there. You had that hope," Reid said this week when asked what gave him confidence Kansas City could rally to a 51-31 win over the Texans for a spot in the AFC championship game. "Then it's the feel of your team.

You're on the sideline, you've been down there long enough, you can sense what they're thinking, where their mind is at. These guys weren't flinching. Let's get it right."

The Chiefs (13-4) got everything right the rest of the way. And the comeback from a 24-0 deficit propelled them into a matchup Sunday with Tennessee (11-7), which has merely knocked off the Patriots and top-seeded Ravens on the road to reach the precipice of the Super Bowl.

It will be the first time coaching this deep in the playoffs for the Titans' Mike Vrabel, but it's certainly familiar territory to his counterpart. Reid had the Chiefs in the same position a year ago, when they lost in overtime to New England — the Patriots won the coin toss and marched downfield for a touchdown — and he led the Eagles to five NFC championship games during his 14 years in Philadelphia.

"I have done a few of these," Reid said, "One thing that changes is how fast the game is. I can tell you from experience, the magnitude, every time you

take a step up in the playoffs — it's single elimination."

Experience is great. Successful experience is better, and that is where Reid falls short. His only conference title came during the 2004 season, when the Eagles lost the Super Bowl to the Patriots. And who should be on the New England roster that night but a game-wrecking linebacker named Vrabel, who even caught a touchdown pass.

Vrabel may not have any experience in this position as a coach, but has plenty as a player. He lifted the Lombardi Trophy three times with New England before finishing his career — coincidentally — with two seasons in Kansas City.

"I spent 14 years in the National Football League," Vrabel said, "and I don't even know how many playoff games, but those were good experiences about preparation and really focusing on what got us to this point from where we were at different points in the season. And then, there's also things that I have to do as a coach to make sure that we're ready."

On offense, that means pounding away with running

back Derrick Henry and getting just enough production from Ryan Tannehill, just as the Titans did during a back-and-forth Week 10 win over the Chiefs.

On defense, it means slowing down the aerial assault of quarterback Patrick Mahomes and his fleet of game-changing playmakers: running back Damien Williams, tight end Travis Kelce and wide receivers Tyreek Hill and Sammy Watkins.

"I think there is a belief in one another, first and foremost," Tannehill said. "We've been through a lot this season, ups and downs, and won games in a lot of different ways. With that comes a lot of belief and a lot of confidence in one another."

The Chiefs have plenty of confidence in their own right. They haven't lost since that game in Tennessee, and their comeback last week gave them the belief they can overcome anything. Their offense is still shattering records and a retooled defense under new coordinator Steve Spagnuolo has been playing as well as any in the league.

Both Packers, 49ers had losing records last season

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — The San Francisco 49ers are one win away from accomplishing a turnaround that's been done only once before in the Super Bowl era.

With a victory in the NFC championship game at home on Sunday against the Green Bay Packers, the Niners will become the second team in NFL history to make the Super Bowl a year after losing at least 12 games.

Only the St. Louis Rams have done it, going from 4-12 in 1998 to Super Bowl champs one year later thanks in part of an injury to Trent Green that cleared the way for Kurt Warner to take over at quarterback.

The 49ers (14-3) also can credit an injury to their quarterback for part of their turnaround; the team went only 4-12 last season after Jimmy Garoppolo went down with a season-ending knee injury in Week 3.

The silver lining to that injury was the No. 2 overall pick in the draft, which led

to the addition of defensive end Nick Bosa, who helped transform the defense into one of the league's best.

"Things have a way of working out," Garoppolo said. "I always told myself it was a blessing in disguise, the ACL and everything, and yeah, we got Bosa out of it. That's a pretty good trade-off, I guess. Things have a way of working out, I guess. This ride is crazy. You've just got to roll with the punches."

The Packers (14-3) have also had an impressive turnaround after slumping to a 6-9-1 record last season that led to the firing of longtime coach Mike McCarthy.

Matt LaFleur came in and tinkered with the offense, and general manager Brian Gutekunst brought in key additions such as pass-rushing duo Preston Smith and Za'Darius Smith, who combined for 25½ sacks on the season.

There have also been some lower-profile pickups such as Tyler Ervin, Jared Veldheer and Mercedes Lewis that have

helped.

"I think he's done a great job. I think he deserves a lot of credit, him and his staff," quarterback Aaron Rodgers said of Gutekunst. "There's been a lot of great pickups, but I think I said this at my locker a few weeks ago, the big-name ones have been fantastic, but it's kind of the other ones that have been the glue pieces, I feel like."

Brotherly love: There are plenty of close ties between the coaching staffs based on past history together. But none is as strong as the one between Matt LaFleur and his younger brother Mike, who is the passing game coordinator in San Francisco. When the teams played in the regular season, Matt's family came out early and spent the weekend with Mike's family. That won't be the case this time.

"I think there's a little different vibe, so I'll just leave it at that," Matt LaFleur said. "I haven't really talked to him much at all and it will probably be that way for the remainder of the week."

NHL roundup

Crosby scores in OT, Pens beat Red Wings

Associated Press

DETROIT — Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin needed only 21 seconds to take advantage of an overtime penalty.

Crosby scored a power-play goal 1:33 into overtime to lift the Pittsburgh Penguins over the Detroit Red Wings 2-1 Friday night. Crosby scored by redirecting a slap pass from Malkin past goalie Jimmy Howard. Pittsburgh was on the power play after Detroit's Luke Glendening took Jared McCann down away from the play and was called for interference.

"I don't think 4-on-3s are super, super dangerous lots of times, but when Crosby's around the net, it gets way more dangerous, because that's the one guy that you kind of at times leave to the goalie," Red Wings coach Jeff Blashill said. "You've got Malkin looking like he's going to shoot, so you've got to honor the shot, and there's just no way to get over there."

It was Crosby's third goal in three games since returning from a 28-game absence because of a core muscle injury. Bryan Rust also scored for the Penguins in the third period after Filip Zadina put Detroit ahead in the second.

"It just didn't have a lot of flow," said Crosby, who has eight goals on the season. "Took us a bit to get into it, but the second and third, I thought we found our legs a bit and generated some really good chances."

All three goals came with the man advantage.

Howard made 35 saves but remains winless since Oct. 29.

The Penguins rebounded from a 4-1 loss to Boston on Thursday night. They have not lost back-to-back games since late November, and Crosby has six points since returning.

"It's very impressive. I think it's hard for guys to come back off of injuries. Usually there's an adjustment process," Penguins coach Mike Sullivan

said. "Sid missed an extended amount of time, but once again, if you're asking me, does it surprise me? My answer would be no, because I watch his work ethic every day."

Crosby scored an overtime goal for the seventh straight season, tying him with Mats Sundin and Brendan Morrison for the longest streak since regular-season OT was re-instituted in 1983-84, according to Stats Perform.

Zadina opened the scoring with a shot from the right circle that slid along the ice and past goalie Matt Murray, who was screened a bit in front by Detroit forward Givani Smith. Rust evened the score with 16:24 left in the third when he beat Howard with a wrist shot to the glove side.

It was the 20th goal of the season for Rust.

"He's really playing well right now," Sullivan said. "He's hungry, he's confident, and he's playing the best hockey I think, since I've been coaching him."

Ducks 2, Hurricanes 1 (OT): Sam Steel scored on a breakaway 1:36 into overtime to lift Anaheim over host Carolina.

Erik Gudbranson also had a goal and Ryan Miller stopped 25 shots for Anaheim, which enters a nine-day break following consecutive wins.

Sebastian Aho scored and James Reimer made 35 saves for Carolina, which played its first game without Dougie Hamilton after the All-Star defenseman broke his right leg Thursday at Columbus.

Lightning 7, Jets 1: Anthony Cirelli got his first career hat trick, Nikita Kucherov scored twice and visiting Tampa Bay routed Winnipeg.

Tampa Bay's Andrei Vasilevskiy made 30 saves for his 10th straight victory, matching the longest winning streak of his career. He had 10 consecutive wins from Feb. 9 to March 5, 2019.

Top 25 roundup

No. 15 Spartans top Wisconsin on 'special night' for PG Winston

Associated Press

EAST LANSING, Mich. — Cassius Winston threw a lob from the right wing over the middle of the lane and Xavier Tillman dunked the basketball, breaking a record that stood for two decades.

Winston had six points, and his four assists gave him the Big Ten record for career assists as No. 15 Michigan State beat Wisconsin 67-55 Friday night.

"It was a special night," he said.

The Spartans (14-4, 6-1 Big Ten) stayed in sole possession of first place in the Big Ten and bounced back from a 71-42 loss at Purdue.

Winston connected with Tillman to give him four assists in the game and 817 in his career. Former Spartan Mateen Cleaves, who attended the game, ended his national championship-winning career with 816 assists in 2000 and was happy to have his mark surpassed by Winston.

"He's so selfless and he puts everybody first," Cleaves said. "When you have that mindset, good things always happen. Trust me, I am totally happy turning over the keys to Cassius. I think it's fantastic."

"Here, we're family. I'm Cassius' biggest fan."

Winston knew Cleaves was pulling for him to have the record.

"A lot of times in these situations, you probably want that forever," Winston said. "But it was never like that. He was rooting for me the whole time."

The Badgers (11-7, 4-3) trailed the entire game, but went on a 13-0 run with Nate Reuvers scoring 11 points to cut their deficit to six points early in the second half. They

went on another run late in the game to make the final score look relatively respectable after trailing by as much as 25 points.

"When we were down, we ended up coming back and kept fighting," Reuvers said. "If we can take away some of their runs and be better defensively the next time we play them, we can definitely beat them."

Iowa 90, No. 19 Michigan 83: Luka Garza scored 33 points and three of his teammates also scored in double figures as the Hawkeyes beat the visiting Wolverines.

CJ Fredrick had 21 points, Joe Wieskamp 20, and Ryan Kriener came off the bench to score 14 for the Hawkeyes.

Iowa (13-5, 4-3 Big Ten), which led by as many as 11 points in the first half, trailed 74-68 with 7:44 to play before going on a 10-0 run that included seven points by Garza.

Eli Brooks broke out of a shooting slump to lead Michigan (11-6, 2-4) with 25 points.

Franz Wagner scored 18 points, Jon Teske had 14 points and David DeJulius 10 for Michigan.

No. 13 Dayton 78, Saint Louis 76 (OT): Jalen Crutcher hit a three-pointer at the buzzer in overtime and finished with 21 points, lifting the Flyers over the host Billikens.

Obi Toppin added 20 points for Dayton (16-2, 5-0 Atlantic 10). Ibi Watson scored 17 and Trey Landers 14.

Dayton rallied from a 12-point deficit midway through the second half to win its seventh straight game.

Javonte Perkins scored 25 points for Saint Louis (14-4, 3-2). Hasahn French added 16 points and 17 rebounds and Jordan Goodwin added 15 points.

NBA roundup

Raptors make quick work of Wizards

Associated Press

TORONTO — Marc Gasol scored a season-high 20 points and matched his career high with six three-pointers, Norman Powell scored 28 points and the Toronto Raptors beat the Washington Wizards 140-111 on Friday night.

Terence Davis II matched his career best with 23 points, OG Anunoby had 18 and Serge Ibaka 15 as the Raptors recorded their highest-scoring game of the season and matched the franchise record for points in a game. Toronto's previous high this season was 133 points in a win over Cleveland on Dec. 16 at home.

Pascal Siakam scored 12 points and Kyle Lowry had 11 as the Raptors won their seventh consecutive game against

the Wizards, and fifth straight at home. Toronto has won 17 of its past 20 regular-season meetings with Washington.

Troy Brown Jr. scored 22 points, Isaac Bonga had a career-high 17 and Bradley Beal had 14 as the Wizards lost their third straight and fourth in five.

76ers 100, Bulls 89: Furkan Korkmaz had six three-pointers and a career-high 24 points, and host Philadelphia beat Chicago.

Ben Simmons and Al Horford each scored 20 points for Philadelphia. Simmons had 11 rebounds and seven assists.

Mavericks 120, Trail Blazers 112: Luka Doncic scored 35 points, Tim Hardaway Jr. added 29 and host Dallas avoided getting swept at home by Portland.

Doncic had eight rebounds and seven assists in the 20-year-old's first chance to tie Jason Kidd's career club record of 21 triple-doubles.

Pacers 116, Timberwolves 114: Malcolm Brogdon made a tiebreaking 16-footer with 18 seconds left and T.J. Warren scored 28 points to help host Indiana beat Minnesota.

Indiana has won four straight, including two in the past three days against the Timberwolves, earning their first season sweep in the series since 2015-16.

Hawks 121, Spurs 120: Trae Young scored 31 points and visiting Atlanta rallied from a 14-point deficit in the final quarter to stun San Antonio.

Kevin Huerter drained a three-pointer from the left cor-

ner with 6.3 seconds remaining to complete the rally for Atlanta.

Heat 115, Thunder 108: Kendrick Nunn scored 22 points to help visiting Miami top Oklahoma City.

Nunn, the two-time Eastern Conference rookie of the month, was coming off a 33-point effort Wednesday in a win over San Antonio.

Grizzlies 113, Cavaliers 109: Dillon Brooks scored 26 points, Ja Morant added 16 points and eight assists and host Memphis survived a late Cleveland rally for its seventh straight win.

Brandon Clarke had 15 points while shooting 6-for-8 from the field, part of Memphis' 51% shooting performance for the game.

Sports briefs

Former Cowboys coach Garrett joins Giants as OC

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Jason Garrett is headed to the other side of the Giants-Cowboys rivalry.

New York announced Friday night that the former Dallas coach will join new coach Joe Judge's staff as the offensive coordinator.

The team also announced the hiring of Patrick Graham as the defensive coordinator and assistant head coach. Thomas McGaughey was retained by Judge as the Giants' special teams coordinator.

Garrett was told Jan. 5 he was not being brought back by the Cowboys after coaching the team for the previous 9½ seasons. He took over in Dallas as the interim coach when Wade Phillips was fired halfway through the 2010 season and went 87-70, including the playoffs.

"We had some great con-

versations when we were able to bring him in here," Judge said of Garrett in a statement released by the team. "It was a great opportunity to get to know each other a little better than we had before. It was a great opportunity to sit there and talk ball and share philosophies and views on the game."

"It's a great system he brings with great teaching that will allow our players to go out there and play aggressively."

The 53-year-old Garrett had the club's second-longest tenure behind Pro Football Hall of Famer Tom Landry.

Dallas finished 8-8 for the fourth time under Garrett this season. The Cowboys opened 3-0 before dropping eight of 12 and losing control of their playoff fate. Dallas missed the playoffs six times in Garrett's nine full seasons.

His contract was expiring with the Cowboys, who instead

turned to Mike McCarthy as coach.

Brignone, Vlhova share GS win

SESTRIERE, Italy — Federica Brignone and Petra Vlhova tied for a World Cup giant slalom victory Saturday while overall leader Mikaela Shiffrin finished third by the smallest of margins.

Shiffrin was just one hundredth of a second behind the joint winners on the Giovanni Agnelli course.

Brignone led after the first leg and was ahead at the final checkpoint of her second run before crossing dead level with Vlhova.

Still, Brignone extended her lead in the discipline standings to 61 points ahead of Shiffrin.

It was the second consecutive victory for Vlhova, who

also won a slalom on Tuesday.

In other skiing news:

■ Beat Feuz struck back in his season-long rivalry with Dominik Paris to win a World Cup downhill on Saturday in Wengern, Switzerland.

Switzerland's best downhiller showed his mastery of the Alpine nation's most storied event to win the Lauberhorn race for a third time, matching the record of Austrian great Franz Klammer and delighting his home fans in a 32,000 crowd.

Feuz finished 0.29 seconds ahead of Italy's Paris down a shorter 2.95-kilometer course that started lower down the mountain due to overnight snowfall, the first in several weeks at Wengen.

Thomas Dessen of Germany was third, 0.31 behind Feuz. That completed a podium of the only winners of the five World Cup downhills so far this season.