

STARS AND STRIPES[®]

Friday, July 29, 2016

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Air Force: F-35 nearly ready for combat

The Washington Post

The Air Force is close to certifying that the F-35 joint strike fighter is ready for combat, a declaration that would become one of the most significant milestones in the long and tortured history of the Pentagon's most expensive weapons program ever.

After years of delays, cost overruns and controversy, top Pentagon officials could make the decision as early as next week, some 15 years after the program began.

In an interview, Gen. Herbert "Hawk" Carlisle, the head of the Air Force's Air Combat Command, said the jet fighter would likely be declared combat ready "at the leading edge" of a time-frame that begins Aug. 1. Once that happens, he said "they are

ready to go." Still, he said the program is still in its developmental stages, and that officials have continued to find and fix problems. The plane is still due for upgrades in its software in addition to other changes.

"I'm very, very confident it is going to continue to exceed our expectations," he said. Declaring the plane's "initial combat capability is just the beginning. We still have work to do on the airplane, and it will continue to get better."

For years, the \$400 billion program suffered a series of problems, and the F-35 was derided as "the plane that ate the Pentagon." In 2014, the engine of one of the jets caught fire as it was preparing to take off, forcing the Pentagon to temporarily ground the entire fleet.

But in more recent years the

program has gotten back on track, Pentagon officials said. Production has begun to climb. Prices have come down. And it has hit a series of milestones, including its international debut at an airshow this summer in the United Kingdom.

Approximately 180 of the aircraft have been delivered by Bethesda, Md.-based Lockheed Martin, the world's largest defense contractor. And the Pentagon plans to buy a total of 2,443 — though some in Congress, including Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., the chairman of the Armed Services Committee, have said there is no way the military will be able to afford that many.

Still, military officials say the so-called 5th generation fighter is a significant step up from its predecessors, allowing

pilots to maneuver undetected through enemy territory. The plane, which relies on so many lines of code it's often referred to as a "flying computer," has also been heralded for its ability to give pilots unparalleled situational awareness.

As the Air Force transitions from F-16s to the F-35, Lt. Col George Watkins, the commander of the 34th Fighter Squadron, said he has "been amazed at what we can do when going up against 4th generation fighters" in training.

The jet comes in three variants. One for the Marine Corps, which can land vertically and take off on a short runway. The Navy version is capable of landing on aircraft carriers, while the Air Force's is a more conventional fighter jet.

Clinton promotes national unity, seeks to build trust

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Hillary Clinton capped a four-day convention celebration with a plea for national unity and tolerance. Now, one of the most divisive and distrusted figures in American politics must convince voters that she, rather than Republican rival Donald Trump, can bring a deeply divided nation together.

"America is once again at a moment of reckoning. Powerful forces are threatening to pull us apart," Clinton said to a rapt Democratic convention audience. "And just as with our founders, there are no guarantees. It truly is up to us. We have to decide whether we all will work together so we all can rise together."

After a convention speech aimed squarely at undercutting Trump, the first female presi-

dential nominee embarks on a bus tour through two Rust Belt battlegrounds, Ohio and Pennsylvania. The shoot-from-the-hip billionaire believes he can make headway in those states with blue-collar white men, a demographic that has eluded Clinton and was unlikely to be swayed by a convention that heavily celebrated racial and gender diversity.

Trump's tweeted response to Clinton's speech captured his pitch to those voters. He slammed the former secretary of state as an ineffectual defender against terrorism and blasted her judgment.

"Hillary's vision is a borderless world where working people have no power, no jobs, no safety," he wrote.

Starting with a rally Friday at Temple University, Clinton, accompanied by running

mate Sen. Tim Kaine and their spouses, will focus on economic opportunity, diversity and national security, themes hammered home this week by an array of politicians, celebrities, gun-violence victims, law enforcement officers, and activists of all sexualities and races.

Their goal is to turn out the coalition of minority, female and young voters that twice elected President Barack Obama while offsetting expected losses among the white male voters drawn to Trump's message.

Democrats contrasted their optimistic, policy-laden message with the darker vision and less specific platform that marked Trump's turn during the Republican convention a week earlier.

Clinton's speech "was such a contrast with what we saw in Cleveland last week," Kaine

told CNN's "New Day" Friday, who described the Republican convention as "dark and depressing."

Kaine said job creation would be the top priority if Clinton wins the White House.

Selling that message will depend on whether Clinton can reach voters walled off by longstanding distrust. Despite her decades on the public stage, many know Clinton as much from Republican attacks as her resume, a fact Clinton confronted head-on: "I get it that some people just don't know what to make of me, so let me tell you."

The stakes are high: A loss to Trump would not only end Clinton's political career, it could be a devastating coda to her and her husband's political legacy and leave the Democratic Party weaker than it has been in a generation.

Calif. F/A-18 crash kills Marine

BY TARA COPP
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A Marine Corps pilot was killed late Thursday when his fighter jet crashed near Twentynine Palms in California during a training mission, the Marines said Friday.

The pilot, who was flying an F/A-18C Hornet, was part of the Third Marine Aircraft Wing, which is based out of Marine Corps Air Station Miramar. The crash occurred about 10:30 p.m.

Lt. Gen. Jon Davis, Marine Corps deputy commandant for aviation, said Friday that the crash was still under investigation. The name of the pilot was not released, pending the notification of next of kin.

This is the third F/A-18 crash since May. A fatal crash in June of a Hornet during a Blue Angels practice flight killed Marine Capt. Jeff Kuss and two upgraded "Super Hornet" variants of the F/A-18 collided in May during a training mission off the coast of North Carolina. In January, another night training flight off the coast of Hawaii killed 12 Marines when their two CH-53E helicopters collided.

The crashes follow a deadly year in 2015 for Marine Corps aviation when 30 pilots and their crews were killed. Almost all the deaths, including those in a January helicopter crash, involved nondeployed units logging flight training hours.

The crashes have called into question whether the military's nondeployed pilots are getting the number of training hours needed to fly their aircraft safely.

According to the Marines' standards, pilots should have 16.5 hours of flight training each month. Davis, the Marine's top aviation official, said the service has fallen short of this.

3 soldiers die in training this week

BY ALEX HORTON
Stars and Stripes

Three soldiers have died in stateside training this week, the Army said Friday. A soldier in Ranger school died Wednesday at Fort Benning, Ga., and another died Thursday at Fort Jackson, S.C.

On Wednesday, 2nd Lt. Michael R. Parros, 21, died, two days after his first day of Ranger School at Fort Benning. An Army release said the West Point graduate had been hospitalized with hyponatremia, abnormally low sodium levels in the blood typically linked to excessive water intake. It can be aggravated by other factors, according to the Mayo Clinic. Ranger School is designed to push soldiers to physical and mental limits in a grueling, 61-day course.

A soldier at Fort Jackson collapsed Thursday following a 2-mile run at the end of his physical fitness test and later died at the hospital, base spokesman Patrick Jones said. The name of the soldier has not been released, and the incident is under investigation.

That death is at least the second this week linked to a severe reaction following a

morning physical training run. Spc. Matthew R. Hester, 28, died at Fort Carson, Colo., on Monday, shortly after he collapsed, the Army said. Hester, a combat medic, was assigned to the 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team of the 4th Infantry Division.

Investigations into the deaths are ongoing; record heat levels in many parts of the country could have been a factor.

The high in Fort Benning was 95 degrees Monday, with the heat index at 103 degrees, according to the National Weather Service.

"Heat is always in play here this time of year," Army spokesman John Tongret said of Fort Benning. "I hate to speculate and say heat was a part of it, but I certainly couldn't argue against it, either. That said, we are not 100 percent certain this was a heat-related injury," Tongret told the East Bay (Calif.) Times. Parros was from Walnut Creek, Calif.

More than 200 soldiers have experienced heatstroke in each of the past five years, said Maj. David DeGroot of the Army Public Health Center in an Army handout cautioning the effects and dangers of training in hot conditions.

Officials at posts vulnerable to high temperatures, mostly in the south, have regulations to curb heat casualties, said John Boyce, an Army Forces Command spokesman. Commanders typically hold ceremonies and other prolonged events in the morning to avoid high temperatures, he said.

"We take every death seriously and look into the circumstances to determine what may be done to avoid them in the future, for both their families and other soldiers," Boyce said.

Officials at the Army's Combat Readiness Center at Fort Rucker, Ala., launched a team to lead the investigation of Parros' death, said Michael J. Negard, a spokesman with the center. The center provides investigative resources to determine how accidents resulting in deaths or heavy financial or equipment losses have occurred. The findings occasionally are sent up to the Pentagon for review of force-wide changes, Negard said.

As of Friday, the center had not received requests from commanders at Fort Carson or Fort Benning to activate a team to look into recent deaths there, Negard said.

Protest at Incirlik doesn't affect ops

Stars and Stripes

The U.S. military said operations were not affected by a demonstration outside Incirlik Air Base, where a large group had rallied on Thursday to protest the American presence at the Turkish facility.

The military was warned in advance of the protest, said to involve at least 1,000 demonstrators. Americans were advised by the U.S. diplomatic missions in Turkey to stay away from the rally.

"It did not impact operations at Incirlik," Henrietta Levin, a Pentagon spokeswoman, said

Friday.

The demonstration came two weeks after a failed coup attempt in Turkey.

Protesters demanded that the government end the American presence at Incirlik. In video footage of the event, some participants burned American flags.

Top U.S. officials voiced support for the Turkish government after the coup. They also rejected suggestions by pro-government media and Turkish officials that the U.S. had a hand in the effort to oust the administration of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

On Friday, U.S. Central Command released a statement from Gen. Joseph Votel about such reports.

"Any reporting that I had anything to do with the recent unsuccessful coup attempt in Turkey is unfortunate and completely inaccurate," the CENTCOM commander said in the statement.

"Turkey has been an extraordinary and vital partner in the region for many years. We appreciate Turkey's continuing cooperation and look forward to our future partnership in the counter-ISIL fight," he said.

Bulls' Butler fitting in with US team

Associated Press

Jimmy Butler spun a basketball on his finger. He joked around with Cleveland Cavaliers guard Kyrie Irving during a brief 1-on-1 exchange. He smiled as some of the NBA's biggest stars lobbed some playful barbs in his direction.

Back in Chicago on the eve of the Olympics, Butler is fitting in quite nicely with the U.S. national team.

"There are a lot of great players on this roster, but more than just basketball players, I get to learn a lot more about them off the court," Butler said, "who they are as people and their families, and how they act, their personalities. I think that's been my favorite part of this whole journey, just getting to know the guys that I go up against every year."

It's good practice for the fall, when Butler returns to a new-look Bulls team that suddenly includes a pair of longtime opponents for the versatile swingman.

Derrick Rose is gone, traded to the New York Knicks. All-Star center Pau Gasol landed in San Antonio. But Dwyane Wade and Rajon Rondo decided to join Butler in Chicago, providing championship experience, but also two more players on the wrong side of 30 who like to have the ball in their hands.

"I'm excited. I know they are as well," Butler said before Thursday's Team USA practice at the United Center. "It's a new start for a lot of us."

Butler's reputation also took a hit in the wake of Chicago's 42-40 finish in April, ending the franchise's string of seven consecutive playoff appearances. The two-time All-Star was openly critical of new coach Fred Hoiberg and did not click with Rose last season.

Asked about speculation he had a hand in Chicago's offseason activity, Butler brushed the notion away like he would an overzealous defender.

"That has nothing to do with me. I don't move guys," he said. "It's like I always say, people are going to think what they want to think."

"That doesn't bother me," he continued. "I know where I stand. I know who I am."

Butler's inclusion on the national team establishes the 6-foot-7 Marquette product as one of the best players in the world, part of a steady rise for the No. 30 selection in the 2011 draft. On the 12-player roster for Team USA, only Draymond Green and DeAndre Jordan were lower draft picks.

Butler, 26, averaged 20.9 points, 5.3 rebounds and 4.8 assists last season. He has increased his averages for scoring and assists in each of the last four years.

"I knew he was a workhorse, but that man really never stops working," Golden State guard Klay Thompson said, "and I give Jimmy a lot of credit because he came into this league and obviously he didn't have the hype he (would) if he was like a top-five pick, but he's worked himself into an All-Star and one of the best wings in the game."

Before this Olympic run, U.S. coach Mike Krzyzewski had only seen Butler on TV.

"The very first thing is just how strong and what a great athlete he is," Krzyzewski said. "Then what a good guy he is, and then what an outstanding competitor. You felt he was going to check every box, but you put two checks in each of these boxes. He's terrific, and he's a really good guy."

Krzyzewski said Butler and Paul George are the most versatile players on the team, capable of guarding any position. Butler had four points and three rebounds while playing 14½ minutes in the United States' 107-57 exhibition victory over China on Tuesday night.

Next up is a matchup with Venezuela on Friday night at Butler's home with the Bulls, and then a trip to Houston for one more game against Nigeria before departing for Brazil. When it comes to the Olympics, Butler said he just wants to win.

It's a very familiar response for U.S. assistant Tom Thibodeau, who coached Butler with the Bulls before he was fired in May 2015.

"To see how much he's grown from his first year in the league to what he's become, it's a testament to how hard he's worked, his intelligence, his drive," Thibodeau said. "Each year he's gotten better, and I think his makeup will allow him to continue to improve each year."

US women could return to podium in field hockey

Associated Press

The United States is a real threat to return to the podium in women's field hockey.

The Americans finished third in Los Angeles in 1984 but haven't medaled since, despite qualifying for the Games in 2008 and 2012.

There are signs that a breakthrough might be near. The U.S. won the Pan-Am Games in 2015, beating perennial power Argentina in the final. In the Champions Tournament in June, the United States finished third, despite being the lowest-ranked of the six entrants. Included were draws against No. 3 Australia and No. 4 New Zealand in pool play and a win over Australia in the third-place match.

The U.S. is No. 5 in the latest FIH world rankings, its highest slot ever. The squad plans to challenge Australia and New Zealand, as well as No. 1 Netherlands and No. 2 Argentina, next month.

"Last month, we were able to show the world that we are at a point where we're reaching our goals," forward Katie Bam said. "We're stepping up and we're taking it to teams that are ranked higher than us, and we are playing without fear, and we are winning those games."

A critical part of coach Craig Parnham's plan when he took over in 2013 was to make sure the players clearly defined what they wanted to accomplish. They met for 2½ hours and agreed that the word united needed to be more than just a part of their country's name.

"We want this program to be number one in the world," midfielder Rachel Dawson said. "We understand that the

only way that we're going to do that is by doing it together, by each of us bringing our individual strengths and making something that's bigger than any of us individually."

Dawson has the most caps, with 289. She played on both the 2008 and 2012 Olympic teams.

Lauren Crandall is second on the team with 273 caps, and she also heads into her third Olympics. She was fifth in the International Hockey Federation Player of the Year balloting in 2015.

"She's hugely experienced and has been through many cycles with the USA," Parnham said. "She is a great leader for the team. Not only does she speak well, but more importantly for us, she defines her ability on actions and behaviors. She leads by example and is a real role model for the younger players."

Kaitelyn Falgowski, a midfielder who also will play in her third Olympics, has 225 caps.

The Americans plan to improve on their 12th-place finish in London in 2012.

"I think a lot can happen in four years," Falgowski said. "That's one of the biggest things going forward, is this is a new team. The lessons we've learned over the past four years have really prepared us going into Rio for any mindset. We're still writing our own script, and in London, we may have finished 12th, but we're going in with a fresh start in Rio, and I think that's something that we're all prepared for and excited to be able to do."

Refugees run long, inspiring road to Rio

Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya — They were used to running barefoot on baking ground. They were raw, untrained. All eager.

Each day, the five runners who grew up in the Kakuma refugee camp pounded the dusty tracks past thousands of makeshift tents to pass the time.

Until there was a lifeline. Workers from the foundation of former marathon world-record holder Tegla Loroupe arrived to hold athletic trials, and the five excelled. For this group of runners, many with no family and all with little schooling, running could offer food, a solid house. Proper shoes.

"When I started the project, I said 'What can I do with these people?'" coach Volker Wagner said. What he didn't have to worry about was their "eagerness to run."

The five runners are refugees, five of 65 million across the world who have been displaced from their homes. Now, they're also track athletes, and they're going to the Olympics.

The runners, all from South Sudan, are part of the IOC's first 10-member refugee team. It's a team of athletes whose roads to Rio de Janeiro have surely been harder, but whose journeys might ultimately be more heartwarming, than any of the other 10,000-plus athletes who will compete at the globe's biggest sports event.

"When we go to Rio we are going to give a message that a refugee can do anything any other human being can do," said Yiech Pur Biel, a 21-year-old 800-meter runner who now trains with the group at a base in the foothills just outside of the Kenyan capital of Nairobi.

The refugee team is made up of men and women who have talent and drive, and the same dreams of competing on the world's largest stage as athletes from all over the globe. But they have no way of representing their countries, countries they were forced to flee. So they've been given a flag, the Olympic flag, to march behind at the opening ceremony in Rio and to compete under at the Games.

Make no mistake their places at the Olympics have been earned: All 10 have met qualifying criteria.

It's still a steep curve, especially for the South Sudanese. They have only been in formal training for a few years at the most, some of them just months. But after the hardships they endured early in life, this challenge isn't that scary.

"If I compare the training or the duration of training with other people I am going to compete with, (it) is not the same. But, I do not fear that," Nadai Lohalith said.

They've come a long way, but Wagner said if any of them get through the qualifying heats at the Olympics, it'll be huge. But that's not the point.

It was never the point. "When you give these people hope," coach Wagner said, "that made this project successful."

They look forward to being at the Olympic village in Rio and meeting other athletes. They look forward to having their own uniforms and running shoes. They look forward to being part of a team.

Most of all, they look forward.



Ship's Store official new car program

Exclusive Navy at-sea offers:

www.navyauto.com or nasinfo@navyauto.com

Sale returns but White Sox fall

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Chris Sale returned from his jersey-trashing suspension and threw six effective innings, but John Lackey out-pitched him and Aroldis Chapman got the final four outs to save the Cubs' 3-1 victory over the White Sox in Chicago's rivalry series Thursday night.

Sale (14-4) was greeted with smiles and hugs from his teammates following a five-day ban for tearing up 1976-style uniforms he didn't want to wear before his previous scheduled start. He had command issues, but worked out of trouble while allowing two runs and six hits.

Lackey (8-7) allowed one run in six innings for his first win since June 8. Chapman, in his second appearance since being acquired from the Yankees, struck out two and consistently hit 102 mph in his first save for his new team.

Kris Bryant, who homered against Sale in the All-Star Game, hit an RBI double off the center-field wall in the first inning. Ben Zobrist added an RBI single in the third and doubled and scored in the eighth as the Cubs earned a split of the four-game series and spoiled Sale's night.

The lefty was scratched from his start Saturday, sent home and then suspended five days for cutting up a number of colored throwback jerseys the team was supposed to wear for the game. Sale said they were uncomfortable and became enraged when the team wouldn't switch them out.

Angels 2, Red Sox 1: Hanley Ramirez's throwing error to the plate on Daniel Nava's bases-loaded grounder allowed two runs to score, and host Los Angeles walked off with a stunning victory over Boston.

The Angels rallied in the ninth against Boston closer Brad Ziegler (2-5), loading the bases with one out on singles by Mike Trout, Albert Pujols and Andrelton Simmons.

Pinch-hitter Nava then poked a potential game-ending grounder to first, but Ramirez put his throw past catcher Sandy Leon, allowing Trout and pinch-runner Ji-Man Choi to end it.

Ziegler, who also lost Wednesday when he gave up a ninth-inning homer by Detroit's Miguel Cabrera, blew his third save of the season.

Cam Bedrosian (2-0) pitched the ninth for Los Angeles.

Nationals 4, Giants 2: Ryan Zimmerman had two hits and scored a run, Trea Turner added two hits and an RBI and visiting Washington beat San Francisco in the opener of a key four-

game series between division leaders.

Bryce Harper doubled in a run while Anthony Rendon had two hits to help the Nationals beat All-Star Game starter Johnny Cueto (13-3) in manager Dusty Baker's return to AT&T Park. Baker won 840 games as the Giants manager from 1993-2002.

San Francisco scored a run in the ninth to pull within 4-2 before Shawn Kelley struck out Angel Pagan with the bases loaded to end it and get his fifth save.

The two teams went into the game with identical 59-42 records before Washington won to join the Chicago Cubs (61-40) as the only teams in the majors with at least 60 wins.

Cardinals 5, Marlins 4: Aledmys Diaz homered, doubled and drove in three runs against childhood pal Jose Fernandez (12-5), helping visiting St. Louis beat Miami.

Fernandez gave up five runs in five innings and fell to 26-2 at Marlins Park.

Miami's Dee Gordon, the 2015 NL batting and stolen bases champion, returned from an 80-game suspension for failing a drug test and went 0-for-4. Ichiro Suzuki doubled as a pinch hitter in the seventh for Miami and needs two hits for 3,000.

Diaz and Matt Holliday homered in the third inning against Fernandez, who had never previously given up more than one homer in a home game. His only other loss at Marlins Park came on opening day this year against Detroit.

Michael Wacha (6-7) allowed three runs in six innings, and three relievers completed an eight-hitter. Seung Hwan Oh pitched around a one-out single in the ninth for his seventh save.

Rockies 2, Mets 1: New York closer Jeurys Familia (2-3) stumbled for a second straight game, allowing two runs in the ninth inning in a loss that handed visiting Colorado its seventh victory in eight games.

Less than 24 hours after Familia's streak of 52 consecutive regular-season saves was snapped, the right-hander entered in the top of the ninth with a 1-0 lead, and couldn't hold it.

Trevor Story had a leadoff single and stole second. After fellow rookie David Dahl walked, Daniel Descalso bunted up the first-base line. Mets catcher Rene Rivera watched as the ball spun toward foul territory but it stopped fair, loading the bases with no outs.

With one out, Familia got pinch-hitter Christian Adames to hit a slow grounder to the right side. First baseman James Loney booted the ball and Story scored to make it 1-all. Familia then threw a wild pitch, allowing Dahl to cross the plate with the go-ahead run.

Rangers 3, Royals 2: Mitch Moreland's second homer of the game broke a tie in the eighth inning and Cole Hamels (12-2) earned his 12th win of the season in host Texas' victory over Kansas City.

Hamels allowed two runs and six hits in eight innings, matching his longest start of the season. Sam Dyson earned his 21st save in 23 chances, stranding the tying run at third base.

Both homers by the left-handed hitting Moreland were to the opposite field and came off Yordano Ventura (6-9). It was Moreland's 10th career multi-homer game and second of the season. He has five homers in his last 11 hits.

Twins 6, Orioles 2: Rookie Max Kepler continued his midseason surge with a tying home run and finished with two RBIs to help host Minnesota beat Baltimore.

The teams were squeezing in a make-up game from a May 9 postponement with Minnesota in the middle of a homestand and Baltimore heading for a weekend series at Toronto.

Kepler hit his 11th home run off reliever Odrisamer Despaigne (0-2) leading off the sixth inning to tie it at 2 after Baltimore starter Ubaldo Jimenez lasted five innings in his first start since July 8. Kepler had an RBI double in the four-run seventh.

Ryan Pressly (5-5) combined with two other relievers to allow just two hits the final three innings.

Phillies 7, Braves 5: Aaron Altherr and Maikel Franco homered, Aaron Nola (6-9) won for the first time in eight starts and visiting Philadelphia beat Atlanta.

Altherr returned to the lineup after missing the first 103 games of the season with a broken left wrist. He went 3-for-4 with two RBIs.

Nola gave up eight hits, three runs, three walks and struck out five in five innings. Jeanmar Gomez earned his 27th save.

Braves starter Matt Wisler (4-11) gave up three homers and has allowed eight homers in his past four starts, a span of 20¹/₃ innings.

Brewers 6, Diamondbacks 4: Hernan Perez hit a two-run homer, singled and scored the go-ahead run in the sixth, Zach Davies (8-4) pitched 6¹/₃ innings and host Milwaukee beat Arizona.

Perez, who started at shortstop for benched Jonathan Villar, crushed the first pitch from Robbie Ray (5-10) 458 feet off the facing of the scoreboard in deep center for the two-run homer in the third.

Davies allowed three runs — two earned — on six hits. Jeremy Jeffress pitched the ninth for his 24th save. Milwaukee added a run when Kirk Nieuwenhuis homered off Tyler Clippard leading off the eighth.

Walker one shot up in PGA

Associated Press

SPRINGFIELD, N.J. — A drab year for Jimmy Walker took a turn for the worse two weeks ago at the British Open, when he stayed in what was dubbed the "frat house" at Royal Troon with Jordan Spieth, Rickie Fowler, Justin Thomas, Jason Dufner and Zach Johnson.

Walker was the only one to miss the cut.

He still stayed the weekend. He just stayed away from the golf course, and his clubs. How does one kill time in such a small Scottish town?

"When the first guy comes back and he's ready for a cocktail, you have one," Walker said.

Thursday in the PGA Championship, the drinks were on Walker.

In the final major of the year, Walker finally saw enough putts fall at Baltusrol that he matched his low score in a major with a 5-under 65 and wound up leading a major for the first time in his career.

Just like that, a stale year came to life.

Walker had a one-shot lead over two-time major champion Martin Kaymer, Emiliano Grillo and Ross Fisher.

And for Henrik Stenson, a great year might get even better. Coming off his record performance at the British Open, the Swede had three birdies on the back nine as the sweltering heat gave way to dark clouds and 20 mph gusts. That gave him a 67, leaving him two shots behind. Stenson is trying to join Ben Hogan in 1953 as the only players to win back-to-back majors at age 40.

"It's going to be a great season for me," Stenson said. "But at the same time, I want to give myself a chance to try to make it the best season."

It wasn't the best of times for Dustin Johnson or Rory McIlroy.

Johnson, the U.S. Open champion with a chance to go to No. 1 in the world ranking, was in the trees, in the water and couldn't get out of a bunker.

He managed only one birdie in a round of 77 that wasn't enough to beat 15 of the club pros at Baltusrol.

He wasn't alone in his misery. McIlroy took 35 putts and didn't make a single birdie in his round of 74 that left him so frustrated that he returned to Baltusrol late in the day with only his putter.

Walker's year has been so mediocre that he has finished within five shots of the winner only once this year, at Torrey Pines. He is on the verge of falling out of the top 50 in the world ranking and hasn't given as much thought to the Ryder Cup with qualifying a month away from ending.

"I feel like all year it's just been real stale and stagnant," Walker said. "It's just ebbs and flows of golf. Just haven't been scoring. ... It's frustrating. I would have loved to have had a better year than I've had so far to this point, but I know there's always time to play well at the end of the year."

Kaymer had the best score in the afternoon, when the blend of poa annua and bent grass on the Baltusrol greens became a little more difficult to navigate.

Baltusrol still allowed for good scoring. Twenty players were at 68 or better, a list that included defending champion Jason Day.

Day played in the morning group with McIlroy and Phil Mickelson, and he was the only player without much stress. Mickelson was 4 over through 11 holes when he rallied with a trio of birdies late in his round to salvage a 71.

East Carolina publicizing desire to join Big 12

Associated Press

East Carolina's athletic department social media hashtag is "ECUndaunted."

The Pirates, for sure, are undaunted when it comes to their approach to pursuing membership in the Big 12. You can throw in unabashed and uncanny, too.

The school is conducting a campaign on its social media platforms to tout the reasons it deserves strong consideration. Associate athletic director for external operations Shelley Binegar is coordinating the ongoing effort that began last week when Big 12 presidents directed Commissioner Bob Bowlsby to study expansion.

Fellow American Athletic Conference schools Cincinnati, Houston, Memphis, UCF, UConn and Tulane also are in the discussion of candidates if the 10-team Big

12 expands.

If those schools have voiced interest, East Carolina has all but shouted its desire.

Among the Pirates' messages: ECU leads the AAC in number of donors and donations, average football attendance over the last five years is highest among Group of Five members, and ECU can deliver a large television market. ECU also pointed out it would make an "excellent travel partner" with West Virginia.

"If we do nothing and we don't get in, then we have ourselves to blame," Binegar said Thursday. "If we do everything we can and we don't get in, then we'll feel like we've done everything we could. We're just not willing to do less. It's important for our fans, for our student-athletes, coaches, community and state to say, 'You know what, we're going to

make a push at this.' To be honest, we're not going to apologize about it. We think we deserve to be in. So why not be a little bit assertive in showing off our good points?"

Binegar acknowledged that East Carolina is fueled by the hope of garnering the prestige and big money that would come from being in a Power Five conference.

Chancellor Cecil Staton wrote a letter to Bowlsby on Tuesday to express ECU's interest. North Carolina Gov. Pat McCrory and state Attorney General Roy Cooper also wrote letters of support.

American Commissioner Michael Aresco said it's a sign of the conference's strength that so many of its members would be considered possibilities if the Big 12 expanded. He said there are no hard feelings.