

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Iraqi PM celebrates with troops in Mosul

Associated Press

MOSUL, Iraq — Iraq's prime minister celebrated with troops on Sunday after they drove Islamic State militants from some of their last strongholds in Mosul, even as heavy fighting continued in a small portion of the Old City neighborhood.

Iraqi state TV reported that Haider al-Abadi arrived in Mosul to declare victory over ISIS in the more-than-8-month-old operation to drive the militants out.

Al-Iraqiya TV quoted al-Abadi as saying he "congratulates the fighters and the people on the big victory" in the key city, even as fighting continued in pockets.

Iraq launched the operation to retake Mosul in October. ISIS now controls less than half a square mile of territory in Mosul's Old City but is using human shields, suicide bombers and snipers in a fight to the death.

Lt. Gen. Jassim Nizal, of the army's 9th Division, said his forces achieved "victory" in their sector after a similar announcement by the militarized Federal Police. His soldiers danced to patriotic music atop tanks even as airstrikes sent plumes of smoke into the air nearby.

The militants captured Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, in a matter of days in the summer of 2014. Nizal acknowl-

edged that many of his men were among those who fled the city at that time in a humiliating defeat for the country's armed forces.

"Some things happened here, that's true," he said. "But we have come back."

Much of Mosul's Old City and surrounding areas have been devastated by months of grueling urban combat. On Sunday, a line of tired civilians filed out of the Old City on foot, past the carcasses of destroyed apartment blocks lining the cratered roads.

Heba Walid held her sister-in-law's baby, who was born into war. The parents of the 6-month-old, along with 15 other family members, were killed

last month when an airstrike hit their home. When Walid ran out of formula, she fed the baby a paste of crushed biscuits mixed with water.

Now they are among more than 897,000 people displaced by the fighting in Mosul.

The loss of the city would mark a major defeat for ISIS, which has suffered a series of major setbacks over the past year.

U.S.-backed Syrian forces have pushed into the group's de facto capital, the northern Syrian city of Raqqa, but a final victory there could be months away, and the extremists still hold several smaller towns and villages across Iraq and Syria.

Soldier donates Medal of Honor to memorial

BY NANCY MONTGOMERY

Stars and Stripes

VICENZA, Italy — The Medal of Honor has always hung heavily around Staff Sgt. Salvatore Giunta's neck. On Wednesday, he finally got to take it off.

In a ceremony marking the 173rd Airborne Brigade's new memorial to all the brigade's soldiers who received the military's highest award, the former Subway sandwich maker unfastened the medal's blue ribbon from his neck and handed it over to the brigade commander.

"It can't be with me because it's ours," said Giunta. In 2010, for his heroic actions during an ambush in Afghanistan, he became the first living man to receive the medal since the Vietnam War.

"I want this to stay in Vicenza, Italy, with the 173rd, with the men and women who earn this every single day through their selflessness and sacrifice," he said.

Giunta's gift to the brigade came near the beginning of a casual, 45-minute event in which privates, children and civilians strolled with war heroes, sergeants major and a major general along a brick walkway on a balmy Italian evening. The walkway, stretching from the brigade headquarters to

the gym, is lined with 18 memorials to men who, on what was frequently the worst and final day of their lives, displayed conspicuous gallantry and uncommon valor.

Two fought in World War II, 13 fought in Vietnam and three fought in Afghanistan, including Giunta, Sgt. Kyle White and Staff Sgt. Ryan Pitts. All are remembered with a stone pedestal bearing plaques that show their faces and recite their heroic deeds.

Brigade commander Col. Greg Anderson said the 173rd is the most decorated brigade in the Army. "I don't say that to brag. I don't say it as a point of pride," he said. "I say that to emphasize that the brigade has always received the difficult missions."

Giunta, then a 22-year-old specialist with B Company, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment, was several nights into an October 2007 mission in the Korengal Valley when his unit was ambushed and began taking casualties. He repeatedly exposed himself to fire to pull fellow soldiers to safety and threw grenades to advance into a wall of bullets. Alone he charged headlong as bullets whizzed past toward enemy fighters, whom he saw carrying off a wounded American, one of his best friends.

"Sal never broke stride. He leapt forward. He took aim. He killed one of the insur-

gents and wounded the other, who ran off," President Barack Obama said at Giunta's ceremony.

Giunta's friend, Sgt. Joshua Brennan, died from his wounds, as did the platoon medic, Spc. Hugo Mendoza.

Such losses make it hard for surviving soldiers to accept their medals for heroism. "Hearing the Medal of Honor is like a slap in the face," Giunta told Vanity Fair several years ago. "I don't think you know what I did. I didn't do s---."

On Wednesday, he acknowledged a six-year struggle to come to terms with the honor. "I'm not here because I'm a great soldier. I'm here because I served with great soldiers," he said.

The brigade had planned to bring retired Lt. Col. Alfred Rascon to the event. Rascon, who was unable to attend, was awarded the Medal of Honor in 2000 for his actions as a medic in Vietnam in 1964, when he repeatedly used his body to shield the men he worked to save from enemy fire.

But other Vietnam vets made the trip, including Dave Gardner, from Memphis, Tenn. "We were the beginning of this," he said, referring to the 173rd's storied involvement in Vietnam. "You want to see what people are doing with your legacy."

New Zealand navy frigate augments 7th Fleet

BY TYLER HLAVAC
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — A Royal New Zealand Navy frigate recently filled in for the USS Fitzgerald during training with the USS Nimitz Carrier Strike Group in the Western Pacific.

The HMNZS Te Kaha augmented 7th Fleet forces after the Fitzgerald was severely damaged in a collision with a cargo ship off the coast of Japan on June 17, a Navy statement said.

The service offered few details on the exercise, which ran between June 30 and July 5, describing it as a “bilateral operation” that included a replenishment at sea.

The collision between the Fitzgerald and the Philippine-flagged ACX Crystal happened about 64 miles southwest of Yokosuka, leaving seven sailors dead and the ship severely damaged.

The destroyer is tentatively scheduled to enter dry dock sometime this week, when it will receive a full damage assessment before being sent stateside for repairs, the Navy told Stars and Stripes.

Band whose music was used in interrogation plays at Gitmo

The Washington Post

If Vietnam was the first media war, then Iraq and Afghanistan were the first conflicts of the digital media era, with troops carrying contra-band cellphones, cameras and MP3 players loaded with music.

Few tracks circulated on playlists overseas more than Drowning Pool’s “Bodies,” a hard-rock song mostly consisting of the throaty, repeated lines of the main chorus: “Let the bodies hit the floor.”

The troop favorite and its sordid past converged last week, when the band played for Freedom Fest, a July 4 show for troops stationed at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, home to the high-profile prison that has held detainees from the global war on terrorism since Sept. 11, 2001.

The song has a dark history. It was used in at least one instance during harsh interrogation of Mohamedou Slahi, a detainee held at Guantanamo in 2003. An interrogator, identified only as Mr. X, “exposed to variable lighting patterns and rock music, to the tune of Drowning Pool’s ‘Let the Bodies Hit [the] Floor,’” according to a 2008 Senate Armed Services Committee probe on prisoner abuse at the facility.

A 2005 U.S. Southern Command inquiry into torture at the base noted interrogators used music to unsettle detainees.

Slahi was freed in October 2016 and was returned to his native Mauritania without charges, the Miami Herald reported.

He recently told the newspaper that his experience with music during his detention was “twisted on so many levels.”

“Music is supposed to make you happy and make you a better person,” he told the Herald by

email in response to questions about the July 4 concert.

Slahi told the Herald it was “quite the coincidence” that the band, and their signature song, were on hand for the festivities at the naval station.

“It is likely that leadership was not informed of the potential for negative connotations because individuals were more familiar with the song ‘Let the bodies hit the floor’ than the name of the band that performed it or its past history with detainees,” U.S. Southern Command spokeswoman Col. Lisa Garcia said in a statement.

Drowning Pool has gone on tour with the USO at least five times since 2005 to provide entertainment for troops around the globe.

At the center is “Bodies,” their wildly popular song from their debut album.

Released in May 2001, “Bodies” was tailor-made for the headbanging rock crowd, and quickly became a favorite of servicemembers looking for what many call “moto” songs — short for motivation — that combine fast rhythms and vivid details of violence to amp up combat troops.

The song was a massive hit in fall 2001, when servicemembers began combat deployments to Afghanistan, the Persian Gulf and later Iraq.

Brian Castner, a former Air Force bomb disposal technician, said on Twitter that he recalls a video of the song spliced with stock military footage and photos of al-Qaida leadership appearing as early as October 2001, when he was in Saudi Arabia gearing up for combat.

In 2006, David Peisner wrote in Spin that interrogators often mentioned “Bodies” as popular for “psyching up U.S. soldiers and psyching out enemies and captives.”

Keel-laying marks official construction of attack sub

Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — The keel of the nation’s 20th Virginia-class attack submarine has been laid at the manufacturing plant for General Dynamics’ Electric Boat.

The milestone marked the ceremonial beginning of a ship’s construction. Modern submarines do not have traditional keels that run the length of the ship because they are built in modules. Instead, at the event Saturday, the subma-

rine’s sponsor was to write her initials onto a metal plate for a welder to inscribe and later to be mounted on the submarine.

The future USS Oregon is expected to cost about \$2.7 billion and to be delivered to the Navy in November 2019.

The keel-laying comes as many in Congress and in the military are eager to get more submarines into the fleet. Groton, Conn.-based Electric Boat and Newport News Shipbuilding in Virginia have an

agreement to build two attack submarines annually.

The House and Senate Armed Services committees have each approved bills to authorize building three submarines instead of two in some years, and also to authorize additional funding to prepare for the increased work.

The Oregon is one of a group of submarines with design changes so the submarines will need one less period in the shipyard for maintenance over

their lifespans, according to the Navy. Consequently, each will be able to do one more deployment during its lifespan, for a total of 15 deployments.

For centuries, U.S. Navy ships have had female sponsors who christen the vessels. It is said that the sponsor’s spirit and presence guide the ship throughout its life.

The Oregon’s sponsor is Dana Richardson, wife of Adm. John Richardson, the chief of naval operations and a submariner.

KKK rally in Va. attracts large, loud opposition

The Washington Post

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. — A rally here by the Ku Klux Klan and its supporters to protest the Charlottesville City Council's decision to remove a statue honoring Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee encountered a loud and angry counterdemonstration Saturday afternoon.

Members of the Loyal White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, which is based in Pelham, N.C., near the Virginia border, gathered at Justice Park, situated in a quiet, leafy, residential neighborhood in downtown Charlottesville. They shouted "white power" and some wore white robes.

About 30 Klansmen were escorted to and from the rally by police in riot gear who were

out on a hot day to separate the rally-goers and approximately 1,000 counterprotesters who greeted them with jeers. Attempts by Klan leaders to address the crowd were drowned out repeatedly by boos and chants. Some of the Klan members arrived armed, carrying handguns in holsters at their belts.

The rally was held about a block away from Emancipation Park — the renamed Lee Park — where the statue of Lee astride a horse still stands. Charlottesville police reported that vandals had painted messages in green and red paint on the statue overnight.

After the Klan rally ended, police led several people away in handcuffs after a large group of counterprotesters remained near the vicinity of the park.

Report: Kremlin-linked lawyer met with Trump kin

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Donald Trump's eldest son, son-in-law and then-campaign chairman met with a Russian lawyer shortly after Trump won the Republican nomination in what appears to be the earliest known private meeting between key aides to the president and a Russian.

Representatives of Donald Trump Jr. and Jared Kushner confirmed the June 2016 meeting to The Associated Press on Saturday after The New York Times reported Saturday on the gathering of the men and Russian lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya at Trump Tower. Then-campaign chairman Paul Manafort also attended, according to the statement from Donald Trump Jr.

He described it as a "short introductory meeting" during which the three discussed a disbanded program that used to allow U.S. citizens to adopt Russian children. Russia ended

the adoptions in response to American sanctions brought against the nation following the 2009 death of an imprisoned lawyer who spoke about a corruption scandal. Trump Jr. said he invited the other two Americans, was asked to attend by an acquaintance not named in the statement, and was not told beforehand with whom he would meet.

"It was not a campaign issue at that time and there was no follow-up," he said.

Kushner lawyer Jamie Gorelick said her client already disclosed the meeting in a revised filing of a form that requires him to list meetings with foreign agents.

Later Saturday, a spokesman for the president's outside legal team contended that participants in the June meeting "misrepresented who they were and who they worked for." However, the spokesman, Mark Corallo, would not say specifically who misrepresented themselves nor how they did so.

Among allies, Trump still unpredictable

Associated Press

HAMBURG, Germany — On President Donald Trump's second trip abroad, there were fewer of the bull-in-a-diplomatic-china-shop moments that had solidified European leaders' skepticism during his maiden overseas tour. Less public berating of allies, no pushing to the front of photo opportunities.

ANALYSIS But Trump still departed Europe on Saturday in the same position as he started: an unpredictable force on the world stage and an outlier among longtime American partners.

For the president's backers, his posture is the fulfillment of his campaign promise to bring more opaqueness to American foreign policy and to challenge long-standing global agreements, even with the nation's closest allies. But his detractors say he keeps sending the world dangerously mixed messages.

"Our partners and our allies are all looking for meaning and intention in those words and will read into it what they want to, which may or may not be what Trump meant," said Laura Rosenberger, a former foreign policy adviser to Hillary Clinton and a senior fellow with the German Marshall Fund.

Trump's message on Russia remains the most convoluted, despite his advisers' efforts to put to rest questions about his views on Moscow's election meddling. The president refused to publicly give the kind of condemnation that his staff said he delivered to Russian President Vladimir Putin during a private meeting Friday. He let a challenge from Putin, who said Trump accepted his denial of Russian involvement in the 2016 election, go largely unanswered, tweeting Sunday morning that he'd "already given my opinion" on the matter.

Trump's posture toward Putin has left allies both baffled and anxious, particularly against the backdrop of the

investigations into whether his campaign coordinated with Russia during last year's election. But increasingly, it's Trump's positions on climate and trade that have catapulted to the top of their list of concerns.

The divide over climate was particularly glaring as the Group of 20 summit in Hamburg, Germany, drew to a close. The U.S. was the only member country that did not sign a statement reaffirming the alliance's support for international efforts to fight global warming. The statement called the Paris climate accord, which Trump withdrew from last month, an "irreversible" global agreement.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Trump's refusal to sign on to the statement was "regrettable." French President Emmanuel Macron, who will host Trump on a quick trip to Paris this week, declared: "There are major differences, growing differences, between major powers. There is the emergence of authoritarian regimes and even within the Western world there are major divisions, uncertainties, instabilities, that didn't exist just a few short years ago."

But Trump and his allies appear to relish his volatility and isolation. Nile Gardiner, a foreign policy analyst for the conservative Heritage Foundation, which has close ties to the Trump White House, praised the president as "the most outspoken and unconventional U.S. president of modern time" and said he is still managing to articulate a "coherent doctrine and vision."

Yet he offered an uneven message on Russia. In a news conference in Poland, the president acknowledged that Russia had interfered in the 2016 election, but he repeated his assertion that "other countries" may have done the same, a reference that appeared to let Putin off the hook.

Temps help Calif. fires spread

Associated Press

SANTA MARIA, Calif. — California wildfires have quickly spread, threatening hundreds of homes and forcing evacuations at a popular lakeside campground and a summer camp where flames temporarily trapped children and counselors, a fire official said.

In other parts of the West, evacuation orders were lifted in Colorado and Montana towns threatened by wildfires, while air and ground crews battled a growing grass fire in northwestern Colorado.

The fire that started early Saturday afternoon in California's Santa Barbara County had spread to both sides of Highway 154 and was "completely out of control," county fire Capt. Dave Zaniboni said. About 90 children and 50 counselors were struck at the Circle V Ranch and had to take shelter there until they could be safely evacuated.

The Santa Barbara County fire was one of three in Califor-

nia that grew quickly as much of the state baked in record-breaking heat. A record that stood 131 years in Los Angeles was snapped when the temperature spiked at 98 degrees downtown. The previous record of 95 degrees was set in 1886, the National Weather Service said.

Forecasters warned that triple-digit temperatures up to 110 degrees would be common in some inland areas and could be deadly for the elderly, children and outdoor workers.

High temps and dry gusts tripled the size of another Santa Barbara wildfire to nearly 30 square miles over eight hours and forced evacuations of about 200 homes in a rural area east of Santa Maria, fire spokesman Kirk Sturm said.

After five years of drought, California got a big break with record rainfall and snowpack in parts of the state this year that has delayed the start of fire season in some places but has also led to vegetation growth that could fuel fires.

In Northern California, a Butte County wildfire swept

through grassy foothills and destroyed 10 structures, including homes, and led to several minor injuries.

The blaze about 60 miles north of Sacramento grew rapidly to more than 4 square miles and was 20 percent contained, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

In Colorado, residents of nearly 500 homes outside the ski town of Breckenridge were allowed to return home Friday night. On Saturday, authorities lifted an evacuation order in Landusky, Mont., in the Little Rocky Mountains.

The grass fire in northwestern Colorado had burned 18 square miles and was spreading in several directions at once because of wind patterns from passing thunderstorms, Public Information Officer Chris Barth said.

A wildfire in southern Wyoming grew to 3 square miles. An unknown number of cabins remained under evacuation orders.

North Korea: US drills boost risk of 'tipping point'

By KIM GAMEL
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea warned that recent U.S. bombing drills risked pushing the divided peninsula to the "tipping point" of war by stoking already-high tensions over the communist state's nuclear weapons program.

Two Guam-based U.S. supersonic bombers flew to South Korea on Friday and released inert weapons onto a training range in a show of force three days after the North test-fired an intercontinental ballistic missile.

The B-1B Lancers were accompanied by U.S. and South Korean fighter jets as part of a 10-hour mission. They also flew with Japanese fighter jets over the East China Sea on their way back to Andersen Air Force Base.

North Korea's state-run media, which usually responds angrily to U.S.-South Korean military exercises, called the peninsula the "world's biggest tinderbox" and said the deployment of U.S. strategic assets was playing with fire.

"The US, with its dangerous military provocation, is pushing the risk of a nuclear war on the peninsula to a tipping point," said a commentary in Rodong Sinmun, the ruling party's official newspaper.

It also reiterated North Korea's insistence that its weapons program is part of "legitimate and justified measures to defend its sovereignty and dignity."

The U.S. has warned that all options, including military action, are on the table as it works with allies to counter the growing threat from the North.

The U.S. also plans to carry out a new test of an advanced missile defense system known as THAAD in coming days, Reuters reported, quoting two unnamed U.S. officials. The interceptors will be fired from Alaska, it said.

Tillerson vows US support for Ukraine

Associated Press

KIEV, Ukraine — U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson told Russia on Sunday that it must take the first steps to reduce tensions in eastern Ukraine and that American and European sanctions would remain in place until Moscow reversed course in the region.

In surprisingly blunt language just two days after presidents Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin met in Germany, Tillerson said Russia should use its influence with separatists in Ukraine's east to fully restore an oft-violated truce, end harassment and attacks on international monitors and pull back heavy weaponry to lines agreed upon under a 2-year-old accord known as the Minsk Agreement. He said a primary goal of the United States "is to restore Ukraine's territo-

rial integrity and sovereignty" and that would be "required in order for the U.S. and Russia to improve our relationship."

"It is necessary for Russia to take the first steps to de-escalate the situation in the eastern part of Ukraine," Tillerson told reporters at a joint news conference in Kiev with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko. "This is necessary for us to make any movement."

"We do call on Russia to honor its commitments that were made under the Minsk accords and to exercise influence over the separatists in the region that they have complete control over," he said, adding later, "The U.S. and [European Union] sanctions on Russia will remain in place until Moscow reverses the actions that triggered these particular sanctions."

Tillerson's tough talk clearly

pleased Poroshenko, who has long complained about Russian interference in his country's east and has watched nervously as the Trump administration has sought to improve ties with Moscow.

Poroshenko was especially complimentary of Tillerson's decision last week to appoint a special envoy for Ukraine negotiations, former U.S. Ambassador to NATO Kurt Volker, who is widely considered to be a hawk on Russia.

Volker will oversee U.S. efforts to press Ukraine and Russia to fully comply with the Minsk Agreement, which lays out a road map for reducing the conflict that has claimed some 10,000 lives over the past three years. The accord was reached in early 2015 in the capital of Belarus by the leaders of France, Germany, Ukraine and Russia but has yet to be implemented.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Groom arrested over wedding fireworks

NY MASSAPEQUA — Guests watching a fireworks display after a New York wedding were cheering the bride, groom and booms when police arrived. The groom ended up under arrest.

Nassau County police said they were called to a Massapequa home early Saturday and found a big party with professional-level pyrotechnics in the backyard.

Police said Thomas Giglio, 39, explained he was setting them off to celebrate his wedding.

He was arraigned Saturday on a fireworks possession charge. Bond was set at \$5,000.

Police: Man dancing on platform fell onto tracks

MA BOSTON — Police said a man who fell onto train tracks in Boston told authorities he “missed a slick landing” while dancing on the platform.

Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority police said the man fell into the pit at the Park Street station Thursday and hit his head and ankle. He was taken to Tufts Medical Center.

Surveillance video appears to show the man walking near the yellow line along the edge of the platform. He then falls on his back and some passengers wave their arms to signal an approaching train to stop.

Police: Dad played as 2 kids went out window

ME LYMAN — A Maine man accused of playing video games and smoking pot while his naked toddlers wandered outside has been charged with child endangerment.

Investigators said Christopher Peare, 35, of Lyman, told them he had no idea his 2- and 3-year-old daughters had crawled out a window and disappeared for 90 minutes Thursday night. The mother of the children was not at home.

Officials said the children were sent to relatives' homes while Peare was booked at the York County Jail.

Troopers said Peare was charged with the same crime in 2012 involving a different child in Sanford.

Gators, snakes at home where cobra escaped

CA THOUSAND OAKS — Authorities have found alligators and venomous snakes at a Southern California home where animal control officers say a cobra had gotten loose and terrified neighbors.

Los Angeles County officials served search warrants Thursday at a home in suburban Thousand Oaks and a rural property just outside the city.

The Los Angeles Times reported the warrants were requested after a neighborhood recently reported seeing a cobra slithering through the area. The neighbor drove a car over the snake, killing it, said animal control spokeswoman Don Barre.

Authorities said the owners have permits but they appear to be in violation of animal-keeping rules.

Police say bystanders stopped drunken woman

NM SANTA FE — Santa Fe police are crediting bystanders with stopping an intoxicated woman who tried to drive away with her infant granddaughter dangling outside the rear door of a pickup.

The Santa Fe New Mexican

reported the 9-month-old girl was strapped into a safety seat as it hung outside the moving truck and was not injured.

Police arrested Bertha Boling, 64, on suspicion of aggravated battery, child abuse, aggravated drunken driving and reckless driving.

Court records show Boling's blood-alcohol level was 0.22 percent, more than twice the limit for a driver in New Mexico.

Man dies in fall from 2nd-floor sliding door

MN MINNEAPOLIS — Authorities said a central Minnesota man fell to his death through his home's second-level sliding door, which does not have a patio or deck on the other side.

The Star Tribune reported that Chad Kraemer, 40, died after falling 10 to 12 feet at his home in Collegeville Township.

The Stearns County Sheriff's Office said deputies were called to the scene about 4:40 a.m. July 2. The Cold Spring Fire Department rescue squad — which includes Kraemer as a member — responded to the call.

Kraemer had been with the rescue squad for 19 years.

Couple accused of assault in custody

GA PEMBROKE — A couple accused of attacking a woman and her daughter because they were served cold chicken at a Georgia food stand have surrendered.

Baxley Police told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution that Nathaniel and Latasha Smith turned themselves in last week. Authorities said the Smiths face aggravated assault charges following the June 22 attack caught on surveillance video in Baxley, a southeast Georgia town.

Police said the couple assaulted Qwik Chick food stand owner Jeanette Norris and her 15-year-old daughter because of the portion size and temperature of their order.

Soccer league orders no yelling by parents

SC COLUMBIA — Some South Carolina soccer fields are likely to be quieter this September.

Local media reported the South Carolina Youth Soccer Association is implementing rules designed to keep parents and spectators from yelling at players, referees and coaches.

The association said the “Silent September” rules will be in effect for all league games.

The association said inappropriate heckling and poor behavior by fans prompted the rules. There can be no cheering or jeering by parents and visitors at the games.

Troopers not seriously hurt in helo landing

KS TOPEKA — Two Kansas Highway Patrol troopers escaped serious injury when the patrol helicopter they were occupying made a hard landing at an airport in Topeka, Kan., the patrol said.

The accident happened when the Bell 407 helicopter's tail rotor hit a hangar at Philip Billard Municipal Airport, the patrol said.

The pilot, patrol Capt. Gregory Kyser, 54, was taken to a hospital for observation and possible treatment. A passenger, state trooper Ryan Nolte, 36, was treated at a hospital for slight injuries.

Kyser is troop commander for the agency's air support unit and fleet operations.

From wire reports

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and Military News

Whittaker grabs interim UFC belt

BY GREG BEACHAM
Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Robert Whittaker won the UFC interim middleweight title Saturday night, surging in the late rounds to earn a unanimous decision over Yoel Romero at UFC 213.

Whittaker (20-4) recovered from a hyperextended knee in the first round with a strong striking performance, peppering Romero (12-2) with punches and kicks over the final three rounds. The Australian won his eighth consecutive fight, earning the victory 48-47 on all three judges' scorecards at T-Mobile Arena.

"It's a moment I've always dreamed of," Whittaker said. "My knee was definitely hurt. I injured it in camp, and Romero's kick set it back weeks. I know that Romero will capitalize on any weakness he sees, so I had to play it off. That's just what champions are made of."

The main event of the UFC's traditional July showcase in its hometown was canceled earlier in the day when bantamweight champion Amanda Nunes was hospitalized. She was scratched from her second title defense against Valentina Shevchenko, who criticized the champion's preparation for the bout.

Alistair Overeem also beat Fabricio Werdum by narrow majority decision in the third career meeting of two veteran heavyweights, and former lightweight champion Anthony Pettis also returned to the division with a unanimous decision victory over Jim Miller.

Whittaker took advantage of his bout's promotion to the main event by claiming the belt in front of a pay-per-view audience. He earned the chance to fight for the full 185-pound title held for the past year by Michael Bisping, who is injured.

Bisping stepped into the cage afterward and congratulated Whittaker in his own irascible style.

"The fact that you're standing there with a belt on makes me sick," the Englishman said,

throwing his own belt on the canvas. "Take that belt. Fight for it."

Romero's Olympic-level wrestling skills kept Whittaker on the defensive for much of the first two rounds. Whittaker increased his striking output while Romero sat back in the third and fourth, with Whittaker also defending Romero's takedowns more adroitly.

Romero was cut on his left eyebrow while Whittaker had a bloody nose and mouth in the final round, which looked even until Romero slipped onto his back with 90 seconds left after failing to land a strike. Whittaker jumped on top to rain down blows to the final horn.

All three judges saw the fight identically, scoring the first two rounds for Romero and the final three for Whittaker.

The 40-year-old Romero was gracious after his eight-fight winning streak ended, praising his opponent.

Whittaker will get the chance to remove the interim designation from his belt when Bisping returns from injury, although it might not happen this year. The middleweight division has been in limbo ever since Bisping shockingly beat champion Luke Rockhold last summer and then fought old rival Dan Henderson instead of Romero, Whittaker or another top contender.

For the third straight year, the UFC had to change the main event of its July show in Vegas at short notice. Last year, Jon Jones was sidelined by a violation of the promotion's anti-doping policy three days before UFC 200.

Shevchenko still showed up at T-Mobile Arena after being denied her long-awaited title shot when Nunes fell ill in the hours before their rematch.

Shevchenko was furious with Nunes, claiming the champion's drastic weight cut was responsible for her illness. She also echoed UFC President Dana White's statement that Nunes was medically cleared to fight, but declined to go from the hospital to the cage.

Players wonder if courts can improve

BY HOWARD FENDRICH
Associated Press

LONDON — With a week still to go, Wimbledon's grass courts already are not the lush lawns players — and TV viewers — are accustomed to seeing early in the tournament.

Novak Djokovic noticed the ball bouncing differently in some patches.

Roger Federer and his opponent slipped during their third-round match.

The two past champions are wondering what sort of work could be done on the middle Sunday, when there is no competition, so the court conditions improve when action resumes with all 16 fourth-round singles matches scheduled for Monday.

"The first two matches I didn't see any significant difference. But I was hearing a lot of comments from the other players. They were complaining. Especially on the outside courts," Djokovic said after beating Ernests Gulbis in straight sets at Centre Court on Saturday.

"Today, I could see there is a difference in grass, in [the] turf itself. It was a bit softer, I would say, especially around a couple of feet inside and outside, around the baseline area," said Djokovic, a three-time champion at the All England Club. "I haven't had that kind of experience before in Wimbledon, to be honest. I mean, the courts are always perfect here."

Federer followed Djokovic on Centre Court and described it as "a tad slippery" after losing his footing during one point in a victory over Mischa Zverev, who also took a tumble.

"But I didn't feel like it was unsafe," said Federer, who has won seven of his record 18 major titles at Wimbledon. "Maybe you don't want players to feel that way, because the moment you become scared of moving properly, it's really difficult to play, I must admit. The last thing we want to see is horrible injuries."

Some players voiced concerns about the court conditions over the opening week, including Kristina Mladenovic of France and Alison Riske of the United States, who each fell early during their second-round match on Court 18 on Thursday.

Riske, who won the match, said afterward that the dirt "is like ice."

Measurements taken throughout Wimbledon's first week show the grass courts are as healthy as they have been in recent years, according to Neil Stubbley, the head of courts and horticulture at the All England Club.

"We looked at the baselines and the areas that they thought there was an issue," Stubbley said. "We didn't feel there was. The Grand Slam supervisor and assistant referee didn't believe that there was either. When you look at the comparisons of other courts ... they were in or around the same condition as the other courts."

Very little rain has fallen over the first six days of the tournament, which Stubbley said led to more wear on the courts.

Still, although he acknowledged the courts are under stress, he said there's "not a doubt" they will hold up throughout Wimbledon's second week.

"Because we have daily monitoring, we can keep a very tight rein on everything," he said. "It never gets to the point where it's ever going to get away from us because we're on top of it every single day."

Still, Djokovic was sure that something wasn't quite the same as in the past.

"I'm sure they know what they're doing. They know their job the best in the world. But you can see that there is a slight difference in the quality of the grass," he said. "This year seems like it's a bit softer."

Noted Federer: "They have time to figure out how they're going to prep [the courts] for Monday."

Harden signs extension in richest NBA deal ever

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — James Harden became a star in Houston, and now he's ready to call the city home.

Harden signed a four-year, "supermax" extension Saturday, a whopper of a deal that guarantees Harden about \$228 million over the next six seasons and makes it the richest contract in league history.

The extension alone tacks another \$170 million or so — depending on how the salary cap escalates — onto a contract that still had two more years and nearly \$60 million remaining. It's a mammoth deal befitting one of the league's brightest stars, which is exactly what the Beard has become in five seasons with the Rockets.

"Since he arrived in Houston, James has exhibited the incredible work ethic, desire to win, and passion to be the best that has made him one of the most unique and talented superstars in the history of the game," Rockets owner Leslie Alexander said in a statement issued by the team. "Additionally, the commitment he has shown to our organization, the city of Houston, and Rockets fans all over the world makes him a perfect leader in our pursuit of another championship."

The deal keeps Harden under contract through the 2022-23 season, a lifetime in the modern NBA financial landscape in which so many superstars take short-term deals to maximize their earning potential. While anything can happen, this is about as much security as a player can get.

Harden is coming off of his finest season. Moving to point guard for new coach Mike D'Antoni, Harden averaged 29.1 points, an NBA-leading 11.2 assists and 8.1 rebounds and finished second in the MVP race to former Oklahoma City teammate Russell Westbrook.

"Houston is home for me," Harden said. "Mr. Alexander has shown he is fully committed to winning and my teammates and I are going to keep putting in the work to get better and

compete for the title."

Most importantly for the Rockets in the immediate future is that the extension will not affect Houston's aggressive pursuit of free agents this summer as the Rockets try to make a run at the Golden State Warriors. The Rockets finished third in the Western Conference regular season last year but know they have plenty of ground to make up if they hope to truly challenge the defending champions.

ESPN first reported the contract details.

Harden's do-it-all season helped the Rockets bounce back from a massively disappointing 2015-16 season that collapsed under the weight of chemistry issues with the All-Star guard and big man Dwight Howard.

Houston went 55-27 in the regular season and beat Westbrook and the Thunder in the first round of the Western Conference semifinals.

Harden seemed to run out of gas a bit in their semifinals loss to the San Antonio Spurs, and GM Daryl Morey has worked quickly to get him some help this summer.

Morey traded for All-Star point guard Chris Paul, a bold move that gives the Rockets as talented a backcourt as any team in the league. Morey also signed rugged forward P.J. Tucker to boost the defense and brought Nene back.

In other NBA news:

■ No. 1 overall pick Markelle Fultz needed to be helped off the court with an injury to his left ankle in the Philadelphia 76ers' summer league game Saturday night against Golden State.

Fultz appeared to roll his ankle in the second half and was helped to the locker room by two teammates. Sixers summer league coach Lloyd Pierce said Fultz has been diagnosed with a sprained left ankle and "will be treated accordingly."

Fultz will not play Sunday, but there is no timetable for his return to action.

"We'll be as cautious as we can, making sure he's healthy," Pierce said.

MLB floundering in Fla.

Associated Press

MIAMI — A Miami Marlins fan walks into a bar, and wants to watch his team play, but all 10 televisions are tuned to other games in other time zones.

There's no punch line, because this isn't a joke — the bar, located near Marlins Park, broadcasts the lack of allegiance for the home team loud and clear.

It's a common occurrence in South Florida, and where else would such a thing happen? Not Boston or St. Louis or San Francisco or most major league locales.

Tampa Bay? Maybe. Like the Marlins, the Rays are last in their league in attendance and battling the kind of chronic fan apathy that has plagued both franchises since they were founded in the 1990s.

The Marlins are in their 25th season and about to host the All-Star Game when it comes to the state for the first time. But does Major League Baseball belong in Florida?

Perhaps not, given the failure of the Rays and Marlins to develop a robust fan base.

"I don't know what the disconnect is," said NL All-Star manager Joe Maddon, who spent nine seasons as Tampa Bay's manager. "Spring training has been here for 100 years. You would think this would be a strong area for baseball."

Instead, it's a strong area for foul-ball collectors, because they face little competition. The Rays have finished last in the majors in attendance every year since 2011, when they were next to last. The Marlins have finished last in the NL 11 of the past 12 seasons.

"It's not a great situation," said Miami manager Don Mattingly, accustomed to a more favorable home atmosphere when he played for the Yankees. "It would be nice to have a packed house with Marlins fans, so Cub fans or Met fans can't get tickets. But that's not the case. What are you going to do?"

Both Florida teams tried changing their name; that didn't help. It turned out calling them the Tampa Bay Devil

Rays and Florida Marlins wasn't the issue.

So what is? Theories might outnumber empty seats.

"There are a bunch of problems," said Rays first baseman Logan Morrison, who also played for the Marlins.

One issue is the transient nature of the state, which makes it different from markets where fan support goes back generations.

Another issue is lack of competitiveness. Florida's teams have reached the playoffs six times in their 43 combined seasons. The Marlins haven't been to the postseason since 2003, the longest current drought in the NL.

"I don't think it's a market we should give up on just yet," said South Florida native Mike Lowell, who played for the Marlins' 2003 World Series champions. "You need teams to make another playoff run."

That championship team was soon dismantled in one of the Marlins' many payroll purges, and support plummeted.

For both the Marlins and Rays, modest payrolls have made it tough to keep popular — and expensive — players. Constant roster turnover has alienated fans, especially in Miami, where unpopular owner Jeffrey Loria's team is for sale.

The All-Star Game will showcase the Marlins' 5-year-old ballpark, which received rave reviews but hasn't helped attendance. The Rays, by contrast, play in 27-year-old Tropicana Field, widely regarded among the worst facilities in sports.

Neither ballpark is centrally located in its region, making for long drives at rush hour for many potential spectators.

"There are a lot of Marlins fans," said Marlins executive Jeff Conine, a former All-Star Game MVP nicknamed Mr. Marlin. "People like the Marlins. They just don't come to games."

Most South Floridians don't watch on TV, either. The Marlins ranked 26th in the majors in ratings last season; the Rays ranked 14th.

Dodgers walk past KC in 10th inning

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Giving the Dodgers extra opportunities is dangerous these days.

All-Star rookie Cody Bellinger drew a bases-loaded walk to force in the winning run in the 10th inning, and the NL West-leaders rallied to beat the Kansas City Royals 5-4 on Saturday night for their fifth straight victory.

“It’s one of those things where you have a very good team and things are going well,” Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said of the streak. “The opposition, there is a certain fear that things are going to get away from them.”

The Dodgers reached the 60-win mark before the All-Star break for the first time since 1974. They are just the third team in franchise history to do so since 1933, joining the 1973 and ’74 squads that had 63 wins each. Their 60-29 record is the best in baseball.

The Dodgers have won 17 of 18 at home, where they lead the majors with a 38-11 mark.

Royals reliever Scott Alexander (1-3) loaded the bases on consecutive walks to Chase Utley (who stole second), Corey Seager and Justin Turner leading off the inning. He was replaced by Kelvin Herrera.

With the infield drawn in, fans chanted “Cody! Cody!” as Bellinger worked a full count before walking and forcing in Utley.

“We put extra focus on Herrera because we knew we were going to face him in a close situation,” Bellinger said. “He throws hard so I was sitting on the heater and I missed the 3-1. He just missed his slider (on the full count).”

Joc Pederson hit a two-run homer in the second inning for the Dodgers, who blew a 3-0 lead before tying the game 4-all on Bellinger’s team-leading 25th homer in the eighth.

“When you’re playing a team of this caliber, the way they are playing lately, you

just can’t afford to give away any runs or pass up any opportunities,” said the Royals’ Eric Hosmer, who extended his hitting streak to 14 games.

Ross Stripling (1-3) got the win with one strikeout on 14 pitches in the 10th.

Royals starter Ian Kennedy gave up three runs and seven hits in six innings, struck out seven and walked one.

Bellinger’s dinger: Bellinger snapped an 11-game homerless streak to record his 25th homer in his 69th career big league game, second-fastest in major league history behind Jose Abreu, who hit his 25th in his 67th game.

The 21-year-old will showcase his power in Monday night’s Home Run Derby in Miami, where his father and former big leaguer Clay will pitch to him.

Streak over: Kennedy’s streak of allowing six or fewer hits in a game ended at 15 straight starts, which was the longest in Royals history to start a season.

Frazier’s 3-run homer lifts Yankees over Brewers

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Clint Frazier hit a three-run homer off Corey Knebel with one out in the ninth, lifting the New York Yankees over the Milwaukee Brewers 5-3 on Saturday.

Frazier turned on a 1-0 pitch from Knebel (0-2) for his second career homer and first game-ending shot. He threw his helmet as he approached his teammates at home plate, unveiling his mop of red hair, which was then doused in yellow Gatorade.

Frazier had three hits and a career-high four RBIs in his sixth game. Dellin Betances struck out two in a perfect eighth for New York, and Aroldis Chapman (2-0) struck out the side in the ninth.

Milwaukee left-hander Brent Suter allowed two runs and five hits in 6¹/₃ innings. The Brewers had won five in a row.

Rays 1, Red Sox 0: Alex Cobb pitched two-hit ball into the eighth inning and host Tampa Bay beat Boston with some help from a replay reversal.

Jesus Sucre drove in the

game’s only run with a sacrifice fly in the second. The inning was kept alive by a replay reversal of a double-play call.

Braves 13, Nationals 0: Julio Teheran pitched seven strong innings and drove in a career-high three runs, leading visiting Atlanta to the easy victory.

Nick Markakis and Johnan Camargo each had three hits for the Braves, who had dropped three of four.

Blue Jays 7, Astros 2: Josh Donaldson and Troy Tulowitzki homered, helping host Toronto to the win.

Donaldson hit a three-run shot in the fifth inning for his first homer since June 11 at Seattle and No. 150 for his career. Tulowitzki connected for the second straight game as Toronto bounced back from Friday night’s 12-2 loss.

Orioles 5, Twins 1: Jonathan Schoop and Mark Trumbo homered, Wade Miley produced his best start in more than five weeks and visiting Baltimore stopped a five-game losing streak.

Manny Machado added an

RBI double to help the Orioles beat the Twins for the first time in six meetings this season. This was just their third win in 11 games.

Padres 2, Phillies 1: At Philadelphia, Dustin Hedges drove in the winning run for San Diego for the second straight game, and Jhoulys Chacin pitched 6¹/₃ strong innings.

Carlos Asuaje added an RBI triple for the Padres, who have won five of six.

Pirates 4, Cubs 2: Gregory Polanco hit a two-run homer in the sixth inning and Ivan Nova pitched three-hit ball into the seventh, leading Pittsburgh past host Chicago.

Ian Happ and Kyle Schwarber had back-to-back home runs for Chicago, which has not won consecutive games since a three-game streak June 18-20.

Indians 4, Tigers 0: Mike Clevinger held visiting Detroit to three hits in six innings and outpitched Justin Verlander, All-Star Michael Brantley broke a scoreless tie with an RBI double, and Cleveland defeated the Tigers.

Rangers 5, Angels 2: Adri-

an Beltre and Drew Robinson hit two-run homers and host Texas beat Los Angeles.

White Sox 5, Rockies 4: Tim Anderson homered off Colorado closer Greg Holland leading off the ninth inning, lifting visiting Chicago past the Rockies.

Marlins 5, Giants 4: Justin Bour hit his 20th home run, Marcell Ozuna drove in two runs and Miami held on to beat host San Francisco.

Reds 7, Diamondbacks 0: Joey Votto, Scooter Gennett and Tucker Barnhart homered, helping rookie Luis Castillo to his first major league win in Cincinnati’s victory over host Arizona.

Athletics 4, Mariners 3: Ryon Healy bounced a ground-rule RBI double to right-center with two outs in the ninth inning to give visiting Oakland a win over Seattle.

Cardinals 4, Mets 1: At St. Louis, Cardinals rookie Paul DeJong homered as part of a four-hit game, and Adam Wainwright won his third consecutive start.