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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Servicemen call for end to Navy beard ban

Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — Now that women in the Navy can wear ponytails, men want beards.

The Navy said last week that service-women could sport ponytails, lock hairstyles, or ropelike strands, and wider hair buns, reversing a policy that long forbade females from letting their hair down.

Servicemen immediately chimed in on social media, asking the Navy if they could grow beards. A sailor's Facebook post with a #WeWantBeards hashtag was shared thousands of times.

Beards were banned in 1984. The Navy wanted professional-looking sailors who could wear firefighting masks and breathing apparatuses without interference.

The Navy says that's still the case. Still, some hope the change in female grooming standards opens the door.

Travis Rader, 29, a naval physical security officer, said allowing beards would boost morale for men, just like allowing po-

nytails and locks has for women. There are two things that would make many Navy men happy: beards and better boots, he added.

Rader had a 6-inch-long beard when he joined the Navy after high school.

"You take something away from somebody and they want it more," said Rader, a master-at-arms assigned to Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma City.

The Navy announced it was adding grooming options for women during a Facebook Live event. Many black women had asked the Navy to be more inclusive of different hair textures. The Navy had the standards in place because of safety concerns and to ensure everyone maintained a uniform, professional look.

Rader was one of several sailors who wrote in the comments section of the Facebook Live event to press for beards. Bill Williams, 20, a naval information systems technician, commented, too, asking why sailors can't have beards if bearded civil-

ian firefighters wear masks.

Williams said he thinks a nice, well-groomed beard looks very professional. "It'd be great because I know that when I shave for multiple days in a row, it starts to really hurt," said Williams, who works at the Naval Computer and Telecommunications Station Hampton Roads in Virginia.

A sailor can get permission to grow a beard for religious reasons or if they have a skin condition that's irritated by shaving. Mustaches are allowed as long as they are trimmed and neat.

"Handlebar mustaches, goatees, beards or eccentricities are not permitted," the policy states. The Navy isn't currently considering changing that.

Safety continues to be the primary concern, said Lt. j.g. Stuart Phillips, a spokesman for the chief of naval personnel. He referenced a 2016 study by the Naval Safety Center that concluded that facial hair affects the proper fit and performance of respirators.

US on pace to set record for Afghan munitions drops

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — The U.S. military is on course to drop a record number of munitions in Afghanistan this year.

U.S. Air Force data released Friday showed that aircraft released 2,911 bombs and missiles over the country during the first half of 2018 — a higher number for that period than during the surge of 2010, when about 100,000 American troops were in Afghanistan.

Last month, 572 munitions were dropped despite an Afghan government cease-fire that ran from June 12 to June 29. During that time, the U.S. suspended offensive strikes against the Taliban but continued counterterrorism operations, conducting more than 80 strikes against a local branch of Islamic State, the Air Force said.

Airstrikes resumed June 30 after the Taliban ignored a call by the government to extend a cease-fire of their own.

"Until the Taliban show they're willing to reconcile with the Afghan government, they will remain square in our crosshairs,"

Lt. Gen. Jeffrey Harrigian, the Combined Forces Air Component commander for U.S. Central Command, said in the AFCENT Airpower Summary. "We remain steadfast in our resolve to take Taliban fighters off the battlefield and decimate their revenue sources."

The U.S. intensified airstrikes in Afghanistan last year as part of the Trump administration's strategy to end America's longest war, now in its 17th year. Under the new rules of engagement, the U.S. has been targeting drug labs used by the Taliban to generate revenue. The ultimate aim is to push the insurgents to the negotiating table.

U.S. military officials say the recent strikes have cost the Taliban \$220 million in drug revenue.

The air war in Afghanistan reached a climax after the U.S. troop surge in 2010. In 2011, the U.S. released 5,411 munitions in Afghanistan, according to Air Force data. Coalition commanders claimed at the time that the Taliban had taken "a real pounding," but the long-term effects of the bombing campaign were fleeting.

Six months into 2011, 2,458 munitions

were released, nearly 500 fewer than the amount dropped during the first half of this year.

The recent uptick in strikes appears to have done little to end a stalemate with the Taliban. According to U.S. military data, the Afghan government continues to control or influence just 56 percent of the country.

Frustrated by the slow progress in the war, President Donald Trump has called for a review of the U.S. strategy.

The United Nations expressed concern in a report released on Sunday about the growing number of civilian casualties caused by airstrikes.

Aerial attack accounted for 353 casualties — including 149 deaths and 204 injured — during the first half of the year, a 52 percent increase from the same period last year, the report said. It attributed 52 percent of those casualties to the Afghan air force, 45 percent to international military forces — meaning the U.S. — and the remaining 3 percent to unidentified pro-government forces.

In reversal, DOD now says it backs GOP on birds

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In an abrupt reversal, the Pentagon said Thursday it supports a Republican proposal in a defense policy bill that would bar the Fish and Wildlife Service from using the Endangered Species Act to protect two chicken-like birds in the western half of the U.S.

In an email to Congress, a top Pentagon official said the proposal could help avoid any “negative readiness impacts on military facilities” that might result from listing the sage grouse and the lesser prairie-chicken as endangered.

The statement by Pete Giambastiani, a legislative affairs aide, directly repudiates comments Wednesday by Pentagon officials calling the GOP proposal unnecessary. The House-approved language would block endangered-species listing for the two birds for 10 years.

The birds have become flash points in an ongoing battle over whether they warrant federal protection that hinders mining and other development from Kansas to California.

Report: Organizational woes handicapping Air Force F-22s

By CLAUDIA GRISALES
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Air Force F-22s could face increased combat risks caused by fewer available aircraft and less pilot training time if the service doesn’t make necessary changes to the fleet’s organizational structure, a federal watchdog agency warned Thursday in a newly released report.

The Air Force has 186 F-22 aircraft, which is widely regarded as one of the world’s elite fighter jets.

“The Air Force’s organization of its small F-22 fleet has not maximized the availability of these 186 aircraft. Availability is constrained by maintenance challenges and unit organization,” according to the 38-page report by the Government Accountability Office, an investigative arm for Congress that routinely reviews U.S. agencies and programs. “The Air Force’s utilization of its F-22 fleet has limited pilot opportunities to train for air superiority missions in high threat environments.”

F-22 pilots are not meeting annual training requirements, according to Air Force reports and service officials, the GAO report stated. In addition, the use of F-22s for exercises and operational missions that don’t require the aircraft’s unique capabilities disrupt pilot training and lead to reduced proficiency, the report stated.

For example, pilots are restricted from using certain F-22 capabilities during partnership-building exercises for fear of exposing the fighter jet’s unique features. Air Force officials said

these restrictions limit the value of the exercise and can lead to bad habits, the report stated.

The F-22 jets also are used to support alert missions, or missions that require certain bases to have jets ready at all times to respond to threats from civil or military aviation. The alert missions fall to the F-22s because the jets are based in Alaska and Hawaii, where no other operational Air Force fighter squadrons are based.

“Pilots and aircraft assigned to the alert mission cannot be used for any other purposes, including training,” the report stated. “This limits opportunities for pilots to enhance air superiority skills. Without examining and implementing options to improve F-22 pilot training opportunities, the Air Force may be foregoing opportunities to improve its capability to address the high-end air superiority challenges it expects to face.”

In addition, the Air Force organizes its F-22 fleet into small units of 18 to 21 aircraft per squadron and one or two squadrons per wing, which creates maintenance inefficiencies, the GAO report states. For example, among its specific demands, the F-22’s stealth coating requires time-consuming maintenance and reduces the jets’ availability for missions.

The Air Force has not assessed the structure of its F-22 fleet since 2010, the report stated. Without such a review, the Air Force might be losing opportunities to improve the availability of its small-yet-critical F-22 fleet and to support air-combat needs in high-threat environments, the agency said.

Retired Marine to receive MOH for Battle of Hue heroics

Stars and Stripes

A Marine credited with saving the lives of countless members of his company during one of the bloodiest battles of the Vietnam War will receive the Medal of Honor thanks to the efforts of a congresswoman and a group of Marines who witnessed his heroics.

Retired Sgt. Maj. John Canley, who lives in the coastal community of Oxnard, Calif., learned he will receive the nation’s highest military honor via a phone call from President Donald Trump early this month. An official announce-

ment from the White House is expected once a date for the presentation is confirmed.

Canley initially received the Navy Cross, as well as two Bronze Stars and a Purple Heart, for his actions overseas.

According to his Navy Cross citation, Canley — then a gunnery sergeant with 1st Battalion, 1st Marines — displayed extraordinary leadership and selflessness during the Battle of Hue in early 1968.

After his company’s commander was seriously wounded, Canley sprang into action and immediately took control of his fellow Marines. Over the

course of the weeklong siege, Canley successfully neutralized enemy combatants and brought injured Marines to safety, despite sustaining several shrapnel injuries.

“Gunnery Sergeant Canley lent words of encouragement to his men,” the citation reads. “And [he] exhorted them to greater efforts as they drove the enemy from its fortified emplacement.”

John Ligato, one of the Marines who fought alongside Canley in Vietnam, called him “totally fearless.”

“You followed him because he was a true leader — some-

thing you need in life-and-death situations.”

Canley’s road to the Medal of Honor was a long one, requiring the intervention of several dedicated Marines and Rep. Julia Brownley, D-Calif.

Ligato and his fellow 1st Battalion Marines spent nearly 15 years pushing for Canley to be recognized with the honor, only to see the effort met with more than 10 rejections.

“There were times I gave up,” Ligato told military.com. “But the irony is he’s one of the most deserved Medal of Honor recipients ever in the history of our country.”

US, allies set to evacuate Syrian aid workers

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. officials say the U.S. is finalizing plans to evacuate several hundred Syrian civil defense workers and their families from southwestern Syria as Russian-backed government forces close in on the area.

Two officials familiar with the plans said Thursday that the U.S., Britain and Canada are spearheading the evacuation that would transport members of the White Helmets group to transit camps in neighboring countries. From there, they will be sent to third countries, including Britain, Germany, the Netherlands and possibly Canada, according to the officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly discuss the matter.

The officials, and a member of the White Helmets who is due to be evacuated from Quneitra province, said the operation appears to be imminent as the Syrian army continues to gain ground in its latest offensive. The White Helmets, who have enjoyed backing from the U.S. and other Western nations for years, are likely to be targeted by Syrian forces as they retake control of the southwest, according to the officials.

The officials said planning for the evacuation has been underway for some time but accelerated after last week's NATO summit in Brussels.

"These are hard hours and minutes," the White Helmets volunteer in Quneitra said, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear for his life. "This is the worst day of my life. I hope they rescue us before it is too late."

The evacuation is expected to take place from Quneitra, which straddles the frontier with the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights and where the civil defense team is trapped. It is the last sliver of land still outside government control in the region.

Guardsmen try their hand at wrestling — Mongolian-style

By J.P. LAWRENCE

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Learning to wrestle Mongolian-style proved "a trip" for soldiers from the Oklahoma National Guard who tried to flip, throw and grapple their opponents in a traditional Mongolian festival while deployed in Afghanistan.

One of those soldiers, Army Spc. Michael Pereyra of the 1st Squadron, 180th Cavalry Regiment, said he was drawn to the sport after trying it six months ago. He saw Mongolian soldiers wrestling and when they asked for anyone who wanted to join in, Pereyra volunteered.

Pereyra wrestled throughout junior high and high school, but wrestling Mongolian-style was different, he said — so different he had to start from scratch.

"I pretty much had to throw everything away and learn how to wrestle again," he said.

Mongolian soldiers are de-

ployed to Kabul and have been part of the NATO mission since 2009, said a unit spokeswoman for 1st Squadron, 180th Cavalry Regiment. The mission is a return of sorts to Afghanistan for Mongolia, which conquered and subjugated the region under Genghis Khan in the 13th century.

Pereyra and other soldiers with the 1st Squadron, 180th Cavalry Regiment work with Mongolian soldiers to guard the New Kabul Compound, a military base close to the U.S. Embassy. That means reacting to any threats and managing base access.

The festival of Naadam, also known as the "three games of men" in Mongolian, is held annually on July 12. It includes wrestling, horse racing and archery. Naadam celebrates the Mongolian revolution of 1921, which freed the country from rule by the Chinese, who barred Mongolian monks from practicing traditional sports and lim-

ited mass events.

Genghis Khan held wrestling tournaments while conquering much of the known world 800 years ago.

The goal of Mongolian-style wrestling is to force one's opponent to touch his back, knee or elbow to the ground. Throws, trips and lifts are allowed, but strikes are not. Pereyra said he trained in one-on-one duels on the mat as his trainers taught him different throws and trips. Mongolian wrestlers wear tight-fitting briefs and a short-sleeved shirt exposing their chest, and Pereyra said he learned how to grab and hold the clothing while grappling.

"They were showing me how to use leverage. It's more about technique than brute strength," Pereyra said.

So far, he has participated in three wrestling tournaments over his seven months deployed and won a match on his second try.

Armed drones bolster US strength in Niger

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Armed U.S. drone flights over Niger — which started after four U.S. soldiers were killed in an ambush in October — have put a scare into local militants, the country's top defense official said.

Earlier this year, U.S. Africa Command quietly began armed unmanned surveillance flights in Niger, adding more firepower in the country where the Oct. 4 attack on a team of Green Berets raised questions about whether troops were carrying out dangerous missions without sufficient backup.

While drones now fly armed out of a base in Niger's capital, Niamey, no strikes have yet been launched on targets inside the country, AFRICOM

said Friday.

Still, the presence of armed MQ-9 Reapers has the attention of extremists, according to Niger Defense Minister Kalla Mountari.

"They (the U.S.) have answered our calls. This is huge because it will serve as a deterrent to those terrorists who wish to attack us," Mountari told Voice of America in an interview Friday.

"Unlike before, when they (extremists) attack and disappear, knowing we don't have the means of pursuing them, now they would be hunted and taken out from above," Mountari said.

The U.S. had operated unarmed drones out of Niger for several years, but after the ambush on U.S. soldiers, there was a diplomatic push to add more attack capability.

Since the ambush, AFRICOM chief Gen. Thomas Waldhauser said he has made adjustments to how special operators work on the continent, including adding armored vehicles to some units, increasing the amount of firepower forces carry with them and using drones more to conduct surveillance.

For now, AFRICOM's armed surveillance mission is being run out of a base in Niamey, but the effort will switch to a base under construction in central Niger.

Work on the site, known as Air Base 201 in the city of Agadez, is expected to be finished by the end of the year.

There are about 800 U.S. military personnel in Niger, which has the second-largest number of U.S. troops in Africa after the military's hub in Djibouti.

Putin invited to Washington for fall summit

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Unbowed by swirling criticism of his summit encounter with Vladimir Putin, President Donald Trump swiftly invited the Russian leader to the White House this fall for a second get-together. Putin's ambassador to the U.S. said Moscow is open to discussing such a meeting, even as confusion abounds over exactly what they discussed the first time.

Cleanup has continued from Monday's two-hour private meeting in Helsinki with Trump belatedly saying Putin's "incredible offer" of shared U.S.-Russia investigations was no good after all.

A White House meeting would be a dramatic extension of legitimacy to the Russian leader, who has long been isolated by the West for activities in Ukraine, Syria

and beyond and is believed to have interfered in the 2016 presidential election that sent Trump to the presidency. No Russian leader has visited the White House in nearly a decade.

Trump asked National Security Adviser John Bolton to invite Putin, and "those discussions are already underway," Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Thursday. Trump earlier had tweeted that he looked forward to "our second meeting" as he defended his performance at Monday's summit, in which the two leaders conferred on a range of issues including terrorism, Israeli security, nuclear proliferation and North Korea.

"There are many answers, some easy and some hard, to these problems ... but they can ALL be solved!" Trump tweeted.

In Moscow, Anatoly Antonov, Russian ambassador to the U.S., said it is important to "deal with the results" of their first summit before jumping too fast into a new one. But he said, "Russia was always open to such proposals. We are ready for discussions on this subject."

The Kremlin has the final say, but hasn't responded yet to Trump's invitation.

News of Trump's invitation to Putin appeared to catch even the president's top intelligence official by surprise.

"Say that again," National Intelligence Director Dan Coats responded, when informed of the invitation during an appearance at the Aspen Security Forum in Colorado.

"OK," he continued, pausing for a deep breath. "That's going to be special."

Storm sinks Missouri duck boat, killing 17

Associated Press

BRANSON, Mo. — Divers found four more bodies Friday in a Missouri lake where a duck boat packed with tourists capsized and sank in high winds, bringing the death toll to 17 in the tourist town of Branson, authorities said.

Investigators blamed stormy weather for the accident Thursday evening on Table Rock Lake. Winds at the time were blowing as hard as 65 mph, according to the National Weather Service.

Fourteen people survived, including seven who were injured when the boat went down, state police said.

Named for their ability to travel on land and in water, duck boats have been involved in other deadly incidents in the past. Five college students were killed in 2015 in Seattle when a duck boat collided with a bus. Thirteen people died in 1999 when a boat

sank near Hot Springs, Ark.

"Duck boats are death traps," said Andrew Duffy, an attorney whose Philadelphia law firm handled litigation related to two fatal duck boat accidents there. "They're not fit for water or land because they are half car and half boat."

Safety advocates have sought improvements and complained that too many agencies regulate the boats with varying safety requirements. The boats were originally designed for the military — specifically, to transport troops and supplies in World War II. They were later modified for use as sightseeing vehicles.

Passengers on a nearby boat described the chaos as the winds picked up and the water turned rough.

"Debris was flying everywhere," Allison Lester said in an interview Friday with ABC's "Good Morning America."

A severe thunderstorm warning had been issued for Branson at 6:32 p.m. Thursday, about 40 minutes before the boat tipped over.

Lester's boyfriend, Trent Behr, said they saw a woman in the water and helped to pull her into the boat. He said he was about to start CPR when an EMT arrived and took over.

The driver of the Ride the Ducks boat died, but the captain survived, Stone County Sheriff Doug Rader said.

Divers located the vessel, which came to rest on its wheels on the lakebed, and authorities planned to recover it later Friday.

The boat sank in 40 feet of water and then rolled on its wheels into an area 80 feet deep. Investigators had no information about whether passengers were wearing life jackets or whether they were stowed onboard, the sheriff said.

N. Korea puts reunion of war-split families in doubt

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea said Friday that an August reunion of Korean families separated by war might not happen if South Korea doesn't immediately return some of its citizens who arrived in the South in recent years.

The 2016 arrival of a group of 12 female employees from a North Korean-run restaurant in China has been a source of contention between the rival Koreas. North

Korea has accused South Korea of kidnapping them, while South Korea says they decided to resettle of their own free will.

North Korea often has used the women as a reason to rebuff South Korea's repeated request to allow elderly citizens split during the 1950-53 Korean War to reunite with each other temporarily. But Friday's statement is the North's first attempt to link the fate of the women to the August reunion and comes amid worries that a global diplomacy effort to push the North

to give up its nuclear weapons is making little headway after months of detente.

The North's state-run Uriminzokkiri website said that the reunion and overall inter-Korean ties could face "obstacles" if Seoul doesn't send back the women.

Seoul's Unification Ministry said it has no comment on the Uriminzokkiri dispatch.

There has been mounting speculation that some of the 12 North Korean women truly might have been duped into coming to South Korea.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Selfies on stolen phone help identify suspect

LA SHREVEPORT — A robbery suspect used a stolen cellphone to snap a selfie and, in the process, gave authorities his identity, Shreveport police said.

The Shreveport Times reported the victim of a July 10 robbery told police he was held up at gunpoint as he exited his car. The victim said he surrendered cash and two cellphones, and the robber fled.

Three days later, the victim told police the suspect had taken photos of himself that automatically uploaded to the victim's cloud. The victim retrieved the photos, which investigators then released to the public. Two days later, a tipster gave a suspect's identity.

Police said Tommy Lee Beverly Jr., 27, is now being sought on an armed robbery charge.

Machete-wielding man removed from roof

TX HOUSTON — Houston residents called police about an attempted burglary after hearing noises from the roof of their home and spotting a man there carrying a machete.

When officers arrived and the man refused to come down, members of a SWAT team summoned to the scene had to use a stun gun to remove him.

The man, whose name was not released immediately, told Houston television station KTRK as he was being led away in handcuffs, "It's crazy out here. Crazy world." He also suggested he probably would be killed and "probably gonna see me on the news tomorrow."

It wasn't his first run-in with police Tuesday. Authorities said earlier in the night, he pulled a knife during a confrontation with a family member.

Poison parsnip causes woman's severe burns

VT ESSEX — An invasive species of plant in Vermont has left an Essex woman with severe burns and blisters on her legs.

Charlotte Murphy said she developed painful blisters overnight after brushing against poison parsnip. Murphy says the blisters got so bad she had to go to the hospital to see a burn specialist.

She learned her injuries were comparable to a second-degree burn and were caused by the invasive plant.

David Grass of the Vermont Department of Health said the sap in the parsnip has a chemical reaction with the sun that causes accelerated burns. He said people should wear long pants and sleeves in tall grass. Murphy said she hopes her experience helps educate people.

Man gets 30 years in 6th DUI conviction

ID CALDWELL — A southwestern Idaho man has been sentenced to 30 years in prison following his sixth DUI conviction.

Roy D. Rico, 38, of Caldwell, received the sentence Tuesday in 3rd District Court in Canyon County. He must serve six years before becoming eligible for parole. Prosecutors sought a life sentence, contending that was the only way to protect the community.

Rico was arrested in November, and a blood draw found a blood-alcohol content of 0.255 percent, more than three times the legal limit.

At the time of his arrest, he was on probation for a 2015 DUI conviction. He also had felony DUI convictions in 2004 and 2011, as well as misdemeanor DUI convictions in 2001 and 2002.

Wildlife officers capture wandering bear

NM SANTA FE — Wildlife officials say they have captured a bear that wandered in front of a Santa Fe auto shop and ran through traffic.

Donald and Loretta Garcia said the bear was hanging out in a lot of Donald Garcia's auto shop, Perfection Auto Craft.

Loretta Garcia said they were watching the bear through an office window, but the bear got spooked when she tapped on the window.

Police said in a Facebook post that U.S. Fish and Game officers eventually tranquilized the skinny bear. They described it as an adult male bear weighing about 180 pounds.

Game and Fish officers told KOB-TV that the bear would be released to the Valles Caldera National Preserve.

Baltimore bars sodas from kids' menus

MD BALTIMORE — A new ordinance in Baltimore bars city restaurants from including sodas and other sugary drinks on kids' menus.

Baltimore's health department said the measure went into effect Wednesday. Water, milk and 100 percent fruit juices now must be the default beverage choices for kids' meals at eateries in the city.

Children can still drink soda at city restaurants if an accompanying adult orders one for them.

Dr. Leana Wen is Baltimore's health commissioner. She said the law "will help families make the healthy choice the easy choice."

An advocacy group called Sugar Free Kids Maryland says Baltimore is now the biggest U.S. city and the first on the East Coast to pass this kind of measure.

Baltimore health officials said seven California cities and Lafayette, Colo., have enacted similar ordinances.

Push to ban dogs from barbershops shot down

MT HELENA — Public comments from enthusiastic pet owners helped shoot down a proposal to ban dogs from barbershops and salons in Montana.

The Montana Board of Barbers and Cosmetologists voted unanimously Monday against moving forward with the proposal. Lee Newspapers of Montana reported the vast majority of the more than 200 comments made on the proposal opposed the change.

The state ended a ban on dogs in barbershops in 2001 with requirements that the shops have insurance and the dogs be vaccinated.

Ex-dispatcher jailed over theft of funds

MO CLAYTON — A woman has been ordered to serve 60 days of "shock time" in jail for gambling away money raised for an injured police officer.

KSDK-TV reported that former Hazelwood police dispatcher April Briscuso also was sentenced Monday to five years of probation and is required to pay restitution.

St. Louis County police say Briscuso organized several fundraisers for former officer Craig Tudor, who was paralyzed in a car crash as he responded to a police call.

Briscuso admitted to stealing at least \$9,500 raised for Tudor. The thefts were discovered when Tudor and his wife told investigators they had not received money raised at several events hosted in their name.

From wire reports

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MLB haves, have-nots back for 2nd half

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Mookie Betts and the major league-leading Red Sox are on pace for 100-plus wins. Same for Aaron Judge and the Yankees, and the World Series champion Astros, too.

The Orioles, White Sox and Royals are on track to lose more than 100.

It's the haves and the have-nots as baseball returns after the All-Star break.

"There's a few good teams out there that they're going to make it interesting in the second half," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "That's why you got to show up every day and keep playing. We had a great first part of the season, but that doesn't guarantee us anything in October, going to October."

The Dodgers know all about October, and they are a World Series contender once again. Especially with the addition of Manny Machado.

The NL West leaders got a head start on the July 31 non-waiver trade deadline by sending five prospects to Baltimore on Wednesday for Machado, an All-Star short-stop capable of powering Los Angeles to its first title in 30 years.

"Any time you have a chance to add an impact player in a tight division race that's something you have to look at closely," Dodgers general manager Farhan Zaidi said.

The Indians bolstered their bullpen by acquiring All-Star closer Brad Hand and rookie Adam Cimber in a trade with San Diego on Thursday, sending catching prospect Francisco Mejia to the rebuilding Padres.

Machado might be the biggest star to switch teams this month, but there will be plenty of players on the move.

If the last-place Mets decide to rebuild,

aces Jacob deGrom and Noah Syndergaard could shake up the playoff race. Rangers left-hander Cole Hamels and Reds pitchers Raisel Iglesias and Matt Harvey — remember him? — also could be headed for new homes. Royals third baseman Mike Moustakas and Twins second baseman Brian Dozier could provide hitting help for a contender.

"Starting pitching is always big during the trade deadline, whether it's me or somebody else who's having a good year," deGrom said.

The Padres also could ship out relievers Kirby Yates and Craig Stammen. They are the only team out of the conversation in the NL West, where the Dodgers' lead over fourth-place San Francisco is just four games. The Cubs have the best record in the National League after chasing Milwaukee for much of the first half, and the NL East looks like a three-team race.

Washington was supposed to be one of the haves this year, but it hasn't worked out so far. The Nationals hit the break with a .500 record, looking up at the surprising Phillies and Braves.

But ace right-hander Stephen Strasburg, first baseman Ryan Zimmerman and closer Sean Doolittle are set to return from injuries, and it looked as if Bryce Harper regained some of his swagger with his win in the All-Star Home Run Derby in his home ballpark.

"We've got to battle," Harper said. "I think the Braves are really good, the Phillies are good and those are two teams that are probably going to make some moves as well. Looking forward to the second half. Looking forward to do what we need to do."

While the NL features three tight divi-

sion races, there is nothing like the duel in the AL East, or the crowded AL West for that matter.

The Red Sox and Yankees have baseball's best two records, and one of them very well could be headed for the wild-card game. The Astros are in prime position to become the first repeat World Series winner since the Yankees from 1998-2000, but any stumble and the Mariners or surging Athletics could push Jose Altuve and Co. into a more precarious spot.

"We need to win games and need to continue to push and put pressure on our division, put pressure on the rest of the American League," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "We have to do what we're capable of."

There is a lot to love about Boston, too. Betts is making a case for the AL MVP award, and Chris Sale leads the strike-out-crazy majors with a whopping 188 Ks. The Red Sox also have received surprising contributions from All-Star first baseman Mitch Moreland and left-hander Eduardo Rodriguez.

Of course, the Yankees don't look like they are going anywhere either, not with Judge anchoring a deep lineup and Luis Severino at the front of their rotation. Expect the AL East rivals to be on the hunt for help at the non-waiver deadline, desperately hoping to avoid that dicey wild-card matchup.

"One of the signs of a potentially great team is you're not satisfied with anything you've done to this point," Yankees manager Aaron Boone said. "A handful of guys have had really great years. There's more guys in that room who certainly feel like they can be even better. That's our expectation moving forward."

Heyward helps Cubs top Cards, win 4th straight

Associated Press

CHICAGO — The All-Star break is over. It's right about now when the Chicago Cubs usually take off.

Jason Heyward had three hits and two RBIs, Ian Happ belted a two-run homer and the Cubs beat the St. Louis Cardinals 9-6 on Thursday night for their fourth consecutive victory.

Chicago and St. Louis returned a day earlier than the rest of the majors, but it sure looked like business as usual for the NL Central leaders. The

Cubs improved to 150-73 after the All-Star break since 2015, baseball's best such record over that stretch.

"I just feel like the biggest thing for us is a positive mindset throughout," Heyward said. "Not getting too high, not getting too low."

Anthony Rizzo added two doubles from the leadoff spot as Chicago moved a season-high 18 games over .500. Victor Caratini had three hits and scored three times in the opener of a five-game series, and Ben Zobrist delivered a

tiebreaking sacrifice fly in the Cubs' five-run fifth inning.

"Just really good at-bats," manager Joe Maddon said.

Yadier Molina matched a career high with four hits for St. Louis, but interim manager Mike Shildt was handed his first loss in his second game in charge after Mike Matheny was fired Saturday night. Tommy Pham and Matt Carpenter each hit a solo homer.

"When you're facing a team like Chicago, you have to bring your 'A' game," Molina said. "We didn't bring our 'A'

game with the pitching and defense."

The Cardinals had a 3-1 lead before the Cubs started teeing off on Carlos Martinez (6-6) in the fifth.

Martinez allowed six runs, five earned, and seven hits in five innings. The right-hander went 3-1 with a 2.63 ERA in his previous four starts.

Cubs right-hander Kyle Hendricks also struggled, yielding nine hits in 4²/₃ innings. But he wiggled out of a couple of jams while limiting the Cardinals to three runs.

Johnson, Kisner share British Open lead

The Associated Press

CARNOUSTIE, Scotland — Kevin Kisner hit his approach shot into the Barry Burn at No. 18 and made double-bogey 6, dropping the American into a share of the lead with Zach Johnson at 6 under 136 after the second round Friday at the British Open.

Kisner shot 1-under 70 to follow his opening round of 66, which gave him the overnight lead.

Another American, Pat Perez, had the same score after birdies on four of his first 14 holes, but dropped a stroke on the final four holes to sit one stroke behind the leaders.

After rain throughout the morning, there were blue skies and barely any wind for the late starters in the second round at Carnoustie.

Tigers Woods shot an even-par 71 for the second straight day at sits six strokes back.

Woods will be at Carnoustie for the weekend, though, with the cut projected for 2 over.

Johnson, the 2015 champion, birdied the tough 18th hole to shoot a 67. A steady rain fell most of the morning, allowing

players to be more aggressive off the tee and into the greens. A day earlier the course had played hard and fast at Carnoustie, which has had little rain this summer.

Rory McIlroy is only two strokes back after shooting his second straight 69.

England's Tommy Fleetwood played his way through the rain to post a 6-under 65 and sits two strokes off the lead. Fleetwood, who posted the course record 63 at the Dunhill Links Championship last year at Carnoustie, played a bogey-free round on a course softened by the rain.

Fleetwood, who made a final round charge in the U.S. Open last month, was one shot off the Open record of 64 at Carnoustie, set by Steve Stricker and Richard Green in 2007.

Fleetwood birdied the fourth and fifth holes on his way to a front nine 33, then added three more birdies on the back nine — including one with a 15-foot putt on the final hole — to post the early clubhouse lead.

Johnson overcame a bogey on the opening hole with birdies on the third and fourth

holes, and he never put himself under too much pressure the rest of the way.

Already a two-time major champion with titles at St. Andrews and Augusta National, the 42-year-old from Iowa now has made the cut 12 straight times in the British Open, a streak that began at Carnoustie in 2007. His low ball flight, grinding nature and good putting give him the right ingredients.

As for that other Johnson?

Dustin Johnson was headed toward being the first No. 1 player in the world to miss the cut at the Open since Luke Donald in 2011 at Royal St. George's. He appeared to keep it together with a tough par save from the bunker on No. 12, followed by two straight birdies. But he had another poor finish, closing bogey-double bogey for a 72 and is at 6-over 148 for 36 holes.

Zach Johnson and Dustin Johnson, one of golf's most powerful players, share nothing in common but a surname. That hasn't kept the casual fan from occasionally calling Zach Johnson by the wrong name.

"I certainly am not the No. 1 player in the world that ends in 'Johnson,'" he said. "I've been called Dustin many times. I doubt he's been called Zach that many times."

Zach Johnson has more than held his own. In the power era of golf, he is more of a pistol than a cannon. And yet he has still won 12 times on the PGA Tour, along with majors at the Masters and British Open.

Fleetwood and McIlroy were playing a few groups ahead of Johnson, and it was a race to see who would wind up on top for much of the late morning until Johnson made his birdie putt on the final hole.

McIlroy was within one shot until a long three-putt from just off the 12th green. He gave another shot back on the 15th when he pulled his second shot toward the gallery, though he made enough birdies to stay within range.

Dustin Johnson wasn't alone in his struggle this week. The No. 2 player in the world, Justin Thomas, also was headed toward a weekend off. Thomas wound up with a 77 to finish at 4 over.

Briefly

Source: Thunder trade Anthony to Hawks; waiver likely

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Carmelo Anthony is done in Oklahoma City.

A person with knowledge of the details told The Associated Press the Thunder are sending Anthony and a 2022 protected first-round pick to Atlanta in exchange for guard Dennis Schroder and Mike Muscala. Anthony will be waived by the Hawks, clearing the way for him to sign as a free agent elsewhere. The person spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Sagan takes third win of Tour on Stage 13

VALENCE, France — After

most of the other top sprinters at the Tour de France succumbed in the Alps, Peter Sagan was in prime position to dominate Friday's flat finish.

Cycling's world champion did not disappoint, timing his move to reach maximum speed as he swung past two challengers to claim Stage 13 by a wheel length and take his third win of this race.

Seconds after Sagan reasserted his status as the most feared finisher left on the Tour, overall leader Geraint Thomas safely crossed in the pack along with teammate — and nearest challenger — Chris Froome.

Facing no attacks on the flat stage, Thomas had no trouble

maintaining his advantage of 1 minute, 39 seconds over defending champion Froome.

Tom Dumoulin stayed third overall at 1:50 behind. Primoz Roglic was fourth at 2:46, and Romain Bardet t 3:07 back.

Delle Donne, Parker pick All-Star teams

NEW YORK — The draft is finished and the squads are set for Team Delle Donne and Team Parker in the WNBA All-Star Game.

Elena Delle Donne took her Washington Mystics teammate Kristi Toliver first. Candice Parker drafted fellow Sparks Chelsea Gray and Nneka Ogwu-

mike. Ogwumike also will be able to play with sister Chiney for the first time as she's also on Team Parker.

Other members of Parker's team are guards Skylar Diggins-Smith, Jewell Loyd and Allie Quigley. In the frontcourt are Liz Cambage, Tina Charles, Angel McCoughtry and Maya Moore. Moore was supposed to be captain of this team as she was the top vote-getter, but declined.

Delle Donne's team includes Seimone Augustus, Sue Bird, Kayla McBride and Diana Taurasi. In the frontcourt will be DeWanna Bonner, Sylvia Fowles, Brittney Griner, Breanna Stewart and A'ja Wilson.

NFL, players union working on anthem resolution

Associated Press

The NFL and National Football League Players Association have agreed to halt enforcement of rules regarding the new national anthem policy while the two sides work on a resolution.

The league and its players union issued a joint statement late Thursday, hours after The Associated Press reported that Miami Dolphins players who protest on the field during the anthem could be suspended for up to four games under a team policy issued this week.

“The NFL and NFLPA, through recent discussions, have been working on a resolution to the anthem issue. In order to allow this constructive dialogue to continue, we have come to a standstill agreement on the NFLPA’s grievance and on the NFL’s anthem policy. No new rules relating to the anthem will be issued or enforced for the next several weeks while these confidential discussions are ongoing,” the statement read.

Miami’s nine-page discipline document included a one-sentence section on “Proper Anthem Conduct” and was provided to the AP by a person familiar with the policy who insisted on anonymity because the document is not public. It classifies anthem protests under a large list of “conduct detrimental to the club,” all of which could lead to a paid or unpaid suspension, a fine or both.

The Dolphins said in a statement: “The NFL required each team to submit their rules regarding the anthem before their players reported to train-

ing camp. We will address this issue once the season starts. All options are still open.”

Miami can choose not to issue any suspension nor fine any player guilty of “conduct detrimental to the club.” Other violations under that label include drug use or possession, gambling, breaking curfew and riding motorcycles as a driver or passenger from the start of camp until the last game of the season.

The team’s rookies reported on Wednesday.

Dolphins veteran receiver Kenny Stills took a knee with a hand on his heart during the anthem throughout last season. Defensive tackle Jordan Phillips put his arm around Stills before one game. Two other players who knelt — safety Michael Thomas and tight end Julius Thomas — are no longer with the team.

Defensive end Robert Quinn, who raised his fist during the anthem while with the Rams, is now with the Dolphins.

Miami’s anthem policy came after the NFL decided in May that teams would be fined if players didn’t stand during “The Star-Spangled Banner” while on the field. The league left it up to teams on how to punish players. None of the team policies had been made public.

Jets acting owner Christopher Johnson said shortly after the league announced its policy that he will not punish his players for any peaceful protests — and would pay any potential fines incurred by the team as a result of his players’ actions.

The NFL rule that was passed in May forbid players from sit-

ting or taking a knee if they are on the field or sidelines during the national anthem, but allowed them to stay in the locker room if they wish. The new league rules were challenged this month in a grievance by the players union.

“Players who are on the field during the Anthem performance must stand and show respect for the flag and the Anthem,” says the 16th and final bullet point on Miami’s list of conduct considered detrimental, below disparaging teammates, coaches or officials including NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell.

The NFLPA said earlier this month that the NFL policy, which the league imposed without consultation with the players union, is inconsistent with the collective bargaining agreement and infringes on player rights.

When the league announced the policy, Goodell called it a compromise aimed at putting the focus back on football after a tumultuous year in which television ratings dipped nearly 10 percent.

The NFL started requiring players to be on the field for the anthem in 2009 — the year it signed a marketing deal with the military.

In 2016, then-49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick began protesting police brutality, social injustice and racial inequality by kneeling during the national anthem and the demonstration spread to other players and teams. It became one of the most controversial and sensitive issues in sports.

Critics led by President Donald Trump called the players

unpatriotic and even said NFL owners should fire any player who refused to stand during the anthem. Some players countered that their actions were being misconstrued and that they are seeking social change rather than protesting the anthem itself.

Trump’s criticism led more than 200 players to protest during one weekend, and some kept it up throughout the season.

“We want people to be respectful of the national anthem. We want people to stand,” Goodell said at the May meetings, when he dismissed concerns about the lack of union involvement by contending the league met with countless players over the past year.

“We’ve been very sensitive on making sure that we give players choices,” the commissioner added, “but we do believe that moment is an important moment and one that we are going to focus on.”

The league and a coalition of players have been working in tandem to support player initiatives for a variety of social issues. The NFL is committing \$90 million over the next seven years to social justice causes in a three-segment plan that involves league players.

Kaepernick didn’t play at all last season and still hasn’t been picked up by another team. He threw 16 touchdown passes and four interceptions in his final season in 2016. Safety Eric Reid, one of Kaepernick’s former teammates and another protest leader, is also out of work.

Both have filed collusion grievances against the NFL.

NCAA to study possible effects of widespread legal wagering

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — The NCAA plans to study how the expansion of legalized betting could affect college athletics and member schools.

The NCAA announced Thursday it will create a working group of “subject matter experts” to assess areas such as officiating, NCAA rules, federal and state laws, and the use of integrity services. NCAA

leadership has already called for federal regulation on sports betting. NCAA rules prohibit sports wagering by athletes and athletic department employees.

The Supreme Court opened the door for states to have legal wagering on sporting events when it struck down a federal ban in May. Schools in some states such as West Virginia, Mississippi and New Jersey are already exploring the possibility of

collecting integrity fees in anticipation of legal sports books opening in their states.

“While we certainly respect the Supreme Court’s decision, our position on sports wagering remains,” said Donald Remy, NCAA chief legal officer. “With this new landscape, we must evolve and expand our long-standing efforts to protect both the integrity of competitions and the well-being of student-athletes.”