

STARS AND STRIPES®

Tuesday, July 2, 2019

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Study: Submariners don't father more girls

BY NANCY MONTGOMERY
Stars and Stripes

A new study has contradicted a widespread belief in the submarine community that submariners father more girls than do other servicemembers.

The analysis published in the military's most recent Medical Surveillance Monthly Report "found no evidence to suggest the offspring sex ratio of male active duty U.S. Navy submariners is different from that of other active duty populations or the U.S. population as a whole."

Worldwide, 105 boys are generally born for every 100 girls. Variations in that ratio have been observed in some locations, with fewer male babies born after earthquakes and other stressful events. Some theories have suggested that a decline in sperm count or quality, possibly because of exposure to reproductive

hazards such as pesticides or elevated radiation, may also result in a lower ratio of boys being born.

The new study examined the sex ratio of 7,087 infants born from 2001 to 2015 to the partners of sailors assigned to nuclear-powered attack submarines, ballistic missile submarines or cruise missile submarines. Submariner fathers were predominantly white or Hispanic, with the most common jobs being machinist's mate, electronics technician, electrician's mate and sonar technician.

The study found that 51.2% of the babies were boys and 48.8% were girls, the same as in the larger U.S. population and also closely aligned with ratios in offspring of all military men.

"The results of this large, record-based study suggest that the offspring sex ratio of male active duty U.S. submariners is normal," the study concluded.

The results also suggested

that "submariners are not likely exposed to reproductive hazards in the workplace that alter offspring sex ratio ... and current safety measures sufficiently protect the submariner force from such harmful exposures."

But the authors also noted that their conclusion conflicted with other studies, including one published in January in Military Medicine.

That study, based on 3,315 responses to an electronic survey emailed to submariners, found that the submariners surveyed did father more daughters. That group's offspring ratio was 95 male births for every 100 female births, compared with 105 boys for every 100 girls in the U.S. population.

The January study was limited by its having to inform participants of the reason for the survey, which may have influenced their responses, the authors noted, wanting perhaps to

prove or disprove their beliefs.

"(A) significant portion of the participating community endorses a belief in the hypothesis of higher ratios of female offspring related to sea duty," the study said.

In contrast, the latest study accessed the Defense Department records of all active-duty sailors with submarine-specific unit identification codes who had children.

The human sex ratio at birth "varies with many variables," according to a 2017 review of the established and suspected causes of variations in human sex ratio at birth.

More girls being born is associated with stressful events or circumstances during or prior to pregnancy — "almost certainly mainly caused by maternal-stress-induced male fetal loss," according to that study, as well as "hormonal variation in either or both parents around the time of conception."

Jury deliberations resume in Navy SEAL's murder case

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — A jury of seasoned combat veterans asked for review of testimony Tuesday after resuming deliberations in the murder case of a decorated Navy SEAL accused of fatally stabbing a wounded war prisoner under his care in Iraq and shooting civilians in separate incidents in 2017.

The panel sought the testimony of Lt. Thomas MacNeil, the first of nearly a dozen SEALs who testified at the court-martial of Special Operations Chief Edward Gallagher at Naval Base San Diego.

MacNeil, a former roommate of Gallagher, identified the defendant's special knife and described hearing a radio

transmission that an airstrike in support of Iraqi forces had wounded an Islamic State fighter.

"I heard Chief Gallagher announce, 'Lay off, he's mine,'" MacNeil said.

MacNeil was not one of the two SEALs who said they saw Gallagher stab the prisoner, but he acknowledged posing for photographs with the corpse.

The jury began deliberating Monday after closing arguments in which both sides told jurors that witnesses had lied on the stand. The panel is weighing whether Gallagher, a 19-year veteran on his eighth deployment, went off the rails and fatally stabbed the war prisoner on May 3, 2017, as a kind of trophy kill or if he was

the victim of allegations fabricated after the platoon returned to San Diego to stop him from getting a Silver Star and being promoted.

A military prosecutor asserted the proof of Gallagher's guilt is his own words, his own photos and the testimony of his fellow troops, while defense lawyers called the case a "mutiny" by entitled junior SEALs trying to oust a demanding chief.

The jury is made up of five Marines and two sailors, including a SEAL, many of whom had been in combat in Iraq.

Defense lawyer Marc Mukasey said Tuesday that he expects a quick verdict, given the makeup of the jurors and the looming Fourth of July holiday.

"Everybody wants to cel-

brate the holiday, right?" said Mukasey, wearing a big smile, a charcoal suit and a "Free Eddie" baseball cap emblazoned with the American flag.

During the two-week trial, Special Operator Corey Scott, a medic like Gallagher, told the court that he saw the chief stab the ISIS militant in the neck but stunned the court when he said he was the one who ultimately killed the prisoner by plugging his breathing tube with his thumb as an act of mercy.

Seven SEALs said Gallagher unexpectedly stabbed the prisoner moments after he and the other medics treated the detainee. Two, including Scott, testified they saw Gallagher plunge his knife into the prisoner's neck.

Commander fired after collision with ship

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The commanding officer of a Navy littoral combat ship that struck a moored merchant ship in the St. Lawrence River in Montreal has been removed from duty “due to a loss of confidence in his ability to command,” the service said Monday.

Cmdr. Michael Johnson was relieved of command Friday of the yet-to-be-commissioned Billings LCS’ blue crew, said Lt. Cmdr. Courtney Hillson, a spokeswoman for the Norfolk, Va.-based Naval Surface Force Atlantic.

The firing by Capt. Shawn Johnston, the chief of Littoral Combat Ship Squadron 2, came one week after the Billings collided with the cargo ship *Rosaire A. Desgagnes*.

Hillson said the Billings suffered minor damage in the incident and no one was injured. The ship departed Montreal on Monday en route to Florida, where it is set to be commissioned Aug. 3 in Key West. It will be home-stationed at Naval Station Mayport near Jacksonville.

The Billings was being assisted by two tugboats when its starboard side made contact with the cargo ship, the U.S.

Naval Institute reported last week. It was not clear if a local pilot or a member of the Billings’ crew was in control of the ship at the time of the incident, according to USNI, which first reported Johnson’s removal.

Johnson had commanded the Billings’ blue crew — one of two crews that man the ship — since June 2018. He was temporarily assigned to a staff position with Littoral Combat Ship Squadron 2.

Hillson said the ship’s previous commander, Cmdr. Nate Rowan, will temporarily command the ship. He was most recently commanding the blue crew of the USS Wichita, another LCS.

other LCS.

Littoral combat ships are relatively small, agile warships designed to conduct operations near the coast. They can deploy landing craft and helicopters. They first joined the fleet in 2008, when the USS Freedom was commissioned.

The Billings, named for the largest town in Montana, is the Navy’s 17th LCS and was delivered to the service in 2017. Its commissioning later this summer will mark the ship and its crew as ready to operate on active duty, according to the Navy.

Marines offer bonuses to keep some aviators from leaving

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Marine Corps is offering some of its aviators bonuses of up to \$280,000 to remain in the service as the service looks to improve pilot retention, an issue the military has struggled with in recent years.

The Marine Corps’ fiscal year 2020 aviation retention bonuses target Marine captains and majors who fly certain fighter jets, tilt-rotor aircraft, cargo planes and helicopters in an effort to keep pilots from moving into commercial aviation. The bonuses are available for pilots of the F-35 Lightning II, the F/A-18 Hornet, the AV-8 Harrier, the MV-22 Osprey, the C-130 Hercules, the UH-1 Huey, the AH-1 Cobra and the CH-53 Stallion, said Maj. Craig Thomas, a Marine spokesman.

It marks the third consecutive year that the Corps has issued aviation bonuses.

The fiscal year 2020 bonuses offer longer contracts and eligibility for more pilots, including ones with more than 14 years of service as a commissioned officer, Thomas said Monday. They no longer include an option for a lump sum payment, and weapons system officers will no longer be eligible for the bonuses, he said.

Lt. Gen. Michael A. Rocco, the Corps’ deputy commandant for manpower and reserve affairs, said in a statement that the Marines need to retain its best aviators to ensure it can meet its operational needs. The new round of bonuses should “provide

‘I hope our aviators see this expanded bonus program as a genuine effort to keep their talent and leadership in the squadrons.’

Lt. Gen. Michael A. Rocco

increased stability for our aviators to meet mission requirements and increase ... lethality,” he said.

“It adds one more positive benefit when Marine aviators weigh their options whether to continue serving or move on from the military,” Rocco said.

The largest bonuses are being offered to pilots of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter and the MV-22 Osprey, according to data provided by Marine manpower and reserve affairs. Marine pilots of those aircraft who have less than 11 years of commissioned service are eligible for an eight-year extension that includes a \$35,000 per year bonus, worth \$280,000 overall.

More experienced Osprey and F-35 pilots can sign contract extensions from three to six years, worth \$75,000 to \$210,000, depending on their length of commissioned service.

Pilots of the F/A-18 Hornet, the AV-8 Harrier and the C-130 Hercules are eli-

gible for extensions between three and six years, worth \$75,000 to \$210,000, depending on their length of commissioned service.

Helicopter pilots who fly the AH-1 Cobra, UH-1 Huey and the CH-53 Stallion are eligible for extensions between three and six years, worth \$45,000 to \$150,000, which also depends on the length of their commissioned service.

The bonuses are available only to Marines on active duty. To be eligible, Marines must be recommended by their commanders and they must submit an application for the retention bonus by April 1, 2020, according to the Marines’ forthcoming announcement of the program.

Marine aviators who accepted bonuses in fiscal years 2018 or 2019 might be eligible for the newest bonus if they apply for the 2020 program prior to the two-year anniversary of signing their contract or April 1, 2020, whichever date comes sooner. However, aviators who accepted a lump sum payment are not eligible, according to the announcement.

“Marines usually stay in uniform because they enjoy being a Marine and serving with their fellow [Marines],” Rocco said. “I hope our aviators see this expanded bonus program as a genuine effort to keep their talent and leadership in the squadrons to continue flying and mentor the next generation of aircrews.”

Trump hints at quicker Afghanistan exit

Associated Press

ISLAMABAD — A surprise announcement by President Donald Trump seemed to accelerate the expected time frame for U.S. troop withdrawal from Afghanistan ahead of the all-Afghan peace summit planned for July 7-8 in the Middle Eastern nation of Qatar — a gathering that will apparently be held on Taliban terms as there will be no official Afghan government representation.

On Monday, Trump told Fox News Channel's Tucker Carlson that nearly half of all American troops have already been pulled out.

That pullout was expected to be announced as part of a time frame being negotiated

by Washington's peace envoy, Zalmay Khalilzad, who is in the middle of talks with the Taliban in Qatar.

"I've wanted to pull them out," Trump said, according to the transcript of the Carlson interview shared with The Associated Press.

"And, you know, I have pulled a lot out. We were at 16,000. We're down to about 9,000, which a lot of people don't know.

"So, we've reduced the force very substantially in Afghanistan, which I don't talk about very much, and that's OK," Trump added.

The Taliban's spokesman in Doha, Suhail Shaheen, told the AP earlier that talks with Khalilzad are focused on a

timetable for withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops from Afghanistan.

In a tweet on Monday, Shaheen said talks would come with an announcement of a timetable for withdrawal of the estimated 20,000 service personnel, nearly 14,000 of whom are Americans.

Trump's comments to Fox would seem to contradict a statement made by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo during a visit to Kabul on June 25.

Then, Pompeo said Washington had made no decision on a time frame for withdrawal.

"And while we've made clear to the Taliban that we're prepared to remove our forces, I want to be clear. We've not yet agreed on a timeline to do so,"

Pompeo said.

During the same Fox interview, Trump also said he wanted to leave a strong intelligence-gathering force behind in Afghanistan.

"I'll tell you, the problem is, look, I would like to just get out. The problem is, it (Afghanistan) just seems to be a lab for terrorists. It seems — I call it the Harvard of terrorists. ... But I would leave very strong intelligence there," he said, according to the transcript.

Meanwhile, on the upcoming all-Afghan dialogue, Germany's special representative, Ambassador Markus Potzel, in a Tuesday statement said those attending "will participate only in their personal capacity and on an equal footing."

Stethem returning stateside after 14-year deployment

BY CHRISTIAN LOPEZ

Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — After 14 years in the Indo-Pacific region with the 7th Fleet, the USS Stethem is returning to San Diego to operate under the 3rd Fleet once more.

Once the destroyer reaches its new homeport, it will undertake a "midlife modernization," according to a Navy statement released Monday.

Arriving at Yokosuka in June 2005, the Stethem operated as part of a strike group with the

now-decommissioned aircraft carrier USS Kitty Hawk.

"The opportunity to serve alongside incredible waterfront shipmates and operate with our [Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force] allies, flexing every mission area in the most challenging operational environment is truly unmatched," Cmdr. John Rummel, the Stethem's commanding officer, said in the statement. "We offer our sincerest appreciation to all of those that supported Stethem, our Steelworkers and families during our time in Yokosuka and wish them continued suc-

cess in the years to come!"

The Stethem's namesake, Steelworker 2nd Class Robert Stethem, a Navy Seabee diver, was killed in Beirut during the hijacking of TWA Flight 847 in 1985, according to the Navy. The ship was commissioned Oct. 21, 1995.

While attached to the 7th Fleet, the Stethem took part in a variety of operations ranging from search and rescue missions and disaster relief to joint and three-carrier operations, according to the statement.

In 2011, the Stethem and its crew took part in Operation

Tomodachi, the three-month relief effort to northeastern Japan that followed the magnitude 9.0 earthquake and ensuing tsunami that killed nearly 16,000 people.

In April, the ship joined a Japan-led search for a missing Japan Air Self-Defense Force F-35A stealth fighter.

The destroyer also took part in several multinational exercises in South and Southeast Asia, including Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training, Cobra Gold with Thailand and cooperative deployments with ships from the JMSDF.

Cindy McCain honors her late husband aboard destroyer

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS

Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — A change of command ceremony here Tuesday for the USS John S. McCain was "bittersweet" for the widow of one of the destroyer's three namesakes.

It was Cindy McCain's first visit to the warship that bears

her late husband's name since the Arizona senator's death Aug. 25 at age 81.

It was also the first time she has been aboard since the Navy added him as a namesake. The others are his father and grandfather, also named John S. McCain, who were both admirals.

The Navy added U.S. Sen. John S. McCain to the list as he lay dying of brain cancer.

"For all the wonderful tributes to John that poured in before and after his passing — all of which his family appreciates beyond description — the one that touched us the most, and perhaps meant the most to him, was the Navy's decision the month before he died to add his name to the ship's namesake," McCain said.

Tuesday's visit was also the

first by members of the McCain family since the destroyer collided with the Alnic MC, a commercial tanker, near Singapore on Aug. 21, 2017.

Confusion among watchstanders that night led to a loss of steering control, and the ship crossed in front of the tanker. The Alnic slammed into a berthing area on the McCain's port side, killing 10 sailors.

Tanks planned for July 4th celebration

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump isn't taking "no tanks" for an answer on the Fourth of July.

He said Monday that a display of U.S. military tanks will be part of a special event he's headlining July 4 in Washington, and an Associated Press photographer saw at least two M1A1 Abrams tanks and two Bradley Fighting Vehicles on flatcars in a railyard at the southeastern edge of Washington.

Military police were guarding the vehicles, which were visible to passers-by on nearby paths.

A U.S. official told the AP that the military vehicles to be used in the July 4 event were being stored at the railyard.

Trump had wanted a military parade of tanks and other equipment in the District

of Columbia after he witnessed a similar parade on Bastille Day in Paris in 2017.

That plan eventually was scuttled, partly because of cost, though Trump apparently held on to the idea.

Local officials also had objected because of the damage the heavy armored tanks could do to city streets.

"We're going to have some tanks stationed outside," Trump said Monday from the Oval Office, appearing to acknowledge local officials' earlier concerns.

He offered no specifics on where the vehicles would be located.

Two M1A1 Abrams tanks and two Bradley Fighting Vehicles will be on display as part of Trump's "Salute to America" event, according to a U.S. official who spoke on condition of anonymity because details of the exhibits have not been made public.

The Abrams tanks weigh more than 60 tons apiece and were been shipped on railroad freight cars, from Fort Stewart, Ga., the nearest Army base that has them. The White House declined to release more specific information.

Thursday's events are also expected to include a military demonstration by the U.S. Navy Blue Angels and other aircraft.

Trump plans to deliver a speech at the Lincoln Memorial during his "Salute to America," which has been added to the regular schedule of Independence Day events in the nation's capital.

Last year, Trump and his wife, first lady Melania Trump, hosted servicemembers and their families at a picnic on the White House lawn and the president addressed guests from the balcony. No similar event is being planned this year.

Moon expresses confidence in Trump-Kim meeting

BY KIM GAMEL
AND YOO KYONG CHANG
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — The impromptu border summit between President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un amounted to a de facto end of hostilities, South Korea's president said Tuesday, seeking to counter skepticism that the highly symbolic meeting lacked substance.

President Moon Jae-in, who

traveled to the truce village of Panmunjom with Trump on Sunday, also expressed confidence the meeting would lay the foundation for renewed negotiations aimed at persuading the North to abandon its nuclear weapons.

He acknowledged that no document was signed but said Trump and Kim had declared the "beginning of the end of hostile relations and a new era of peace by their actions."

The image of Trump stepping across the concrete berm that delineates the Military Demarcation Line between the iconic blue buildings at the Joint Security Area was historic. He is the first sitting U.S. president to step onto North Korean territory.

Kim and Trump agreed to resume nuclear talks, which stalled after the leaders failed to reach agreement on sanctions relief and other issues

during their second summit in Vietnam in late February. But the sides gave no indication about how they may overcome the gaps.

Satellite images suggest the North's nuclear and missile programs remain intact.

The Trump administration said another round of working-level talks led by the main U.S. envoy to the North, Stephen Biegun, would likely begin this month.

Border Patrol head condemns agents' posts on Facebook

Associated Press

CLINT, Texas — The head of the U.S. Border Patrol on Monday slammed as "completely inappropriate" sexually explicit posts about U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and comments questioning the authenticity of a photo of a drowned man and his young daughter in a secret Facebook group for agents.

The existence of the group was reported by ProPublica as roughly a dozen members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, including Democrats

Ocasio-Cortez, of New York, and Rep. Veronica Escobar, of Texas, toured border facilities where attorneys said they had found migrant children living in fetid, filthy conditions.

Some of the posts were graphic, doctored images of Ocasio-Cortez, including one that shows a smiling President Donald Trump forcing her head toward his crotch.

Other comments refer to Ocasio-Cortez and Escobar as "hoes," and one member encouraged agents to throw a "burrito at these bitches."

The revelation about the Facebook posts only added to the vitriolic atmosphere surrounding immigration and the treatment of tens of thousands of migrants who have crossed the border, vastly straining the system that has been struggling to keep up amid Trump's hard-line rhetoric.

The Democrats delivered an emotional denunciation of what they saw inside the border facilities as protesters shouted that they didn't believe them.

The Texas visit came the same day as Trump signed

a \$4.6 billion emergency aid package that Congress passed Friday. The Democratic-led House had pushed for more restrictions on how the money could be used and stricter oversight but ultimately lost the battle.

Trump said he hadn't seen the postings but claimed Border Patrol agents were not happy with Congress.

"So the Border Patrol — they're patriots, they're great people. They love our country. They know who's coming in," said Trump.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Overweight vehicle crosses, closes bridge

WHEELING — A charter bus weighing well over the weight limit crossed a West Virginia suspension bridge, causing it to temporarily close.

News outlets reported a charter bus weighing more than the Wheeling Suspension Bridge's 2-ton limit crossed the bridge Saturday, leading to its closure.

Wheeling Police Department spokesman Philip Stahl said the driver of the bus was cited for the overweight vehicle and failing to obey a traffic control device.

The bridge remained closed until an inspector could ensure it's structurally sound.

Ford dealer ends July 4 gun-Bible promotion

AL CHATOM — A Ford dealership in Alabama has ended a Fourth of July promotion that gifted a Bible, and American flag and a gift certificate for a 12-gauge shotgun to anyone who bought a new or used vehicle.

News outlets reported Ford Motor Co. told Ford Chatom the promotion was inappropriate after a worker fired from a California dealership killed two employees last week, then killed himself.

Dealership general manager Colin Ward said the dealership is fulfilling any commitments it already made.

Owner of stolen cow accused of threats

VA WILLIAMSBURG — A Maryland farmer whose cow was stolen and taken to an animal sanctuary in Virginia is accused of threatening the sanctuary's owner.

WJZ-TV reported "Life with Pigs" owner Ryan Phillips has filed a criminal complaint against Anthony Scott Braglio, 57, for "profane, threatening or indecent language over public airways or by other means." The allegation stems from a phone call that Phillips secretly recorded after Baltimore County, Md., police recovered the stolen calf in May.

Phillips has accused Braglio Farms of neglecting the calf; Baltimore County investigated and found no such evidence.

Two women are charged with stealing the cow. The commonwealth's attorney is reviewing Phillips' complaint.

Mail delivery halted over dog attacks

KY LOUISVILLE — The U.S. Postal Service has suspended mail delivery to a Kentucky street that has a history of dog attacks.

Postal Service spokeswoman Susan Wright told The Courier Journal that dog attacks have been a problem on Girard Drive for a long time, and the issue is only getting worse. She said a mail carrier recently dodged three loose dogs on the street.

Residents are being asked to pick up their mail from a nearby post office.

Police crack down as stunts block traffic

MI DETROIT — Detroit police are cracking down on drivers recorded on video blocking freeway traffic and those doing doughnuts on that roadway and elsewhere.

The video gained attention over the weekend on social media. Police Chief James Craig told reporters Monday that officers are inspecting several cars they believe were involved, including one belong-

ing to a Canton man.

Craig said the 25-year-old has been released but his car remains impounded. The chief said the man is involved in reckless driving across the city.

The illegal stunt driving recorded along Detroit's Lodge Freeway shows cars backed up behind parked vehicles while another spins with tires screeching.

Museums seek items related to Prohibition

MS JACKSON — The Mississippi Department of Archives and History is seeking items to tell the story of when liquor was illegal.

An exhibition titled "Mississippi Distilled: Prohibition, Piety, and Politics" will open in March at the Museum of Mississippi History and the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum in Jackson.

The department said it's seeking Prohibition enforcement items, such as a uniform or badge from an officer involved in a raid. Collections director Nan Prince said museum officials are interested in "anything related to alcohol consumption and production in Mississippi," including photos of taverns and saloons, and artifacts related to temperance activists.

To contribute, email collections@mdah.ms.gov.

Man grills burger, then robs Wendy's

FL JENSEN BEACH — Florida officials said they are looking for a "hamburglar" who broke into two restaurants, fixed himself some food, and then stole money.

The Martin County Sheriff's Office said the suspect forced his way into a Wendy's in Jensen Beach by smashing a

window with a brick. He then fired up the grill, made a hamburger, and walked away with the store's safe. He also went to another Jensen Beach eatery, where he helped himself to more food and money.

On Facebook, the office posted photos and asked the public to help identify the suspect.

Tardy man accused of forging police report

NH LISBON — A man accused of telling a bogus police story as an excuse for being late to work is facing real charges.

The Caledonian-Record reported that Paul Neilson, 51, of Lisbon, was charged last week with forgery, a felony punishable by up to seven years in prison.

Police said he told his boss he was late to work on March 11 because a Lisbon officer gave him a warning about his expired car registration. When his boss got suspicious, police said Neilson gave him a letter purportedly from the officer.

The boss contacted police, who said they had not had any contact with Neilson.

Fiberglass cows return in Chicago

IL CHICAGO — A herd of fiberglass cows is returning to Chicago to mark the 20-year anniversary of a hugely popular display that inspired other cities to line their streets with statues of everything from lobsters to pigs.

The Chicago Tribune reported that for the month of July the city is commemorating the 1999 public art exhibit called "Cows on Parade" with what it is calling "Cows Come Home." Some 20 cows will be on display.

From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES®

On a mission to provide credible reporting and daily news to America's military, wherever they serve.

Mobile apps available: www.stripes.com/apps.

Top NHL free agents sign 7-year deals

Associated Press

The New York Rangers, Florida Panthers and Nashville Predators came out ahead on Day 1 of NHL free agency, signing the best players available to seven-year contracts.

If Artemi Panarin, Sergei Bobrovsky or Matt Duchene can help their new teams win the Stanley Cup, it will go against a trend.

Teams that have made the biggest splash by signing stars from other teams in recent summers haven't had those major moves lead to winning the Stanley Cup.

"The reality is, you want to get those guys on July 1, you've got to give them terms and you've got to give them a lot of money," Detroit Red Wings general manager Steve Yzerman said. "I don't know if it's the right way to go or the wrong way. We've all done it."

"You can look back on the history of July 1 signings and I guess judge for yourself whether you think they're good or bad."

The Toronto Maple Leafs were hailed a year ago for signing superstar John Tavares and they ended up losing in the first round of the playoffs for the third straight year. Edmonton and Buffalo, respectively, signed Milan Lucic and Kyle

Okposo to seven-year contracts in 2016 and both franchises are still floundering.

"You have to try to sign free agents when the time is right in terms of the cap and cycle of the team," Oilers general manager Ken Holland said. "If you think you're one or two pieces away, you have to take a chance."

The Minnesota Wild took a big chance in 2012, signing Zach Parise and Ryan Suter to 13-year contracts. The duo has not been able to help the franchise get past the second round.

It is possible, though, for a team to invest a lot in a player from another team in free agency and have it pay off with a title. The Washington Capitals gave Matt Niskanen a seven-year, \$40.25 million contract in 2014 and the defenseman helped them hoist the Cup four years later.

A look at the teams that spent the most so far in 2019 to sign unrestricted free agents — three from Columbus — away from other teams:

New York Rangers

Desperate for a shot of talent and energy, New York gave the 27-year-old Panarin a contract that trails only Edmonton's Connor McDavid in money per season. The dynamic forward signed a seven-year, \$81.5

million contract with a franchise that has missed the playoffs in consecutive years for the first time in the salary cap era. The Russian had a career-high 87 points last season in Columbus. He has scored at least 27 goals in each of his four NHL seasons, including his first two years with the Chicago Blackhawks.

Florida Panthers

The franchise has missed the playoffs three straight years and 16 times in 18 seasons, creating a sense of urgency to win that can lead to lavish spending in free agency. Bobrovsky took advantage, signing a seven-year, \$70 million contract. The two-time Vezina Trophy winner replaces retired goaltender Roberto Luongo and makes Florida tough to beat each game he starts. He led the league with nine shutouts and his 37 victories with the Blue Jackets ranked second in the NHL. The Russian has given up fewer than 2 1/2 goals per game over nine seasons.

Nashville Predators

Nashville reached the 2017 Stanley Cup Final and has taken a step back since, losing in the first round this year after a second-round exit. The Predators needed to give their power play a boost even though it cost them \$56 million over seven years to sign Matt Duchene away from the Blue Jackets. They were able to sign the 28-year-old Canadi-

an center after freeing up cap space by trading All-Star defenseman P.K. Subban to New Jersey. Duchene had 31 goals and 39 assists last season with the Ottawa Senators and Columbus.

Minnesota Wild

Minnesota signed right wing Mats Zuccarello to a five-year, \$30 million contract in the hopes of getting back to the playoffs after a six-year streak ended. Even though Zuccarello had just 12 goals and 40 points last season with the Rangers and Dallas, the Wild need all the help they can get offensively after ranking among the NHL's worst in scoring last season. Zuccarello, who is from Norway, has 114 goals and 241 assists over nine seasons.

Vancouver Canucks

Vancouver has failed to make the playoffs the previous four seasons, matching the franchise's longest drought when it joined the NHL in the early 1970s and from 1997-2000. Its chances of turning things around may have improved by signing Tyler Myers, one of the top defensemen on the market. Myers, who played in Winnipeg for four-plus seasons, came at a high price: \$30 million over five years. The American had 31 points for the Jets last season. He has 265 career points over 10 seasons, split between Buffalo and Winnipeg.

Thompson staying with Warriors; Leonard still quiet

Associated Press

Klay Thompson is staying home with Golden State. Jimmy Butler finally has a new home in Miami.

And the wait continues for Kawhi Leonard.

Thompson announced his decision to stay with the Golden State Warriors for \$190 million over the next five years, meaning the five-time reigning Western Conference champions have their 'Splash Brothers' backcourt of Thompson and Stephen Curry locked up long-term. Thompson made

the announcement on social media, using the hashtag "Warrior4life."

He added, "there was never a doubt."

There's still plenty of doubt about Kawhi Leonard's next stop. The first 24 hours of free agency have come and gone without a peep from the NBA Finals MVP, who is expected to meet with the Toronto Raptors — the team he led to this past season's NBA title — as early as Tuesday. The Los Angeles Lakers also appear to remain squarely in the race to land him to play alongside LeBron James

and Anthony Davis.

But there is no more doubt about Butler's future.

The Heat completed agreements on what will become a four-team trade Monday to land Butler from the Philadelphia 76ers, with the Los Angeles Clippers and Portland Trail Blazers also involved. Miami gets Butler and Meyers Leonard, the Blazers get Hassan Whiteside, the Clippers get Moe Harkless and a future first-round pick and the 76ers get Josh Richardson.

Miami had agreed to send Whiteside to Portland for Har-

kless and Meyers Leonard earlier in the day, and then essentially got absorbed into the deal to get Butler — who will be under contract for \$142 million over the next four seasons. The Heat had the framework of a three-team deal with the 76ers and Dallas nearly in place Sunday, before the Mavericks went a different way.

Kyrie Irving made his move to the Brooklyn Nets on a four-year deal believed to be worth \$141 million official, with the New York native saying the lure of going home was too strong to ignore.

Barty, Serena win Wimbledon openers

Associated Press

WIMBLEDON, England — Ash Barty played her first match as the No. 1 player in the world on No. 1 Court at Wimbledon, and she won.

The top-seeded Australian, who followed her victory at the French Open by winning a grass-court warm-up tournament in Birmingham, advanced to the second round at the All England Club on Tuesday by winning her 13th straight match. She beat Zheng Saisai 6-4, 6-2.

"It feels incredible," Barty said about playing at Wimbledon as the top-ranked woman. "It's a little bit of a bizarre feeling, to be honest. But I just try and go about my business the exact same way.

"This hallowed turf that we do get to play on is sacred, it's beautiful. And you have to enjoy every minute."

Defending champion Angelique Kerber also advanced, beating Tatjana Maria 6-4, 6-3 on Centre Court.

Both Barty and Kerber are in the same quarter of the women's draw, which means they could meet in the quarterfinals. Seven-time champion Serena Williams is also in that same quarter, and she also won, beating Giulia Gatto-Monticone of Italy 6-2, 7-5.

Williams, who lost in the Wimbledon final last year, is short on matches and training time this season, factors she cited after her third-round exit at the French Open, her most recent tournament.

Garbine Muguruza, the 2017 Wimbledon champion who was also placed in that same tough quarter of the draw, didn't make it through her first match. And neither did Maria Sharapova, the champion in 2004.

Muguruza, seeded 26th, lost to Brazilian qualifier Beatriz Haddad Maia 6-4, 6-4.

Sharapova, who served for the match while leading 5-3 in the second, retired from her match with a left wrist injury while trailing Pauline Parmentier of France 4-6, 7-6 (4), 5-0.

Sharapova, who was unseeded at the All England Club for the first time since her debut in 2003, called for a medical timeout after the second set and a trainer put some taping on her wrist. She called for the trainer a second time in the third set,

and stopped just after Parmentier served for the 5-0 lead.

The combative and combustible Nick Kyrgios advanced to the second round despite winning only five points in the fourth set. The unseeded Australian beat Jordan Thompson 7-6 (4), 3-6, 7-6 (10), 0-6, 6-1.

Kyrgios took a medical timeout after the second set and a trainer came on court to examine his left side. He then won the third set in a tiebreaker — a set which took 1 hour, 16 minutes to complete.

The fourth set, however, lasted only 18 minutes as Thompson won 24 points while Kyrgios took only five.

Kyrgios will face two-time champion Rafael Nadal in the next round.

Dutch striker Miedema player better in big games

Associated Press

LYON, France — Here's some bad news for Sweden's defense ahead of its World Cup semifinal Wednesday against the Netherlands: Vivianne Miedema gets even better in the big games.

After scoring in every knockout match at the European Championship two years ago, helping the Netherlands win the title, the prolific Dutch striker is vying to do the same here.

Miedema's superb glancing header in a tough round-of-16 match against Italy took her tournament tally to three goals in five games — two behind Megan Rapinoe and Alex Morgan of the United States, and England's Ellen White.

Don't bet against Miedema overtaking them; she's a knockout-round big hitter. After not scoring in the group stage at Euro 2017, she then scored in the quarters and semis before netting twice in the final against Denmark.

She, like her teammates, is under serious pressure to deliver from the demanding Dutch

fans descending on Lyon.

"At the Euros nobody expected a lot from us and once we started winning our country stood behind us," Miedema said. "(Coming) here, everybody in Holland said, 'Oh, they are going to be world champions' and that gave us a lot of pressure."

On Wednesday, thousands of Dutch fans will turn much of the stadium a dazzling orange.

"We get so much energy from it, we hope it's a Dutch party again," Miedema said. "My first (international) game was six years ago, in front of 500 people. The Euros have helped us a lot — it's been growing a lot over the past couple of years."

With the growth of the national team comes increased media coverage — good and bad.

At the start of this tournament, it was bad. The Dutch labored past New Zealand courtesy of an injury-time goal. Forward Shanice Van De Sanden, who has not scored so far, has received a lot of criticism.

But coach Sarina Wiegman also sees criticism as a reflection of the growing stature of

the women's game.

The men's team has often been criticized by its fans and media for having never won a World Cup — losing three finals — and only winning one Euro. This despite wonderful players like Johan Cruyff, Ruud Gullit, Marco van Basten, Dennis Bergkamp and Robin van Persie.

Why should the women be treated differently? As long as the criticism does not become "personal," Wiegman welcomes it.

"Many people have an opinion and that's fine. It means we're more visible," she said through a translator at a pre-match news conference. "The entire squad has faced criticism. At the beginning the players were heavily criticized, but we were able to win."

Sweden's Peter Gerhardsson might find the criticism amusing, since he is a self-confessed fan of Dutch soccer.

"Historically, they are a machine," he said. "It's always the individuals who characterize the side in terms of organization."

Gerhardsson admired Mi-

edema's header against Italy: the huge leap, the timing, the accuracy, the bullet-like trajectory into the net. Now he must stop her adding to 61 goals in 80 internationals — achieved at just 22 years old.

Then there's defender Stefanie van der Gragt, whose towering header against the Italians was equally impressive.

"We are going to manage their set-piece plays. We have a team working on all these aspects, looking into everything," Gerhardsson said.

The analytical breakdown of Dutch free kicks and corners is something Gerhardsson and his backroom staff do well — as proven in the 2-1 win against two-time world champion Germany in the previous round.

"We will have a plan as always," Gerhardsson said. "All we need to do is execute it."

Veteran defender Nilla Fischer thinks she knows how to stop the supply line to Miedema.

"Push them to one side and keep them there, so they won't be able to turn and get a cross in," Fischer said. "It's important that we keep our defensive shape."

Angels pitcher Skaggs dies suddenly

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Los Angeles Angels pitcher Tyler Skaggs died Monday at the age of 27, stunning Major League Baseball and leading to the postponement of the team's game against the Texas Rangers.

Skaggs was with the team in Texas when he was found unresponsive in his hotel room, police said. He was pronounced dead at the scene. Police said they were investigating, but no foul play was suspected.

Skaggs was "an important part of the Angels Family," the team said in a statement. "Our thoughts and prayers are with his wife, Carli, and his entire family during this devastating time."

Skaggs, who would have

turned 28 on July 13, had been a regular in the Angels' starting rotation since late 2016, when he returned from Tommy John surgery. He struggled with injuries repeatedly over the past three seasons but persevered to become a valuable starter in Los Angeles' injury-plagued rotation.

The left-hander had just pitched on Saturday, allowing two runs in 4¹/₃ innings in a 4-0 loss to Oakland. He was scheduled to start the series finale at Texas, on the Fourth of July holiday.

Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred said he was "deeply saddened" by Skaggs' death.

"We will support the Angels' organization through this most difficult period, and we will make a variety of resources available to Tyler's teammates

and other members of the baseball family," Manfred said in a statement.

Skaggs is the first Angels player to die in-season since Nick Adenhart was killed by a drunken driver 10 years ago. The 22-year-old rookie right-hander was coming off his first start of the 2009 season, his fourth career game in the big leagues.

Jose Fernandez, a two-time All-Star pitcher for the Miami Marlins, was killed in a boating crash near Miami Beach, Fla., in September 2016.

Pitcher Darryl Kile, who played in the majors for 12 seasons (1992-2002) was on the road with the St. Louis Cardinals when he died in June 2002 in his Chicago hotel room. Albert Pujols, now a member of the Angels, was Kile's team-

mate then.

Angels players and coaches who had arrived at the Rangers' ballpark for Monday night's series opener left about four hours before the scheduled start of the game to return to their hotel. The clubhouse was never opened to the media.

The Rangers' clubhouse also was closed when general manager Jon Daniels and manager Chris Woodward told their players what had happened and dismissed them.

Skaggs was born in the Los Angeles neighborhood of Woodland Hills, in the far western part of the sprawling San Fernando Valley. He graduated from Santa Monica High School in 2009, when the Angels drafted him in the first round.

MLB roundup

Yelich hits 30th home run as Brewers rally past Reds

Associated Press

CINCINNATI — Christian Yelich singled with the bases loaded and hit his major league-leading 30th homer Monday night, helping the Milwaukee Brewers rally for their sixth straight victory at Great American Ball Park, 8-6 over the Cincinnati Reds.

Milwaukee sent 10 batters to the plate for five runs in the seventh inning, with Yelich contributing an RBI single. The reigning National League MVP hit a two-run homer in the ninth that made him the first Brewer with 30 before the All-Star break.

The homer came off a pitch that was above the strike zone and landed in the first row of seats in left field.

"It was one of those weird ones," Yelich said. "It wasn't the best pitch to swing at, but that's baseball. Sometimes, you do everything right and don't get rewarded. Sometimes, you do everything wrong and hit a

home run."

The Brewers have won 11 of 15 overall against their NL Central rival. This time, they overcame a pair of two-run homers by Eugenio Suarez, who has three in the last two games.

Lorenzo Cain and Keston Hiura added homers for the Brewers.

Pirates 18, Cubs 5: Josh Bell hit three home runs to boost his season total to 25 and host Pittsburgh routed Chicago.

Bell hit a three-run shot off rookie Adbert Alzolay (1-1) in the first, a two-run drive off Alzolay in the second and finished off a four-hit, seven-RBI night by taking new Chicago closer Craig Kimbrel deep in the eighth.

Adam Frazier finished 5-for-6 and tied a major league record with four doubles. Colin Moran had a career-high five hits for the Pirates.

Jung Ho Kang hit his seventh home run of the season off Chicago infielder Daniel Descal-

so, who made a cameo on the mound in the seventh with the game well out of hand.

Bell became the 20th Pirates player to hit three home runs in a game and the first left-handed batter to do it since Hall of Famer Willie Stargell in 1971.

Rays 6, Orioles 3: Kevin Kiermaier's three run home run lifted host Tampa Bay to a win over Baltimore in a game in which two-way player Brandon McKay went 0-for-4 in his major league debut as a hitter.

Kiermaier's 10th homer came off Branden Kline (1-4) in the sixth inning after a walk and a single by Avisail Garcia.

McKay, who gave up one hit in six scoreless innings Saturday night in his major league pitching debut against the Texas Rangers, grounded out four times and was picked off second base on a throw from catcher Pedro Severino.

The crowd of 20,441 included about 10,000 fans who purchased \$2 tickets.

Blue Jays 11, Royals 4: Freddy Galvis hit a pair of solo home runs, rookie Cavan Biggio had four RBIs and host Toronto beat Kansas City.

Randal Grichuk had four hits and four RBIs and Teoscar Hernandez added a solo home run as the Blue Jays won for the 15th time in 19 regular-season home meetings with the Royals.

Wearing red caps and jerseys in honor of Canada Day, the Blue Jays scored in each of the first four innings and finished with a season-high 18 hits.

Giants 13, Padres 2: Jeff Samardzija threw eight innings of five-hit ball and doubled, and Kevin Pillar, Evan Longoria and Austin Slater homered in San Francisco's rout of host San Diego.

Samardzija (5-7) went eight innings for the first time this season. He allowed two runs, struck out six and walked two.

San Francisco had nine extra-base hits.