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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

US boosts special ops as SDF begins push into Raqqa

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — U.S.-backed Syrian fighters began pushing into the Islamic State's self-declared capital of Raqqa on Tuesday, opening a long-anticipated battle that could put American troops closer to the front lines than in any operation in Syria so far, Pentagon officials said.

In recent weeks, the United States has increased the size of its special operations advisory force embedded with the Syrian Democratic Forces as the group prepared its invasion of Raqqa, said Eric Pahon, a Pentagon spokesman. Adding more American commandos to the fight will place them in a better position to provide real-time battlefield advice for what is certain to be the Syrian Democratic Forces' toughest battle yet, he said.

But Pahon added the move will also help the United States curb some concerns put forth by Turkey, a NATO ally. The United States angered Turkey by supporting and by recently providing weapons to the Kurdish element of the Syrian Democratic Forces, known as the People's Protection Unit, or YPG, which is considered a terrorist group by Turkey.

"The American advisers will closely monitor the equipment provided to the Syrian Kurds," Pahon said. "... At the least, they'll ensure it's

not going to be pointed in any different direction other than ISIS."

Pahon declined to discuss how many American troops are aiding the operation. The Pentagon officially acknowledges it has about 500 troops serving in Syria, but it is believed upward of 1,000 U.S. servicemembers are operating there.

The SDF announced Tuesday via social media that it had "launched the great battle for the liberation of Raqqa," a city of some 300,000 people controlled by ISIS for more than three years. As the SDF began moving toward the city in November, ISIS moved much of its senior leadership and administrators farther south into territory along the Euphrates River that it still controls. What remains behind, according to Pentagon estimates, are some 4,000 ISIS fighters prepared to fight to death for the city.

For the SDF, the road to Raqqa has been long and marred by brutal battles through northern Syria. But the U.S.-backed group of Syrian fighters has won every major battle against ISIS for the last two years, liberating more than 14,000 square miles from the terrorists, according to the Pentagon.

"The SDF have proven themselves the most capable force against ISIS in Syria," said Navy Capt. Jeff Davis, another Pentagon spokesman.

Death toll in Kabul bombing over 150

BY PHILLIP WALTER
WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — The death toll from last week's massive truck bomb explosion in Afghanistan's capital has surpassed 150, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said Tuesday, making it the deadliest attack in the city since U.S.-led forces ousted the Taliban in 2001.

"More than 150 innocent Afghan sons and daughters were killed and more than 300 wounded were brought to hospitals with burns and amputations," Ghani told attendees of an international peace conference in Kabul.

Previous estimates put the death toll from last Wednesday's attack at about 90.

The blast occurred when a wastewater tanker laden with explosives detonated at the entrance of Kabul's heavily fortified diplomatic quarter where both the U.S. Embassy and NATO's Resolute Support headquarters are located.

All of those killed were Afghans, including nine U.S. Embassy guards. At least 11 American contractors at the embassy were among scores of foreigners injured by the blast, the State Department said.

The string of violence has left Kabul on edge, and highlighted the worsening security situation in Afghanistan after more than 15 years of U.S. and international support. It also comes as President Donald Trump's administration decides whether to send additional American troops to the country.

Russia intercepts, escorts US B-52

Associated Press

MOSCOW — The Russian military said it scrambled a fighter jet Tuesday to intercept and escort a U.S. strategic bomber flying over the Baltic alongside the Russian border.

Russia's Defense Ministry said Russian radars spotted an aircraft flying along the border and a Su-27 fighter took off to intercept it. It said the Russian pilot identified the plane as a U.S. B-52 bomber and escorted

it at a safe distance until it flew further away from the Russian border.

U.S. Lt. Col. David Faggard, a spokesman for U.S. Forces Europe, said the B-52 was conducting a routine mission in international airspace over the Baltic when it was intercepted by the Russian fighter. Such intercepts happen routinely, Faggard said.

The bomber, normally based in Barksdale, La., is currently stationed at RAF Fairford in

Britain in support of NATO exercises.

The B-52 had its transponders on and would have been identifiable to air-traffic controllers at the time of the encounter, Faggard said.

In a separate incident, a Russian MiG-31 fighter jet was dispatched Tuesday to intercept a Norwegian maritime surveillance aircraft flying over the Barents Sea near the Russian border, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

Attack sub USS Cheyenne makes S. Korea port call

BY KIM GAMEL
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — The attack submarine USS Cheyenne made a port call to the southeastern city of Busan on Tuesday in the latest show of military might amid rising tensions with North Korea.

The Navy said the 360-foot-long Los Angeles-class submarine was on a routine visit as part of a regularly scheduled deployment to the Western Pacific.

But the sight of U.S. warships and other military hardware near the divided peninsula rankles North Korea, which accuses Washington and Seoul of preparing for an invasion.

The U.S. military has been beefing up its resources in the region as fears grow over the growing nuclear and missile threat from the North.

The submarine — which is named for the capital of Wyoming and has its homeport in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii — arrived at Busan just over a month after the USS Michigan paid a visit. The aircraft carriers USS Carl Vinson and Ronald Reagan also conducted dual operations last week, and the Nimitz is on its way to the Pacific.

The Los Angeles-class attack submarine USS Olympia pulled into Yokosuka, Japan, on May 31 for a port visit.

North Korea has test-fired about a dozen missiles this year, increasing the pace of its testing program in defiance of a ban on

ballistic technology in United Nations Security Council resolutions that are backed by punishing sanctions. It also conducted two underground nuclear tests last year.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis called North Korea a “clear and present danger” during his speech Saturday at an international security conference in Singapore.

“We’re working diplomatically, economically. We’re trying to exhaust all possible alternatives to avert this race for a nuclear weapon,” he said. “We want to stop this. We consider it urgent.”

The visit by the Cheyenne, which was commissioned in 1996 and weighs more than 6,000 tons when submerged, is proof of the U.S. commitment to its alliance with South Korea, officials said.

“We are honored to host the crew of USS Cheyenne for a much deserved port visit” Rear Adm. Brad Cooper, commander of U.S. Naval Forces Korea, said in a statement.

He added that the U.S. and South Korean navies “routinely work shoulder to shoulder with one another, and this port visit is an opportunity for Cheyenne sailors to enjoy Busan and explore the Korean culture.”

The United States has about 28,500 servicemembers stationed in South Korea, which is still considered to be at war with the North after the 1950-53 conflict ended in an armistice instead of a peace treaty.

Lead levels at Navy school in Yokosuka remain problematic

BY ERIK SLAVIN
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Water fixtures at the Navy’s Ikego Elementary School in Japan have again registered high levels of lead, though officials say families appear to be unaffected following voluntary blood testing.

Tests revealed 11 fixtures exceeding the Environmental Protection Agency’s standard for immediate action, Navy officials said Tuesday.

In 2014, 22 fixtures exceeded the EPA standard after initial testing. The Navy took remediation steps to lower lead levels following the results three years ago. However, officials found this year that recommendations for flushing the water fountains, faucets and other fixtures may not have been followed because there was nothing to document the action.

Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka, which oversees the Ikego housing area, shut down the school’s water fountains and began providing bottled water in April.

Navy officials in 2014 attributed the elevated lead levels mostly to lack of use during the summer break. On Tuesday, the Navy said it would need

more testing to learn why lead levels are high.

The fixtures exceeding standards and 104 others that tested within normal limits “are secure until they can come up with the solution to fix these problems,” Navy region spokesman Cmdr. Ron Flanders said.

Ikego is still waiting on results from fixtures activated by sensors, base spokesman Sean Kelly said Tuesday.

U.S. Naval Hospital Yokosuka has given blood tests to 162 adults and children, with none showing lead results above 5 micrograms per deciliter. That guideline for children adopted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is twice as stringent as the one in place prior to 2012. There is no level of lead considered safe, though levels below the reference point indicate little risk.

“Even low levels of lead in blood have been shown to affect IQ, ability to pay attention and academic achievement,” according to the CDC website.

About 600 people either attend class or work at Ikego Elementary. Ikego’s population has grown significantly in recent years with the closure of the Negishi housing area in Yokohama and new ships joining the fleet at Yokosuka.

US Navy, Japan order \$42M in submarine-hunting sonars

Syracuse (N.Y.) Media Group

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Navy and Japan will buy an additional \$42 million worth of submarine-hunting sonar systems from Lockheed Martin’s plant in suburban Syracuse, according to Pentagon officials.

The deal confirmed by Lock-

heed Martin officials Monday is at least the fourth option exercised by the Navy on a contract worth up to \$199 million for TB-37 multi-function towed arrays.

The sonar systems allow surface ships — including Zumwalt and Arleigh Burke-class destroyers and Ticonderoga-class cruisers — to hunt and attack

enemy submarines at various ocean depths.

Under the latest contract option, purchases for the Navy (56 percent) will be combined with sales to Japan (44 percent) under the foreign military sales program, Pentagon officials said.

About 66 percent of the work

will be performed at Lockheed’s plant at Electronics Park in Salina, the Pentagon said. Additional work will be completed in Millersville, Md. (33 percent) and Marion, Mass. (1 percent). The work is due to be completed by September 2019.

Army offers big re-up bonuses

Associated Press

FORT BRAGG, N.C. — Struggling to expand its ranks, the Army will triple the amount of bonuses it's paying this year to more than \$380 million, including new incentives to woo reluctant soldiers to re-enlist, officials told The Associated Press.

Some soldiers could get \$90,000 up front by committing to another four or more years, as the Army seeks to reverse some of the downsizing that occurred under the Obama administration after years of growth spurred by the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

The enlistment campaign was driven by Congress' decision late last year to beef up the size of the Army, echoing the spirit if not quite the extent of President Donald Trump's campaign promises to significantly increase military staffing and firepower.

Last fall, Trump unveiled a plan that would enlarge the Army to 540,000 soldiers. Army leaders back the general idea, but say more men and women must be accompanied by funding for the equipment, training and support for them.

Under the current plan, the active-duty Army will grow by 16,000 soldiers, taking it to 476,000 in total by October. The National Guard and the Army

Reserve will see a smaller expansion.

To meet the mandate, the Army must find 6,000 new soldiers, convince 9,000 current soldiers to stay on and add 1,000 officers.

"We've got a ways to go," Gen. Robert Abrams, head of U.S. Army Forces Command, said in an interview at his office in Fort Bragg, N.C.

"I'm not going to kid you. It's been difficult because a lot of these kids had plans and their families had plans."

In just the last two weeks, the Army has paid out more than \$26 million in bonuses.

The biggest hurdle, according to senior Army leaders, is convincing thousands of enlistees who are only months away from leaving the service to sign up for several more years. Many have been planning their exits and have turned down multiple entreaties to stay.

"The top-line message is that the Army is hiring," said Maj. Gen. Jason Evans, who recently became the service's head of Human Resources Command.

Evans said the Army was expanding "responsibly with a focus on quality," insisting there will be no relaxation of standards.

It is a clear reference to last decade, when the Army eased recruitment rules to meet combat demands in Iraq and Afghanistan. At their peak, more

than 160,000 U.S. troops were in Iraq and about 100,000 were in Afghanistan. To achieve those force levels, the Army gave more people waivers to enlist, including those with criminal or drug use records.

The Army vows it won't do that again, focusing instead on getting soldiers to re-enlist. Money is the key.

The Army's \$550 billion base budget, approved by Congress last month, will provide money for the financial incentives. The latest round of increased bonuses, which became effective less than two weeks ago, are good for at least the next month.

Cyber posts, cryptologists or other intelligence or high-tech jobs with certain language skills are particularly rewarded. They can get between \$50,000 and \$90,000 by agreeing to serve another three to five years. Army Special Forces also can qualify for top-level incentives. But more routine jobs — such as some lower-level infantry posts — may get nothing or just a couple of thousand dollars.

The new bonuses have triggered a spike in re-enlistments, said Master Sgt. Mark Thompson, who works with Army retention policies, saying there have been more than 2,200 since May 24.

But the clock is ticking. "Time is our biggest challenge," Evans said.

3rd London attacker ID'd

Associated Press

LONDON — British police have named the third London Bridge attacker as Youssef Zaghba and said he is believed to be an Italian national of Moroccan descent.

Police said Tuesday he lived in east London and that his family has been notified, adding that he was not considered to be a "subject of interest" to either police or the intelligence services.

The other two attackers were named Monday as Khuram Shazad Butt and Rachid Redouane.

The three, who were wearing fake suicide vests, were shot dead late Saturday after ramming a van into pedestrians on London Bridge and then slashing and stabbing people in nearby Borough Market. During the attack, seven people were killed and dozens more were wounded.

The Italian daily Corriere della Sera reported Tuesday that Zaghba had been stopped in Italy while trying to go to Syria in 2016.

Zaghba, 22, who is said to have been born in Morocco to a Moroccan father and an Italian mother, was stopped at Bologna's Marconi airport on March 15, 2016, while he tried to take a flight to Turkey. He was allegedly on his way to Syria and was carrying only a backpack.

The report said Italy had put him on a watch list and flagged his presence to Moroccan and British authorities.

Zaghba was reportedly working in a London restaurant and had not been seen in Italy since 2016.

The identity of the last attacker in Saturday's attack came as a new search got underway in a neighborhood in east London near the home of two of the London Bridge attackers. The search in Ilford, just north of Barking, is seeking to determine whether the group had accomplices.

London police have said all 12 people held since the attack from the Barking neighborhood have been freed.

USAF hopes to lure pilots with higher pay

By TARA COPP

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Air Force pilots who are eligible will receive an extra \$10,000 to \$35,000 annually for staying in the service, the Air Force announced Monday.

Bonuses will be determined using a tier system, with fighter pilots receiving the highest amounts. Air Force leadership hopes the additional pay will help persuade pilots to remain in the service.

The Air Force has said it

needs more than 1,200 fighter pilots. The Air Mobility Command, which flies military tanker and cargo aircraft, is short 300 pilots, its commander said earlier this year.

"We hope this new approach will make it easier for more airmen to stay in the service," Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson said. "The country needs them."

However, pay is only one factor cited by pilots who have chosen to leave the service, the Air Force has said. Pilots have also sought private-sector employ-

ment for other reasons, including limited flight training, the number of additional administrative duties and the amount of time deployed overseas, according to the Air Force.

Air Force leadership met with airline industry executives in May to discuss ways to make it easier for pilots to serve as reservist military pilots and work for commercial airlines. Subsequently, the service announced nonfinancial initiatives, such as reducing the number of administrative tasks required of pilots.

Arrest made days after latest NSA leak

The Washington Post

Criminal investigations into national security leaks tend to be long, complicated and delicate affairs. Sources generally cover their tracks, especially in an era when even the most innocuous computer activity leaves an electronic trail.

Edward Snowden took extraordinary precautions when he leaked troves of classified information on surveillance activity by the National Security Agency to journalists, and he was charged only after he publicly revealed himself to be the source.

Thomas Drake, a former NSA executive, wasn't indicted for several years after he passed on details about fraud and waste at the agency to *The Baltimore Sun*. Originally accused of felony espionage, Drake pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor of

exceeding authorized use of a computer.

In the case of Reality Leigh Winner, an NSA contractor accused of sending a top-secret document to a news outlet, federal authorities brought charges less than a week after being tipped off to the leak.

Winner, 25, an Air Force veteran, was charged Monday with gathering, transmitting or losing defense information, as *The Washington Post* reported. Court documents did not identify the document that was leaked or the news outlet that received it, but the criminal complaint against Winner was unveiled shortly after the national security site the Intercept published a story containing an NSA report on Russian efforts to interfere with the 2016 election.

The Post has reported that the charges are related to the Intercept's story, which de-

scribes how Russian military intelligence used hacking techniques against a U.S. voting software supplier and more than 100 local election officials in the days before voters went to the polls. The Intercept called the classified document the "most detailed U.S. government account of Russian interference in the election that has yet come to light," saying it indicated that Russian hacking may have gone deeper than previously known.

A search warrant affidavit filed in federal court in Georgia reveals how it took just a few days for investigators to single out Winner as the alleged source of the leak.

It started on May 30, when the news outlet showed authorities the printed materials and asked them to comment, according to the affidavit.

"The U.S. Government Agency examined the document

shared by the News Outlet and determined the pages of the intelligence reporting appeared to be folded and/or creased," the affidavit reads, "suggesting they had been printed and hand-carried out of a secured space."

An internal audit showed that six people had printed out the top-secret materials after they were published at the beginning of the month. One of them was Winner, who worked for Pluribus International at a facility in Georgia, the affidavit says.

Winner was arrested Saturday. When FBI agents questioned her at her home, she admitted "removing the classified intelligence reporting from her office space, retaining it and mailing it from Augusta, Georgia, to the news outlet," court documents read. She remains in jail pending a detention hearing.

Fla. sheriff: Fired worker singled out 5 fatally shot

Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — A recently fired worker from an awning company in Florida followed through with a plan to kill his former colleagues, singling out five and fatally shooting them in the head before taking his own life, authorities said.

John Robert Neumann Jr., 45, shot and killed himself at the sound of approaching sirens Monday. He did not appear to belong to any type of subversive or terrorist organization, Orange County Sheriff Jerry Demings said.

"My experience tells me that this individual made deliberate thought to do what he did today. He had a plan of action," said the sheriff, who wouldn't say why Neumann was fired in April.

Demings said Neumann had a "negative relationship" with at least one of his former co-workers in Orlando, and he singled out the former colleagues who were shot.

The shooting began after Neumann slipped through a rear door into the cavernous Fiamma Inc. factory, an area larger than two football fields where awnings are stitched together for recreational vehicles. He paused at least once to reload. Seven other workers were inside at the time but were unharmed.

Demings said investigators were looking through any social media postings for clues. Neumann was honorably discharged from the U.S. Army in 1999 and did not have a concealed weapons permit, the sheriff said.

The dead were identified as Robert Snyder, 69; Brenda Montanez-Crespo, 44; Kevin Clark, 53; Jeffrey Roberts, 57; and Kevin Lawson, 46.

Authorities had confronted Neumann once before at the factory, when he was accused of battering a co-worker in June 2014. But no charges were filed.

Paris police wound man who attacked with hammer

Associated Press

PARIS — A police officer shot and wounded a man who attacked officers with a hammer near Notre Dame Cathedral on Tuesday, Paris police and a police union official said.

Union official Cedric Michel said a man armed with a hammer went after police who were patrolling the esplanade in front of the world-famous cathedral known for its Gothic architecture and gargoyles.

A police spokesperson told *The Associated Press* that an officer used his weapon to shoot the assailant. The spokesperson was not authorized to be publicly named. He said the unidentified attacker was taken to a hospital.

Paris police tweeted that one officer was wounded in the attack.

The incident happened around 4:30 p.m. Large numbers of police cars filled the area on the Ile de Cite island in the Seine River in the center of Paris.

Hundreds of people on the esplanade in front of Notre Dame

were evacuated and authorities urged people to stay away from the area. People inside Notre Dame, the nearby Sainte-Chappelle cathedral and area bars and cafes were told to stay inside.

Police spokeswoman Johanna Primevert told *The Associated Press* just before 5:30 p.m. that the operation was over.

Paris remains under high security after a string of Islamic extremist attacks in recent years, including several targeting police officers and security personnel.

In April, an attacker opened fire on a police van on Paris' Champs Elysees, killing one and gravely wounding two others. The attacker was shot dead by police.

The incident recalled two other attacks on soldiers providing security at prominent locations around Paris, one at the Louvre museum in February and one at Orly airport in March.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

To save driver, man jumps into moving car

IL DIXON — Authorities have hailed a northern Illinois man as a hero after he jumped through the open window of a moving car to save the driver, who was having a seizure.

Randy Tompkins, 39, of Dixon was driving his truck Friday afternoon when he spotted a car driving in the wrong lane heading right at him. He jumped from his truck and through the passenger window of the slowly moving car. He put two fingers into the convulsing driver's mouth to prevent him from swallowing his tongue.

The incident was captured by a police dashcam.

Boy gets stuck in claw game for 30 minutes

MD ABERDEEN — A boy spent about 30 minutes trapped in a claw arcade game at a hotel in Maryland before being freed.

Authorities say the boy climbed through the game's prize door Saturday evening and could not get out. Harford County officials say the boy was trapped for about 30 minutes before the arcade machine owner arrived with a key to get him out.

A spokeswoman for Harford County Volunteer Fire & EMS Association, Jenn Chenworth, said she did not know how old the boy was.

2 arrested after 'surf and turf' store theft

MA NORTHAMPTON — Police say they have arrested two men for a "surf and turf" supermarket theft in Massachusetts.

The Daily Hampshire Ga-

zette reported a 33-year-old man and 37-year-old man both face larceny charges over the theft of steak, shrimp and Honeycrisp apples.

An off-duty police chief noticed the two men changing clothes inside a Nissan Altima and obscuring their license plate Saturday morning. The men then parked at a nearby Stop & Shop in Northampton.

Officers were waiting when one of the men left the store with the items in his cart.

Northampton Police Capt. John Cartledge says the items were valued at \$214.

Ballet dancer saves man from train track

NY NEW YORK — A New York ballet dancer can also add heroics to his repertoire — having saved a homeless man who was pushed onto subway tracks over the weekend.

Gray Davis, 31, a dancer with the American Ballet Theater, said no one was acting to help the unidentified man who had fallen onto the subway tracks Saturday night. Davis told the New York Times he jumped onto the tracks and lifted the unconscious man onto the platform, before swinging himself up using his ballet training.

NYPD officials say they arrested a 23-year-old woman in connection with the assault.

Unusual crab pulled from Chesapeake Bay

VA TANGIER — An unusual crab has been pulled from the Chesapeake Bay.

The blue crab has two oysters growing on either side of her head near her eyes. The crab is estimated to be about 2 years old and was found in a crab pot that belonged to the mayor of

Tangier Island. The oysters are about 6 months old.

The Washington Post reported there's an explanation for why the crab got stuck with two oysters on her head. Experts say oyster larvae need something hard to attach on to and grow. Old oyster shells and reefs are perfect, but over the years their numbers have diminished.

Updated ordinance bans porch grilling

MI DETROIT — City officials are cooling the coals on front porch grilling in Detroit.

The Detroit News reported that the City Council updated its outdoor fire code to ban outdoor cooking under a roof or an enclosed area.

The ordinance was approved last month and aims to prevent accidental fires when grills tip over or flames lick too close to homes.

Grills or outdoor cooking devices only are permitted in side and back yards. They also must be at least 10 feet from a property line.

Deputy Fire Commissioner Dave Fornell says violators likely will receive initial warnings, followed by fines.

250-pound anvil stolen from garden

VT WESTMINSTER — Vermont State Police are investigating the theft of a 250-pound antique metal anvil from a home garden in Westminster.

Police say the 18-inch-tall anvil was being used as a decorative object in the front yard garden near Main Street when it was stolen sometime between May 21 and last Sunday.

The anvil is estimated to be worth \$250.

Jail inmate mistakenly allowed to walk out

SC YORK — A jail inmate is being returned to his South Carolina cell after mistakenly being allowed to walk out the door.

York County sheriff's deputies said they found Joshua Earnest Peters on Saturday at a home in Pineville, N.C.

Authorities say a clerical error led to releasing Peters, 37, on Thursday, a mistake that was discovered on Friday.

Officers say they contacted Peters by phone after his mistaken release and urged him to return to jail, but he didn't comply and he was tracked down.

Troopers, firefighter free dog from tree

KY SALEM — A couple of Kentucky State Police troopers and a firefighter have proved that man can be dog's best friend by coming to the rescue of a dachshund trapped inside a tree trunk.

Police say two off-duty troopers were mowing a cemetery in Salem, about 35 miles northeast of Paducah, when they heard barking last week. Sgt. Michael Williams and Trooper Gerick Sullivan looked for several minutes and finally found the pooch trapped inside a tree.

A news release from state police said Rocco, as he was later identified, accessed the tree through a nearby groundhog hole. The troopers called for the Salem Fire Department, and firefighter Daniel Newcomb cut part of the tree, safely freeing Rocco, who was returned to his owner.

From wire reports

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Predators down Penguins, even series

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Frederick Gaudreau sure is doing his best to earn his own locker with the Nashville Predators with a Stanley Cup Final debut for the ages.

For now, he insists he is happy enough just to sit on the floor as long as he plays.

An undrafted free agent playing in just his sixth postseason game, Gaudreau scored the go-ahead goal 3:45 into the second period and Pekka Rinne made 23 often-spectacular saves as the Predators beat the Penguins 4-1 on Monday night to even the series at 2-2.

It's now a best-of-three sprint to the Stanley Cup, and Nashville is riding a wave of momentum after outscoring the defending champions 9-2 in the Games 3 and 4 of their Final debut.

Game 5 is Thursday night in Pittsburgh.

Gaudreau, a 24-year-old rookie, only has a chair in the locker room, but he now is the

second player in NHL history to score his first three career goals in a Stanley Cup Final, joining Johnny Harms with the 1944 Blackhawks.

"He's been unbelievable for us the way he's come in, and he's just been so good, timely goals and composed," Nashville captain Mike Fisher said. "He definitely belongs, and he's been a huge part of our success."

Gaudreau is also just the third rookie to score game-winning goals in consecutive games in the Stanley Cup Final since the NHL took over sole possession of the trophy in 1926-27. Pittsburgh's Jake Guentzel did it in the first two games of this series and Roy Conacher did it for Boston in Games 3, 4 and 5 against Toronto in 1939.

Calle Jarnkrok, Viktor Arvidsson and Filip Forsberg also scored for Nashville, which improved to 9-1 at home and roared back after dropping the first two games of the series on the road.

"We were in a tough hole

against a really good team, came home and took care of the home games with the help of all our great fans," Rinne said. "It's a great feeling. We played two really good games."

Pittsburgh star Sidney Crosby scored his first goal in the series after not getting a shot on goal in Game 3. The goal was his first in the Stanley Cup Final since June 4, 2009, a span of 12 games, but it wasn't enough as the Penguins lost two straight for the second time this postseason. Goalie Matt Murray lost consecutive games for the first time in his young career.

"It's hard to win when you score one goal," Pittsburgh coach Mike Sullivan said. "I thought tonight of all nights, we generated the most chances of the highest quality."

Nashville tapped country singer Dierks Bentley as the latest star to sing the national anthem, while Jason Aldean waved the towel to rev up the crowd. Former NBA star and TV commentator Charles Bar-

kley also was on hand, accepting NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman's invitation to watch in person. Carrie Underwood admitted during the first intermission that she didn't get Fisher, her husband, a birthday present on Monday — holding out hope that a Stanley Cup championship celebration would do the trick in coming days.

"That's all I wanted for my birthday," Fisher said afterward of the big win.

Craig Smith ricocheted a puck off Murray's pads that Jarnkrok tapped in at 14:51 to start the fans yelling louder. Pittsburgh lost a challenge for goalie interference.

Just 66 seconds later, Crosby tied it up for Pittsburgh on a dazzling breakaway. He skated in on Rinne, holding the puck, faking a slap shot and then slipping one past the goalie for his eighth goal and 24th point of the playoffs. He also moved into 20th all-time in NHL playoff points but the Predators clamped down after that.

Pittsburgh stars turn up pressure, but not enough

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — The Pittsburgh Penguins needed more from their stars. They got more, just not nearly enough against Pekka Rinne and the Nashville Predators.

Sidney Crosby scored his first goal in this Stanley Cup Final, but the Predators beat Pittsburgh 4-1 on Monday night to even the best-of-seven series at 2-2.

Both Crosby and Evgeni Malkin were held without a shot in Game 3 — the first time that's happened to the duo in the same playoff game and just the fifth time in Crosby's postseason career.

Crosby got the Penguins on the scoreboard late in the first on Monday, converting on a breakaway to even the score at 1 after banking the puck off of the right post and by Rinne.

The goal was Crosby's first in the Final since June 4, 2009, a span of 12 goalless games for the Pittsburgh captain. It was one of four shots on goal for Crosby in the game.

Rinne denied chance after chance after Crosby's goal, many of them saves that the 6-foot-5 Finn struggled to make in Games 1 and 2 in Pittsburgh.

"You've got trust what gets you here," Crosby said. "You've got to trust all those habits, all those things that you preach all year, come through when you need them most. We've shown that's how we are going to score goals — getting pucks and people there. We did a good job of that tonight. On the other side of things, we've got to make sure that we limit their chances, don't give up breakaways or chances where they can make us pay the other way."

"Obviously, it's hard to win when you score one goal, but having said that, I thought tonight of all the games we played, we generated the most chances and the highest quality," Pittsburgh coach Mike Sullivan said. "It didn't go in the net for us. We had a number of grade-A opportunities, a couple of breakaways, flurries around the net, so there were a lot of things from a process standpoint that we really liked."

Rinne's most timely save may have been his stop on Chris Kunitz's breakaway at 3:29 of the second. The score was tied at 1 at the time, and Nashville rookie Frederick Gaudreau scored Nashville's second of the game 16 seconds later on a wraparound that was not initially called a goal on the ice.

As play continued after Matt Murray appeared to make a

stick save on Gaudreau, the arena horn sounded alerting on-ice officials to stop play. A quick video review confirmed that the puck did cross the line.

Murray, who entered the game 9-0 in the postseason following a Pittsburgh loss, also allowed a first-period rebound goal by Calle Jarnkrok and a breakaway goal to Viktor Arvidsson in the third.

Malkin finished with two shots as the Penguins ended up being outscored 9-2 in Nashville.

Jake Guentzel, Pittsburgh's leading postseason goal scorer with 13, had three shots on Rinne.

"He's a great goaltender, so he can make those kinds of saves," Guentzel said. "But I've got to do a better job finding the back of the net."

Teen Ostapenko, Bacsinszky advance

Associated Press

PARIS — Timea Bacsinszky will celebrate her 28th birthday by playing in the semifinals of the French Open after a straight-set victory over home favorite Kristina Mladenovic.

Bacsinszky beat 13th-seeded Mladenovic 6-4, 6-4 in a match that was twice delayed by rain.

Mladenovic appeared to deal better with

the initial delay. She fought off break point to hold at the start of the second set and then immediately broke.

But Bacsinszky broke back. The Swiss player then won 12 of the 15 points before rain started falling again.

Bacsinszky almost dropped her serve but held on and won the match when Mladenovic hit a forehand wide.

Rain postponed the men's quarterfinals

involving Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic until Wednesday

Teenager Jelena Ostapenko advanced to the semifinals by rallying past former No. 1 Caroline Wozniacki, 4-6, 6-2, 6-2.

Ostapenko is the first woman from Latvia to make it to a Grand Slam semifinal in the professional era. At age 19, the 47th-ranked Ostapenko is also the youngest player in the tournament.

Sam Houston State advances to first CWS

Associated Press

Sam Houston State had made it to the NCAA baseball regional finals three times and lost each time.

On Monday, the Bearkats broke through.

Seeded third in the Lubbock Regional, Sam Houston State beat No. 5 national seed Texas Tech 4-3 for its second win in two days over the Red Raiders.

"We played this whole week like we were not afraid to lose," catcher Robie Rojas said. "We knew no matter what we loved each other and we've had a great run. So when you play [without] the fear of ... crashing and burning, you're going to do things like this."

Also clinching regionals Monday were No. 3 national seed Florida, No. 6 TCU, Long Beach State, Mississippi State, Kentucky, Vanderbilt, Missouri State, Florida State and Texas A&M. No. 1 national seed Oregon State, No. 4 LSU and No. 7 Louisville wrapped up regionals Sunday along with Davidson and Wake Forest, and Cal State Fullerton won Saturday.

The Southeastern Conference had six of its eight tournament qualifiers move on; the Atlantic Coast Conference had three of its seven advance.

Sam Houston State is the second surprise team to move on in the NCAA Tournament, joining No. 4 regional seed Davidson, which knocked out No. 2 national seed North Carolina on Sunday. Kentucky also is headed to its first super regional.

Sam Houston State is in the

national tournament for the 11th time, getting an automatic bid as Southland Conference Tournament champion.

The Bearkats from Huntsville, Texas, had to beat 2016 national runner-up Arizona twice and Texas Tech twice to advance to super regionals.

"I've been talking about us being a David in a land full of Goliaths," third-year coach Matt Deggs said.

The Bearkats' winning run was unearned, coming after Tech second baseman Brian Klein threw wildly to first on Lance Miles' grounder. That allowed Hunter Hearn to score from first.

Sam Houston State used 11 pitchers in the regional, five on Monday. Riley Cooper pitched 4 ²/₃ innings of relief for the win and Nick Mikolajchak worked the ninth for his 13th save.

The Bearkats also went to regional finals in 2007, 2012 and 2014. Their current run came after they beat nine teams in the regular season that made the NCAA Tournament, including Houston three times and Texas A&M.

"We talked all week leading up to this that it's only impossible until somebody does it. Once somebody does it, it's not impossible," Deggs said. "This is the first team in Sam Houston State history that's ever advanced to the Super Regional, and first team out of the Southland Conference to advance to the super regional, and we're very proud to represent that conference."

A look around the country:

Super regionals

The NCAA announced sites for the eight super regionals that begin Friday and Saturday.

Super regionals starting Friday: Vanderbilt (36-23-1) at No. 1 national seed Oregon State (52-4); Cal State Fullerton (37-21) at Long Beach State (41-18-1); Davidson (35-24) at Texas A&M (39-21); Kentucky (43-21) at No. 7 Louisville (50-10).

Super regionals starting Saturday: Sam Houston State (44-21) at Florida State (43-21); Mississippi State (40-25) at No. 4 LSU (46-17); Missouri State (43-18) at No. 6 TCU (45-16); Wake Forest (42-18) at No. 3 Florida (45-17).

His time to shine

Freshman two-way player Austin Langworthy starred with his arm and bat as host Florida beat Bethune-Cookman 6-1. He allowed one run and two singles in four innings of relief in his first pitching appearance since April 11. He started the game in left field, went 2-for-4 and hit a three-run homer to open the scoring in the sixth inning.

Timely homer

Texas A&M's Baine Schoenvogel hit his second pinch-hit home run of the season in the top of the ninth inning, and it turned out to be the winner in a 4-3 victory over host Houston.

Marvelous on mound

■ Will Zirzow led Florida State past Auburn 6-0 with the best outing of his career. He allowed two singles, hit a batter, walked none and struck out 11 in his first complete game. Used mostly as a reliever, Zirzow had never pitched more than five innings.

■ Vanderbilt, which beat Clemson 8-0, called on Matt Ruppenthal to start. The junior gave up three hits in six shutout innings in his first appearance since May 6.

■ Long Beach State's Dave Smith followed up his complete-game shutout against San Diego State on Friday with four innings of one-hit ball against Texas on Monday.

Big bats

■ Missouri State's Jeremy Eierman, whose two-out homer in the ninth gave the Bears a walk-off win over Oklahoma State on Friday, hit a two-run shot in the sixth inning to give his team the lead in a 3-2 win over host Arkansas.

■ Vanderbilt's Will Toffey, who homered twice and drove in five runs against Clemson, continues to be one of the hottest hitters in the country. In four regional games he was 9-for-19 (.473) with 10 RBIs, eight runs and three homers. In his last 10 games he's 24 for 48 (.500) with 22 RBIs, 17 runs and six homers.

■ Dallas Baptist led regional participants with 13 home runs.

OU wins title series opener in 17 innings

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Shay Knighten didn't let Oklahoma waste any more opportunities.

Her three-run homer off Kelly Barnhill in the top of the 17th inning gave the Sooners a 7-5 victory over Florida in Game 1 of the NCAA softball championship series on Monday night.

Oklahoma left the bases loaded in the 15th and 16th innings before Knighten put the Sooners in control.

"I was just looking to find a pitch in the zone that I could hit hard," she said. "I wasn't looking for really a particular pitch. It was just something — I knew she was throwing hard, so it's just get there, just get there, and if it was in the zone, I was going to swing."

The matchup between programs that have split the past four national titles was the lon-

gest championship series game in NCAA history. It lasted 5½ hours, and all four pitchers threw more than 100 pitches.

"Epic, epic battle," Oklahoma coach Patty Gasso said. "I don't know what else — that was it. This is one of the greatest games I think in College World Series history, I would guess. It was like two heavy-weight fighters throwing punch after punch. Florida just kept answering everything that we put out there, and we tried to answer back, and it was a game of will, a game of team, a game of character."

Florida coach Tim Walton said he was impressed with his team's resilience. The Gators extended the game twice after being down to their last strike.

"I told my team in about the — I don't know if it was the eighth or the 21st, whatever inning it was, I told them great

job, proud of you guys," he said.

Oklahoma (60-9) can clinch a repeat championship Tuesday in Game 2 of the best-of-three series.

Oklahoma's Paige Lowary (16-3) got the start, was replaced, then re-entered to claim the win.

Paige Parker was the most outstanding player of the series last year and had won all eight of her World Series decisions, so it was a bit of a surprise that Lowary got the start. Parker pitched 6 2/3 innings of relief.

"It was a team decision," Gasso said. "It was a pitching staff, coaching staff decision. These two were right with us when we talked about it, and then we presented it to the team and they were all for it."

Barnhill (26-4), USA Softball's National Collegiate Player of the Year, took the loss

for Florida (58-9). She pitched nine innings and struck out 13. Delanie Gourley struck out 13 in eight innings of relief.

The Sooners scored the first earned runs top-seeded Florida has allowed in four World Series games.

With Oklahoma up 2-1 and two outs and two strikes against Florida's Sophia Reynoso in the bottom of the seventh, Reynoso popped the ball up. It dropped, and Alesia Ocasio scored from first to tie the game and force extra innings.

Knighten doubled off Gourley in the 12th with no outs, and Fale Aviu followed with a two-run homer to put the Sooners up 4-2, setting up Florida's second escape act.

After Lowary re-entered the game with two outs in the 12th, Amanda Lorenz, down to her last strike, knocked in two runs to tie the score at 4.

Nationals' bullpen holds up in victory over Dodgers

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — It's the great flaw of an otherwise elite team and has been all season for the Washington Nationals — their beleaguered bullpen.

But on Monday night, the relief corps followed a solid start by Gio Gonzalez with three scoreless innings to lead the surging Nationals past the Los Angeles Dodgers 4-2 in a rematch of last year's tight playoff series.

"It's about time we hung onto one of those," manager Dusty Baker said.

Anthony Rendon's solo homer in the second started the scoring for Washington, which got a two-run single from Matt Wieters with two outs in the fourth and another two-out RBI single from Bryce Harper in the fifth.

"The key to the game was we got a couple of big two-out knocks," Baker said. "That was the ballgame."

Washington, which owns the National League's best record

at 36-20, has won six of seven and increased its NL East lead to 11½ games.

Gonzalez (5-1) went six innings, allowing two runs on four hits and two walks. He struck out five in the first meeting between the teams since the Dodgers edged the Nationals in five games during their 2016 NL Division Series.

Los Angeles scored both its runs in the sixth. Chris Taylor doubled in one, and Franklin Gutierrez had an RBI groundout.

All of the Nationals' scoring came against Hyun-Jin Ryu, who went a season-high seven innings. Ryu (2-6) yielded four runs on seven hits. He did not walk a batter and struck out four.

Astros 7, Royals 3: Yuli Gurriel hit a three-run homer, Brian McCann had a two-run shot and visiting Houston earned its 11th consecutive win.

It's the longest winning streak in the majors this season and one shy of the Astros'

record. They won 12 straight in 1999 and 2004.

Houston, with the best record in the majors at 42-16, has also won 11 road games in a row — a franchise record.

Athletics 5, Blue Jays 3: Ryon Healy homered twice to drive in a career-high five runs, single-handedly backing Sean Manaea's fourth straight winning start as host Oakland defeated Toronto.

Healy hit a three-run homer in the second inning and a two-run drive in the fourth for his second career multihomer game — both in the past three days. He has 13 home runs this season.

Cubs 3, Marlins 1: Eddie Butler pitched three-hit ball into the sixth inning and Kris Bryant hit a two-run homer as host Chicago topped Miami for its fourth straight victory.

Reds 4, Cardinals 2: Eugenio Suarez and Scooter Gennett hit consecutive two-run doubles in the seventh inning as host Cincinnati came from

behind to beat the slumping Cardinals.

St. Louis starter Carlos Martinez (4-5) was dominant through six innings before wilting in the seventh as the Cardinals dropped their fourth straight and eighth in 11 games.

Giants 7, Brewers 2: Jeff Samardzija pitched deep into the game after a shaky beginning while Aaron Hill had a tiebreaking, pinch-hit double in the eighth inning for the visiting Giants.

Hill drove in two with two outs off Milwaukee reliever Rob Scahill (1-2).

Phillies 11, Braves 4: Odubel Herrera continued his power surge with a two-run homer and two doubles and Tommy Joseph homered and drove in three runs, helping the visiting Phillies.

Herrera became the first Philadelphia player to hit two doubles in three straight games, according to Phillies records dating back to 1913.