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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Marchers protest immigration policy

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Thousands of protesters across America, moved by accounts of children separated from their parents at the U.S.-Mexico border, marched Saturday — in major cities and tiny towns — to demand President Donald Trump’s administration reunite the divided families.

More than 700 planned marches were expected to draw hundreds of thousands of people across the country, from immigrant-friendly cities like Los Angeles and New York to conservative Appalachia and Wyoming under the banner Families Belong Together.

Thousands dressed in white and gathered early Saturday morning in sweltering 90-degree heat in Lafayette Park across from the White House in what was expected to be the largest of the day’s protests.

“What’s next? Concentration Camps?” one marcher’s sign read. “I care, do you?” read another, referencing a jacket the first

lady wore when visiting child migrants amid the global furor over the administration’s zero-tolerance policy that forced the separation of more than 2,000 children from their parents. Her jacket had “I really don’t care. Do you?” scrawled across the back, and that message has become a rallying cry for Saturday’s protesters.

“We care!” marchers shouted outside city hall in Dallas. Organizer Michelle Wentz said opposition to the administration’s “barbaric and inhumane” policy has seemed to cross political party lines. Marchers carried signs that read “Compassion not cruelty” and “November is coming.”

In New York City, thousands began chanting “shame!” and singing “shut detention down!” before their planned march across the Brooklyn Bridge.

Smaller groups came together in city parks and downtown squares in every state, a total of 703 places across the coun-

try, and photos quickly started ricocheting around social media.

Some carried tiny white onesies. “What if it was your child?” was written on one. “No family jails,” said another.

Children joined in. A little girl in Washington, D.C., carried a handwritten sign: “I get my mommy. Why can’t she?”

Though many who show up to the rallies across the country will be seasoned anti-Trump demonstrators, others are new to immigration activism, including parents who say they feel compelled to show up after heart-wrenching accounts of children forcibly taken from their families as they crossed the border illegally. In Portland, Ore., for example, several stay-at-home moms have organized their first rally while caring for young kids.

“I’m not a radical, and I’m not an activist,” said Kate Sharaf, a Portland co-organizer. “I just reached a point where I felt I had to do more.”

With cease-fire kaput, US resumes attacks on Taliban

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — U.S. forces in Afghanistan conducted more than 20 airstrikes against the Taliban on Saturday after an unprecedented unilateral cease-fire ended.

The strikes took place in Ghazni, Helmand and Uruzgan provinces, according to Army Lt. Col. Martin O’Donnell, spokesman for U.S. Forces-Afghanistan. The Afghan Air Force also conducted at least two independent strikes since the midnight end of the cease-fire, he said.

Afghan and U.S. forces had no choice but to resume fighting after the Taliban chose not to extend a short cease-fire it declared earlier this month, said Gen. Mohammad Radmanish, acting spokesman for the Defense Ministry.

“We have more than nine places throughout the country where we’ve started the continuation of our military operations,” Radmanish said Saturday morning, referring solely to Afghan operations.

Both sides of the conflict laid down their arms during the three-day Islamic holiday of Eid al-Fitr, the first such move since the nearly 17-year war began.

President Ashraf Ghani then extended the government’s cease-fire — honored by the U.S. — by an additional 10 days, hoping the Taliban would announce a similar measure within that time.

Throughout the cease-fire, the U.S. continued counterterrorism operations, predominantly against the local branch of Islamic State, known as ISIS-K.

The U.S. also defended against insurgent attacks.

“U.S. forces conducted five self-defense strikes during Afghanistan’s unilateral cease-fire period; however, we cannot confirm the strikes were against Taliban targets,” O’Donnell said.

Speaking to Pentagon reporters from Kabul last week, Air Force Brig. Gen. Lance Bunch, assistant deputy air commander for U.S. Forces Afghanistan, said the Afghans carried out 38 self-defense strikes of their own against Taliban targets

during the cease-fire.

He also suggested that the extra U.S. resources available to target ISIS-K because of the lull in anti-Taliban operations weren’t as heavily used as some had expected, saying, “there had been a light increase” in operations against the militants.

Critics of the cease-fire worried that it would give the Taliban — who continued to fight government forces during the 10-day extension — an upper hand and allow them to regroup and plan attacks. However, U.S. and Afghan military officials have played down fears, saying that they continued to gather intelligence throughout the period, which they will use as fighting resumes.

Although disappointed the cease-fire was not extended further by both sides, Ghani said Saturday that it was a successful experiment.

“If we were to wait for a peace deal and a cease-fire based on it, we would wait indefinitely to stop the bloodshed,” he said after ordering security forces to resume operations. “The cease-fire broke the deadlock and caused mobility.”

US assessing cost of troops in Germany

The Washington Post

The Pentagon is analyzing the cost and impact of a large-scale withdrawal or transfer of American troops stationed in Germany, amid growing tensions between President Donald Trump and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, according to people familiar with the work.

The effort follows Trump's expression of interest in removing the troops, made during a meeting earlier this year with White House and military aides, U.S. officials said. Trump was said to have been taken aback by the size of the U.S. presence, which includes about 35,000 active-duty troops, and complained that other countries were not contributing fairly to joint security nor paying enough to NATO.

Word of the assessment has alarmed European officials, who are scrambling to determine whether Trump actually intends to reposition U.S. forces or whether it is merely a negotiating tactic ahead of a NATO summit in Brussels, where Trump again is likely to criticize U.S. allies for what he deems insufficient defense spending.

U.S. officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to comment on the unpublicized effort, emphasized that the exercise is limited to an internal exploration of options. The top military brass is not involved as yet, and the Pentagon has not been tasked with figuring out how to execute any option.

A spokesman for the National Security Council at the White House said in a statement that the NSC had not requested a Defense Department analysis of repositioning troops in Germany. But "the Pentagon continuously evaluates U.S. troop deployments," the statement said, and such "analysis exercises" are "not out of the norm."

Several officials suggested that Pentagon policymakers could have moved ahead with the assessment to prove the worth of the current basing arrangement and to dissuade Trump

from carrying the thought of withdrawal any further.

Pentagon spokesman Eric Pahon dismissed any suggestion of a full or partial withdrawal from Germany and described such analysis as routine.

"The Pentagon regularly reviews force posture and performs cost-benefit analyses," he said in a statement. "This is nothing new. Germany is host to the largest U.S. force presence in Europe — we remain deeply rooted in the common values and strong relationships between our countries. We remain fully committed to our NATO ally and the NATO alliance."

Commitment doubts

Since the end of World War II, the U.S. troop presence in Germany has been viewed as a bulwark against a potential Russian invasion of Europe and a staging ground for U.S. operations in Africa and the Middle East.

Defense officials said a cost analysis of options for changing that was being conducted at a staff level to inform a wider discussion about the U.S. troop presence in Europe. As part of the regular analysis of the cost and justification for its troops around the world, the U.S. has dramatically reduced the size of its force in Germany from Cold War levels.

But persistent doubts in Europe about Trump's commitment to the alliance have made even the possibility of routine changes to American force posture in Europe far more charged.

The redeployment scenarios under study include a large-scale return of U.S. troops stationed in Germany to the U.S. and a full or partial move of U.S. troops in Germany to Poland — a NATO ally that has met the alliance's defense spending targets and whose leadership is more in tune with Trump.

In recent months, Poland has proposed spending at least \$2 billion to obtain a permanent U.S. base. The U.S. military already fields a rotating force

in Poland, with other alliance members doing the same in the Baltic states, as part of a NATO effort to deter increasing Russian aggression along the alliance's eastern flank.

European officials are hoping to emphasize Western unity at the NATO summit July 11 and 12. But Trump remains displeased that many NATO countries fail to spend at least 2 percent of their gross domestic product on defense, a target alliance members agreed to reach by 2024. The U.S. spends about 3.58 percent of its GDP on defense.

Although several U.S. administrations have called on Europe to spend more, Trump is particularly focused on the balance sheet. He has been especially critical of Merkel on defense and a range of other issues.

Last week, White House frustration was on display in a contentious meeting in Washington between Trump's national security adviser, John Bolton, and German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen. Von der Leyen said German budget projections called for increasing defense spending to 1.5 percent of the country's GDP by 2024. The White House was disappointed with Germany's efforts, according to officials.

No NATO notification

A senior NATO official said that neither the alliance headquarters nor individual member governments had been notified of any Trump plans to raise the issue of withdrawing or repositioning American troops in Europe at the summit, although all are aware of Polish lobbying to place at least some components there. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a member government in advance of the summit.

The official said Poland's offer was "peanuts by comparison" to U.S. military investment in Germany, including "the value of 60 years of sunk costs in facilities" such as the Landstuhl military health complex and Ramstein Air Base.

The NATO official and others suggested that the cost analysis of the U.S. presence in Germany and a pullout option was reminiscent of Trump's leaked request last winter for military options to go to war with North Korea, designed "to scare the living daylights out of everyone and get [North Korea] to the table." In this case, the official suggested, the goal may be to "pile more trouble" on Merkel, while rattling the alliance in general and positioning himself as a summit spoiler.

U.S. allies hosting permanent American military footprints pay for a certain portion of the costs in various ways. Japan and South Korea, for example, make cash contributions, according to a 2013 study the Rand Corp. prepared for the U.S. defense secretary's office, while Germany supports the U.S. troop presence through in-kind contributions such as land, infrastructure and construction, in addition to foregone customs duties and taxes.

Basing its statistics on data from 2002, the study estimated that Germany offset about 33 percent of the costs of U.S. military personnel stationed there. It is unclear how much would be saved by bringing them all home, because the U.S. still would be responsible for paying them, in addition to housing and other personnel expenses. At the same time, a large portion of the American troops in Germany is engaged in the U.S. military's efforts outside Europe and simply bases operations in the nation.

The U.S. military had been drawing down its presence in Europe for years before Russia's annexation of Crimea from neighboring Ukraine in early 2014 prompted a change in posture, with Washington seeking to deter Moscow from further encroachments. U.S. and allied forces began rotating brigades through the eastern members, and the U.S. started returning equipment such as tanks and helicopters to the theater.

West Point gets its first black leader

Associated Press

WEST POINT, N.Y. — Lt. Gen. Darryl A. Williams, a 1983 U.S. Military Academy graduate who has held high-ranking Army posts in Europe and Asia, will become the first black officer to command West Point in its 216-year history, academy officials announced Friday.

Williams will assume command as the academy's 60th superintendent during a ceremony Monday morning in West Point's Jefferson Hall, school officials said.

The native of Alexandria, Va., has served

as the deputy chief of staff for the U.S. Army in Europe and the deputy commanding general for support for the 2nd Infantry Division in South Korea. Most recently, Williams was commander of NATO's Allied Land Command, based in Turkey.

West Point, founded in 1802, didn't graduate its first black cadet until the Reconstruction in 1877. No black cadet had graduated in the 20th century when Benjamin O. Davis Jr. arrived there in 1932.

Davis ate alone, roomed alone and was shunned by fellow cadets because he was

black. After graduating in 1936, he went on to command the Tuskegee Airmen during World War II and retired as an Air Force general in 1970. West Point recently named its newest cadet barracks for Davis.

The announcement of Williams' appointment comes less than a year after an African-American cadet and Rhodes Scholar was selected to take the top position in West Point's cadet chain of command.

Williams takes over from Lt. Gen. Robert L. Caslen Jr., who's retiring after more than 40 years in the Army.

Trump: Elections will be discussed with Putin

Associated Press

MORRISTOWN, N.J. — President Donald Trump said Friday he plans to bring up Russian election meddling during his upcoming summit with Vladimir Putin, part of a wide-ranging list of topics that could include sanctions and the status of Crimea.

Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One that he planned to discuss Ukraine, Syria and Crimea as well as election interference when he meets with the Russian president in Helsinki on July 16 in a summit he said could help defuse tensions between Moscow and Washington.

"We'll be talking about elections. We don't want anybody tampering with elections," Trump said. The president re-

peatedly has minimized the conclusion of the U.S. intelligence community that Russia meddled in the 2016 election to help him win.

He tweeted Thursday, "Russia continues to say they had nothing to do with Meddling in our Election!" And he has called the FBI's investigation into potential Russian coordination with his campaign a "witch hunt" designed to delegitimize his presidency.

Trump was noncommittal when asked if he might lift sanctions imposed on Russia, telling reporters, "We'll see what Russia does. We're going to be talking to Russia about a lot of things. We're going to be talking to them about Syria, we're going to be talking to them about Ukraine. We might even

be talking about some of the things President Obama lost, like Crimea, that could come up."

Asked if the U.S. might recognize Crimea to be part of Russia, he said, "We're to have to see" and then said the situation was handled "unfortunately" by his predecessor, President Barack Obama.

Trump has suggested previously Russia should be allowed to return to the Group of Seven — formerly Eight — economic powers. Putin was expelled from the international group in 2014 after Russia moved troops into eastern Ukraine and annexed the Black Sea peninsula of Crimea. Leaders of the other G-7 nations — Britain, Canada, Italy, France, Germany and Japan — all have made clear

Russia is not welcome back until and unless it gives Crimea back to Ukraine.

The Obama administration, along with the European Union and individual allied countries, imposed sanctions on Russia over Crimea, and even members of Trump's Cabinet have said they will not be lifted until the situation is resolved.

During the flight Friday to his New Jersey golf resort, Trump also was asked to preview next month's NATO summit in Brussels. He reiterated his plans to push fellow NATO members to devote more of their budgets to defense.

"Germany has to spend more money," he said. "Spain, France, it's unfair what they've done to the United States."

Black WWII vet becomes an officer 76 years later

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — An African American man who was denied officer status in the U.S. Army was commissioned as a second lieutenant on Friday — 76 years later.

John Edward James Jr., 98, completed his officer training in 1942 but was denied his bars because of his race, WHYY-FM reported.

James attended officer candidate school at Fort Benning,

Ga., but the day before he was to receive his commission, he was told he wouldn't be made an officer and was being transferred.

It was common during World War II for black soldiers to be denied commissions if they were to be assigned to predominantly white units. At the time, it was against Army regulations for white soldiers to be subordinate to blacks.

James spent the war as a cor-

poral, serving as a typist with a quartermaster battalion supplying front-line combat units in North Africa and Italy for three years. After the war, he married and worked for the post office.

He never told his children about being an uncommissioned Army officer until his daughter, Marion Teresa Lane, discovered his class photo from Fort Benning, WHYY said. He told her to throw it away.

But she said, "Tenacity is my middle name," and began working through the red tape to get her father commissioned, including having her application denied multiple times by the Army Review Board for insufficient evidence. Some of her father's records were destroyed in a fire.

Finally, with the help of Democratic Sen. Bob Casey of Pennsylvania, James' commission was secured.

Judge blocks Ky. Medicaid work requirements

Associated Press

FRANKFORT, Ky. — A federal judge says Kentucky can't require poor people to get jobs to keep their Medicaid benefits, chastising President Donald Trump's administration for rubber-stamping the new rules without considering how many people would lose their health coverage.

The decision is a setback for the Trump administration, which has been encouraging states to impose work requirements and other changes on Medicaid, the joint state-and-federal health insurance program for the poor and disabled. Kentucky was the first state in the country to get that permission, and the new rules were scheduled to take effect Sunday in a northern Kentucky suburb of Cincinnati.

But Friday, U.S. District Judge James E. Boasberg blocked the rules because it said the Trump administration never adequately

ly considered whether the changes would comply with the central tenet of Medicaid: Providing health care for its citizens.

"The Secretary never provided a bottom-line estimate of how many people would lose Medicaid with (the new rules) in place. This oversight is glaring," wrote Boasberg, an appointee of former President Barack Obama. "For starters, the Secretary never once mentions the estimated 95,000 people who would lose coverage, which gives the Court little reason to think that he seriously grappled with the bottom-line impact on healthcare."

Boasberg ordered that Kentucky's approval of the project be vacated and sent it back to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services so the process could be restarted.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, the top Democrat on the committee that oversees Medicaid,

said the decision is "good news for Americans who think health care is a right, not a prize to be won after enduring piles of bureaucratic busy work." But Seema Verna, who leads the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, said the ruling was "disappointing" and indicated the administration could appeal the ruling.

Obama's health care law gave states the option of expanding Medicaid coverage to able-bodied adults. Kentucky, under former Democratic Gov. Steve Beshear, was one of 32 states that did so.

But Republican Gov. Matt Bevin, elected in 2015, said the program was too expensive to continue. He asked for permission to impose new rules, including charging monthly premiums and requiring at least 80 hours of "community engagement" per month, which could include working, volunteering or going to school.

Attackers target military headquarters in Mali

Associated Press

BAMAKO, Mali — A car packed with explosives detonated at the headquarters of a new, five-nation West African counter-terror force in Mali, setting off a gun battle that killed two soldiers, a civilian and two attackers, officials told The Associated Press on Friday.

The attack highlighted the brazenness of the extremist threat in a part of the world that made headlines in October with the killing of four U.S. servicemembers in an ambush in neighboring Niger.

Force commander Gen. Didier Dacko confirmed Friday's attack by phone from

Niger, saying it began with the car attack. Residents said the blast shook the community of Sevare, near the central city of Mopti.

In addition to the deaths, two other attackers were captured, G5 Sahel spokesman Abdoul Salam Diagana told the AP. Four soldiers, three suspected attackers and a civilian were wounded, said Dr. Djibril Kassogue with the Sevare Hospital. "The lives of those injured are not in danger," he said.

The chairman of the G5 Sahel, Niger President Mahamadou Issoufou, confirmed the death toll of three, including two military and one civilian, along with

the eight injured.

In a statement from the G5 Force, Issoufou condemned "this cowardly act by criminal organizations whose aim is to destabilize one of the essential instruments for the stability of our subregion, in this case the Joint Force of the G5 Sahel."

He lauded the effective response of soldiers, and expressed solidarity with the families of the victims.

In the statement, he also reaffirmed "the determination of the G5 Sahel member countries to fight the terrorist forces with firmness in order to restore the usual tranquility and serenity in which the people of the Sahel live."

Thailand cave rescue efforts increase as floods ease

Associated Press

MAE SAI, Thailand — The effort to locate 12 boys and their soccer coach missing in a cave in Thailand for a week picked up pace Saturday, as a break in the rain eased flooding in the system of caverns and more experts from around the world joined the rescue mission.

The search effort in the northern province of Chiang Rai has been going slowly, largely because flooding has blocked rescuers from going through chambers to get deeper into the cave.

Pumping out water hasn't solved the problem, so increasing efforts have been

made to find shafts on the mountainside that might serve as a back door to the blocked-off areas where the missing may be sheltering.

The boys, aged 11 to 16, and their 25-year-old coach entered the sprawling Tham Luang Nang Non cave after a soccer game on June 23, but near-constant rains have thwarted the search for them.

Authorities have nevertheless expressed hope that the group has found a dry place within the cave to wait, and that they are still alive.

Reflecting that hope, a medical evacuation drill was held Saturday morning to see how long it would take to get rescued

people out of the cave, into 13 ambulances and to the nearest hospital.

Australian police and military personnel were deployed Saturday to join other multinational teams, including U.S. military personnel and experts from a British cave exploration club.

China has sent a six-person team of rescue and disaster experts to the cave, the Chinese Embassy in Bangkok announced Friday. The group has experience in life-saving rescues in Myanmar and Nepal, the embassy's statement said.

A second, private Chinese group, calling itself Green Boat Emergency, arrived Saturday.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Boy rescued from AC and heating vent shaft

CT WATERFORD — A Connecticut toddler was rescued from an air conditioning and heating vent.

Firefighters were called to a Waterford residence Tuesday for a 14-month-old who fell down the ventilation shaft.

WFSB-TV said the boy, Elijah Irizarry, lifted up the vent cover and fell through on the second floor of the house. His mother, Kristie Mendes, said he was in a gated area but just fell in.

Fire crews were able to access the crawl space below the home and disassemble the ventilation duct work to rescue the boy.

Man fined \$100 for turkey in his yard

MI GARDEN CITY — A suburban Detroit man was fined \$100 for a turkey that's been calling his backyard home.

Mark Johnston told WXYZ-TV he hasn't gone out of his way to make the turkey comfortable since it started showing up outside his Garden City home six months ago. He said the turkey will stick around a while, then jump the fence and disappear before returning.

Johnston was recently ticketed for keeping the turkey as a pet. Police Chief Tim Gibbons said they've been working with Johnston since April on the issue. He said the turkey likes Johnston's overgrown backyard and likely will leave if it's cleaned up.

Man drowns after trying to save calf

TX CLEBURNE — Police said a North Texas

man drowned while trying to rescue a calf that had fallen into a pond.

Cleburne fire Chief Keith Scarbrough told the Star-Telegram that Coyote Renner, 29, was working ranchland in Cleburne on Wednesday when he saw a calf fall into a stock tank.

Scarbrough said the tank is a small pond used for watering livestock that tends to be muddier than a typical lake.

The fire chief said Renner was still wearing jeans and boots when his body was removed from the 7-foot-deep area of the pond. He said his clothing could've contributed to fatigue.

Drunk woman drives to station to get friend

NJ MOUNT OLIVE — Authorities say a woman drove drunk to a police station where she was picking up a man who had been charged with drunken driving.

Mount Olive police said Melissa Vitale, 49, of Rockaway, appeared impaired when she arrived at the station. She was soon charged with drunken driving after she allegedly failed sobriety tests.

Authorities said Robert Woolf, 45, of Washington, had called Vitale and asked her to pick him up after he had been charged with drunken driving.

\$1M settlement in suit against bouncers, bar

MO GRAIN VALLEY — Two sisters reached a \$1 million settlement in a lawsuit that alleged they were handcuffed to the wall of a Kansas City bar and battered because bouncers wrongly thought they had used a counterfeit \$50 bill.

The Kansas City Star report-

ed that the sisters' attorney, Nick Hinrichs, said he is glad his clients can "finally put this nightmare behind them." The suit said the sisters were confronted by multiple bouncers wearing skull or camouflage masks in late 2016 at the Whiskey Tango bar in Grain Valley, even though they arrived 90 minutes after the counterfeit bill was used.

Suit: Deputies plant drugs on, beat man

LA LAFAYETTE — A federal lawsuit claims Louisiana sheriff's deputies planted drugs on a man and severely beat him in retaliation for a bar fight with another deputy.

The lawsuit, filed Wednesday, also accuses deputies from Iberia Parish Sheriff Louis Ackal's office of falsifying reports on Rickey Roche's arrest to make his beating appear justified.

Ackal's indictment said the sheriff never disciplined the deputies who allegedly beat Roche in 2010 in retaliation for assaulting one of their supervisors, Gerald Savoy. Ackal, Savoy and three deputies who testified about Roche's beating are named as defendants in his lawsuit.

Dealer: 'Buy a car, get a gun' sign not a gimmick

OR ROSEBURG — A Roseburg dealership has a unique incentive for customers: "Buy a car, get a gun."

The News-Review reported the sign went up on the same day 200 people gathered at the county courthouse for a rally in support of the Second Amendment.

Jeremy Magar, the owner of Earnest Auto Sales, came up with the idea for the sale three years ago but decided to implement it only after hearing about

the rally.

Anyone who purchases a car will be given a certificate that can be exchanged for a preselected firearm from a local gun shop. The value of each firearm averages about \$300.

Freeway sign climber snarls downtown traffic

CA LOS ANGELES — A man who climbed atop a freeway sign near a major interchange snarled traffic through the heart of downtown Los Angeles.

The man suspended banners, one about fighting pollution, after climbing onto the sign over State Route 110 during the Wednesday morning rush hour.

Firefighters deployed huge air bags under the sign as California Highway Patrol officers made efforts to get the man to come down. The traffic snarl spread onto connecting freeways and surface streets.

Man charged in \$30M luxury car fraud scheme

WI MILWAUKEE — A Wisconsin man is facing a dozen federal charges in an alleged money laundering scheme that authorities said involved selling luxury cars overseas by defrauding local car dealers.

Albert "Alex" Golant, 37, of Wales is accused of taking millions of dollars to buy Range Rovers, Maseratis and other luxury vehicles to sell to foreign buyers. The U.S. Attorney's Office said Friday he allegedly used straw buyers to falsify financing applications.

Authorities say Golant gained \$30 million from at least 40 different people. He faces up to 30 years in prison for each bank fraud charge.

From wire reports

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NFL players trading pads for cap, gowns

Associated Press

ALAMEDA, Calif. — When Bruce Irvin got a multimillion-dollar signing bonus after being a first-round draft pick in 2012, the idea of getting his college degree was the last thing on his mind.

A former high school dropout who spent time in jail and dealing drugs while growing up in Atlanta, Irvin later decided to set an example for his 5-year-old son Brayden and show that he is more than just a professional athlete.

“When kids come up to him, they can say that his dad was a good football player and he can stop them and say he was a good football player but he also got his associate’s degree, got his bachelor’s degree,” Irvin said. “He wasn’t only a football player. He put education up there right along with his job. It was bigger than me. It was for my son and his kids and generations after me.”

From the troublesome childhood that he detailed last year in a Player’s Tribune article titled “The Things I’ve Done,” Irvin has developed into a leader on the Raiders and in the community, earning a nomination for the Walter Payton Man of the Year Award.

He will have made more than \$36 million playing football at the end of this season, winning

one Super Bowl with Seattle and earning plenty of other accolades. But walking on stage to get his degree back in May goes right near the top of his accomplishments.

“The odds were stacked up against me to get my bachelor’s degree. It was a surreal moment,” he said. “I kind of put it up there with the Super Bowl, neck and neck. Super Bowl probably would have been better if we’d won two in a row. It was a great moment, not only for me but for my son and my family. I’m glad I got to experience it.”

Irvin was one of several NFL players who earned college degrees this offseason, taking advantage of a program negotiated in the collective bargaining agreement that provides tuition reimbursement for players seeking to continue their education.

Players can earn up to \$60,000 in tuition reimbursement based on their time in the league. Arthur McAfee, the senior vice president of NFL Player Engagement, said about two dozen players each year earn their degrees through the program. He added that the increased time off under the current collective bargaining agreement has made the process easier for players interested in getting their degrees.

“We try to find the appropri-

ate balance between the players having opportunity to go back as well as manage their offseason schedule,” McAfee said. “The current format of the offseason schedule provides us with ample opportunity for players to find that time to work toward their degree.”

The most high-profile case this offseason was Kansas City Chiefs guard Laurent Duvernay-Tardif, who became the first active NFL player to get his medical degree when he earned his from McGill University in Montreal just over a year after signing a \$41.25 million, five-year contract.

“When I got drafted in 2014 it was a promise that I made to myself that I was going to keep grinding and keep pushing to combine my two passions at the highest level and show people it was possible,” Duvernay-Tardif said.

Duvernay-Tardif, a sixth-round pick in 2014, did most of his graduate work in the offseason, taking advantage of the increased time off for players provided in the current CBA.

Duvernay-Tardif did take one orthopedic exam during a bye week in 2015, spending a flight back from London studying while his teammates celebrated. While some teams were wary of his desire to become a doctor, Duvernay-Tar-

dif said Chiefs coach Andy Reid has always been extremely supportive.

“Coach Reid it was the total opposite. It was like ‘If you’re here and you still have medicine as a plan B it’s because you really love to play football and I’m going to help you to the best of my ability,’” Duvernay-Tardif said. “That’s what he’s been doing for the past four years. Every season at the end of the season during our exit meeting he’s been asking me ‘What’s next for you, Doc?’ and we’ve been talking about different clinical rotations and stuff. And his mother actually went to McGill University and was one of the first women to graduate in medicine, so there was a little bit of a connection and I really think that he helped me through the process. I don’t think it would have been possible if it was not for him.”

The Raiders have also been extremely supportive of players pursuing their degrees in the offseason and got to watch four players don their caps and gowns over two weekends this offseason. Star receiver Amari Cooper (Alabama), starting right guard Gabe Jackson (Mississippi State) and backup tackle Jylan Ware (Alabama State) all graduated this offseason thanks to the tuition assistance and guidance from the team.

Sports briefs

Moffitt wins third truck race of season, fourth overall

Associated Press

JOLIET, Ill. — Brett Moffitt won the NASCAR Camping World Truck Series race at Chicagoland Speedway on Friday night after leader John Hunter Nemechek ran out of gas on the final lap.

Moffitt won for the third time this season and fourth time overall. He also took Hattori Racing’s No. 16 Toyota to victory lane in Atlanta in February and in Iowa two weeks ago.

Nemechek ended up seventh after leading 64 laps overall and for most of the final stage before his car slowed on the first turn on the last of the 150 laps on the 1.5-mile oval.

Ben Rhodes was second for his fourth top-five finish of the season, and points leader Johnny Sauter was third. A four-time winner this year, Sauter rallied after falling from third to ninth because of jack malfunction during the final round

of pit stops.

Source: Mavericks chasing Jordan again

DALLAS — The Dallas Mavericks are making another run at DeAndre Jordan, three years after the center jilted them in free agency to stay with the Los Angeles Clippers.

Jordan has opted out of the final year of that contract he signed with LA in 2015, and

the Mavericks intend to pursue him as an unrestricted free agent, a person with knowledge of the decision told The Associated Press on Friday.

Jordan was set to make \$24.1 million under the four-year, \$87.6 million contract he signed to stay with the team that drafted him in 2008. Seven years later, the Mavericks made a strong play for Jordan, who agreed to sign with them as a free agent.

James has decision to make as free agent

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — LeBron James posted a video of himself jumping off a cliff while on a Caribbean vacation with his family.

He's about to dive into free agency.

James told the Cleveland Cavaliers on Friday that he will not exercise his \$35.6 million contract option for next season, making him an unrestricted free agent on Sunday when NBA teams can begin negotiations with players before signing them on July 6.

By declining his option, James positioned himself to be able to choose where he'll play next and Cleveland, his basketball home for 11 of the past 15 seasons, remains a strong possibility. But there are at least three other teams — and maybe an outsider or two — with legitimate shots at landing the three-time MVP, who made it clear following this year's NBA Finals that he's still driven to win championships.

While every team dreams of being ruled by King James, only a few have a legit chance of signing him.

Here are the cases — for and against — the leading contenders:

Cleveland

Why: Home; money.

James came back four years ago to a hero's welcome, something that seemed unimaginable when he left in disgrace four years earlier for Miami. But he vowed to do everything he could to deliver a title to championship-starved Cleveland. He delivered in 2016, erasing past sins and raising James to a worshipped level few athletes in any sport have experienced. His family is comfortable here and it's where he has complete control.

The Cavs can also offer him the most lucrative package, a five-year, \$209 million contract.

Why not: Flawed roster; blemished relationship with owner Dan Gilbert.

Last summer's stunning trade of guard Kyrie Irving left the Cavs without a quality running mate for James, who was forced to carry a heavier offensive load throughout the regular season and playoffs. Cleveland has deep salary-cap issues — partially caused by James' failure to commit long-term — and the Cavs currently lack enough talent to unseat the champion Golden State Warriors.

Gilbert and James mended some fences for his return in 2014, but they remain distant other than a shared commitment to winning. Gilbert has gone above and beyond financial barriers to appease James, but the well could be running dry.

Los Angeles Lakers

Why: Salary-cap space; business interests; iconic franchise.

With some savvy moves, the Lakers are poised to potentially add two superstars — James and Paul George and maybe Kawhi Leonard — to a team featuring up-and-coming talents like Kyle Kuzma, Brandon Ingram and Lonzo Ball, who is reportedly dealing with a knee injury. James loves the Hollywood lights, and with two homes in the Los Angeles area as well as a film production company, he has already established some roots in the land of movie stars. The appeal of playing for one of the league's most storied teams is another allure.

Why not: Youth; the Western Conference.

There's little doubt James has some quality years ahead of him. But does he have enough time to let a group of unproven players with no postseason experience develop into a title contender? And if he jumps conferences for the first time in his career, the path to the Finals is far more treacherous.

Philadelphia

Why: Rising team; staying in the East.

In Sixers guard Ben Simmons, James sees a younger version of himself and he'd relish the chance to play alongside the 21-year-old while

mentoring him. The Sixers also have center Joel Embiid, 24, projected to become the game's next dominant big man. Philadelphia would instantly vault from conference contender to favorite with James, who could make a strong run at his ninth straight Finals in Year One.

Why not: Too young; front-office dysfunction.

Much like the Lakers, the Sixers lack postseason experience and James would be surrounded by players who have barely tasted the postseason. General manager Bryan Colangelo's resignation following an investigation into whether he created Twitter accounts to criticize his own players, has given the impression that the team isn't operating in concert.

Other contenders

Houston: While the Rockets once seemed a good fit, James declining his option all but eliminated the chances of him joining up with close friend Chris Paul and MVP James Harden. If James had opted in with the Cavs, they could have worked out a sign-and-trade with Houston.

San Antonio: James reveres Spurs coach Gregg Popovich, but living in Texas doesn't seem appealing to the star's family and the Spurs are still trying to figure out what to do with Leonard, who can become a free agent after next season.

France rallies in second half to send Argentina home

Associated Press

KAZAN, Russia — With Lionel Messi out of the tournament, the World Cup has a new star.

Kylian Mbappe, only 19 and one of the youngest players at the tournament, scored two goals in a five-minute span of the second half to lead France over Argentina 4-3 Saturday and into the World Cup quarterfinals.

Messi, at 31 and playing in his fourth and possibly final World Cup, set up a pair of goals but again failed to score in a knockout match at the

biggest event in soccer.

Mbappe was a constant threat to Argentina's creaking defense with his speed and skill and was at the heart of France's often-breathtaking display, particularly in the middle of the second half.

He became the second teenager to score multiple goals in a knockout match at the World Cup. Pele was the other, doing it twice at 17 at the 1958 World Cup.

"It is flattering to be the second one after Pele but let's put things in context. Pele is another category," Mbappe said. "But it's good to be among the

players to score in knockout matches."

With the score 2-2, Mbappe got his first goal with a cool finish from a tight angle in the 64th minute, his low shot going under Argentina goalkeeper Franco Armani. Four minutes later, he slotted past Armani again after he was put through on goal by a deft pass from Olivier Giroud.

Mbappe also helped France to its first goal. Following a sustained period of early pressure, he won a penalty after a 40-meter burst of speed that ended with him being brought down by Marcos Rojo. Antoine

Griezmann then scored from the spot in the 13th minute, sending Armani the wrong way.

"Of course, as I've already and always said, in the World Cup you have all the top level players so it is an opportunity to show what you can do and what your abilities are," Mbappe said. "There is no better place than a World Cup."

France reached the quarterfinals at consecutive World Cups for the first time.

France will next face either Portugal or Uruguay in the quarterfinals on Friday in Nizhny Novgorod.

Homer-happy Yankees roll past Red Sox

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Packed house, summer heat, Red Sox-Yankees for the best record in baseball.

So, CC Sabathia, did it feel like a really big night in the Bronx?

“I wish I could tell you it did,” he said, “but it didn’t.”

Instead, he just pitched as if the calendar read October, rather than June.

Sabathia shut down the high-scoring Red Sox, Greg Bird hit two home runs and Aaron Judge connected off a college teammate as New York bopped Boston 8-1 on Friday evening to edge ahead in the AL East.

Not since the famed Bucky Dent playoff game in 1978 had the Yankees and Red Sox met so late in a season when they owned the two top marks in baseball, the Elias Sports Bureau said. Home runs decided this matchup, too, with Miguel Andujar also going deep for

New York.

“I mean, we’re a good club,” New York manager Aaron Boone said. “We’re a confident group, we know we can play with anyone.”

The biggest crowd of the year at Yankee Stadium was in the spirit as lines formed outside the gates more than 3½ hours before the start. The pro-Yankees chants began prior to the first pitch, the anti-Boston shouts soon followed.

Sabathia (5-3) helped end Boston’s four-game winning streak, less than a month from his 38th birthday. He gave up one run and six hits in seven innings, and improved to 6-0 in his last seven starts against the Red Sox.

The big lefty bounded off the mound to field Mookie Betts’ tapper and throw him out to end his outing. Slowed by knee problems in the past, a pumped-up Sabathia kept in motion and jogged to the dugout.

“High-stepping right there,

you mean?” he said.

Betts and Andrew Benintendi hit consecutive doubles in the fifth for Boston’s run in the opener of a three-game series.

“It’s important,” Betts said. “As long as we make it to the playoffs, anything can happen.”

Steve Pearce, acquired a day earlier from Toronto, batted cleanup in his debut for Boston. He doubled on the first pitch he saw and also singled off Sabathia.

“I was actually kind of jittery my first at-bat, so it was good to get that out of the way,” Pearce said.

“It would have been nice if we got the win, so that kind of overshadowed what I did at the plate. But I felt comfortable,” he said. “It was a great atmosphere.”

Eduardo Rodriguez (9-3) gave up five early runs. Boston fell to 3-4 against its rival this season, and 12 more games are left.

Judge connected for his 21st homer, a two-run drive in the seventh off Justin Haley. The former Fresno State player eagerly chatted for a while behind the cage during batting practice — after facing each other for the first time in the majors, the rookie reliever angrily kicked at the mound dirt as Judge circled the bases.

“We were really good friends, and it’s a joy to see him having success,” Judge said. “We respect the competition. He might strike me out tomorrow, and I’ll tip my cap to him, and it’ll be see you down the road.”

Gleyber Torres hit his first career triple and scored on Andujar’s single in the second. Torres added a sacrifice fly in a four-run fourth, capped by back-to-back homers from Andujar and Bird.

Bird added a solo drive in the eighth. The Yankees lead the majors with 131 home runs.

MLB roundup

Font, Rays snap Astros’ 11-game road winning streak

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Wilmer Font helped cool down the surging Houston Astros before leaving with an injury.

Font and four relievers combined on a three-hitter and the Tampa Bay Rays beat Houston 3-2 on Friday night to snap the Astros’ 11-game road winning streak, which tied a franchise record.

Font (2-3) allowed one run and one hit over five-plus innings before leaving the game with a strained right lat.

“We’ll know more (Saturday), but in all likelihood he’ll probably miss some significant time,” Rays manager Kevin Cash said. “He’s been throwing the ball so well for us and obviously did again tonight.”

Font, acquired from Oakland on May 25, was recently insert-

ed into the rotation.

Diego Castillo, Chaz Roe, Sergio Romo and Jose Alvarado held the Astros in check after Font’s exit. Alvarado got the final out for his second save.

The Rays improved their record to 8-6 during a stretch of 16 games against Houston, Washington and the New York Yankees.

Angels 7, Orioles 1: Mike Trout celebrated his return to center field with a solo home run and an impressive catch, and Los Angeles beat host Baltimore to snap a six-game skid.

Cubs 10, Twins 6: Addison Russell hit his second career grand slam, Jason Heyward and Ben Zobrist had two-run homers and Chicago rallied to beat visiting Minnesota.

Brewers 8, Reds 2: Keon Broxton homered twice and drove in four runs, and Chase

Anderson pitched two-hit ball for six innings, leading visiting Milwaukee past Cincinnati.

Giants 2, Diamondbacks 1: Andrew Suarez pitched six strong innings, Austin Slater had a pair of RBI doubles and San Francisco beat host Arizona.

Blue Jays 3, Tigers 2: Marcus Stroman pitched seven innings to get his first win this season, Justin Smoak hit a two-run home run and host Toronto handed Detroit its 10th consecutive loss.

Marlins 8, Mets 2: Sandy Alcantara allowed just one run over five innings to win his first career start, helping Miami beat visiting New York.

Rangers 11, White Sox 3: Shin-Soo Choo reached base for the 41st straight game and hit one of five Texas home runs in the first three innings against

visiting Chicago.

Braves 5, Cardinals 1: Julio Teheran pitched six scoreless innings and Johan Camargo had three hits to help Atlanta beat host St. Louis.

Rockies 3, Dodgers 1: Tyler Anderson tossed eight shutout innings as visiting Colorado beat Los Angeles.

Athletics 3, Indians 1: Paul Blackburn pitched shutout ball into the seventh inning and host Oakland won its fifth straight.

Mariners 4, Royals 1: Marco Gonzales pitched a six-hitter for his first career complete game as Seattle beat visiting Kansas City.

Pirates 6, Padres 3: Joe Musgrove pitched seven shutout innings against his hometown team and Jody Mercer homered to lead Pittsburgh over host San Diego.