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Bombs, mines as Iraqis advance on Tikrit

The Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Iraqi troops and Shiite militias battled the Islamic State group Tuesday south of the militant-held city of Tikrit, although roadside bombs and suicide attacks slowed their advance on Saddam Hussein's hometown.

The battle for Tikrit, a strategic city along the Tigris River, likely will be won or lost on allied Iraqi forces' ability to counter the extremists' bombs. Such explosives were a mainstay of al-Qaida in Iraq, the Islamic State group's predecessor, as it fought American forces following their 2003 invasion of the country.

"Tikrit has been besieged from three directions, from the north, west and south, but what has remained only from the eastern side," said Brig. Gen. Saad Maan Ibrahim, an Interior Ministry spokesman. "The explosive experts were able to tackle so many bombs and car bombs."

Ibrahim offered no specifics, although previous reports suggest extremists of the Islamic State group, which holds a third of both Iraq and neighboring Syria in its self-declared caliphate, have littered major roadways and routes with mines. Such mines allow the extremists to slow any ground advance and require painstaking clearing operations before troops can safely move through.

Tuesday marked the second day of the Iraqi advance on Tikrit, with its soldiers supported by Iranian-backed Shiite militias and advisers, along with some Sunni tribal fighters who reject the Islamic State group.

Already, Iran's semi-official Fars news agency has reported that Iranian Gen. Ghasem Soleimani, the commander of the country's elite Revolutionary Guard's Quds Force, was taking part in the offensive.

Austin: Don't need US ground troops to defeat Islamic State

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The general in charge of U.S. forces in the Middle East defended the Obama administration's war strategy Tuesday, telling House lawmakers that the Islamic State will be defeated without ground combat troops.

Gen. Lloyd Austin said the Islamic extremist group is already losing the ability to govern and hold territory in Iraq and Syria following seven months of U.S. and coalition airstrikes, and that eventually it will be pushed out by Iraqi and Syrian proxy forces.

The general testified before the House Armed Services Committee as Congress — including many skeptical Republicans — weighs President Barack Obama's proposal for a new war authorization that would lay down guidelines for the Islamic State offensive, including whether American troops will join the fight.

"I think we will be able to get this done with the approach we have taken," Austin said. "At the end of the day ... this needs to be done by the Iraqis."

To replace authorizations passed after 9/11, the White House is proposing a war authorization that would restrict large-scale combat

ground forces and expire after three years. It would largely continue current policies, which administration and military officials say are working. Several months ago, the Islamic State could move freely in large convoys, but the air offensive has pushed the group into a "defensive crouch" across Iraq and Syria, Austin said.

"The enemy is beginning to struggle in a number of areas, in the ability to govern and the ability to hold territory," he said.

Meanwhile, Obama has authorized some 3,000 U.S. troops, many of whom are deployed to Iraq, to train and advise the Iraq army, which launched a major offensive this week to take back Tikrit, but without U.S. help. In Syria, a new program to train and equip moderate Syrian rebels against the Islamic State is set to begin later this month.

Austin and Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Christine Wormuth backed the Obama administration in its insistence that any war authorization passed by Congress should limit another U.S. ground war in Iraq. Republicans in the Senate have questioned whether limiting U.S. involvement to advising and airstrikes can defeat the Islamic extremists.

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The Wall Street Journal wrote that the operation has thrown a spotlight on Shiite Iran assisting Shiite-domi-

ing influence over Iraq's military affairs after Iraqi security forces proved unable to contain the Islamic State onslaught that began in summer.

Having an overwhelmingly Shiite force move on a Sunni city could exacerbate sectarian divisions in a country that some fear is already sliding toward a breakup.

The U.S. and Iran have steered clear of each other's operations in Iraq, the Journal wrote, citing U.S. officials. In general, when Shiite militias are involved in a military operation, the U.S. doesn't provide support.

Pentagon spokesman Col. Steve Warren said Monday that the U.S. wasn't providing assistance in the Tikrit operation.

"We are fully aware of the operation, but the Iraqis did not request our support for it," Warren said.

That the Iraqis planned to retake Tikrit was well known, as thousands of troops and Shiite militia members had gathered in nearby Samarra to prepare. However, Foreign Policy magazine reported that a U.S. official described "a little bit of surprise" at the Pentagon and U.S. Central Command that the operation was launched Monday and said there is little question that it is being influenced by Iranian Revolutionary Guard commanders.

After conducting more than 2,000 airstrikes against Islamic State targets in Iraq and Syria, the absence of the United States from the Tikrit fight is telling, Foreign Policy noted, and speaks to how little influence the United States may have on this complicated battlefield.

Past attempts to retake Tikrit have failed. The military operation is seen as a litmus test for the capability of Iraqi troops to dislodge the militants from major cities they conquered in the country's Sunni heartland.

nated Iraq to regain parts of the country taken by the Sunni radical group Islamic State.

Tehran has wielded increas-

Netanyahu assails Iran-nuclear talks in congressional address

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told Congress on Tuesday that negotiations underway between Iran and the United States would “all but guarantee” that Tehran would get nuclear weapons, a step he said the world must avoid at all costs.

“Iran has proven time and again that it cannot be trusted,” no matter what it says about permitting verification of the terms of any accord designed to prevent it from getting such weapons, he said.

“The greatest danger facing our world is the marriage of militant Islam with nuclear weapons,” he said in remarks before a packed House chamber that stirred political controversy in two countries.

Netanyahu spoke shortly

after Secretary of State John Kerry met for more than two hours in Switzerland with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in hopes of completing an international framework agreement later this month to curb Tehran’s nuclear ambitions.

The Israeli leader’s appeal also came two weeks before tight elections in which he is seeking a new term — and after the invitation to address Congress extended by House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, triggered a political furor in the United States. More than four dozen House and Senate Democrats said in advance they would not attend the event, a highly unusual move given historically close ties between the two allies.

Many of Netanyahu’s com-

ments were greeted by loud applause from U.S. lawmakers, and not just Republicans. But not everyone was persuaded by his rhetoric.

House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi conspicuously refrained from applauding on several occasions. And when the Israeli leader called for holding out for a better deal with Iran, she held her hands wide and shook her head in disagreement.

The White House expressed its displeasure with the appearance by word and deed, dispatching Vice President Joe Biden on an overseas trip that meant he did not fill his customary seat behind the House rostrum during the speech. Nor did Netanyahu meet at the White House with Obama on his trip to the United States.

Petraeus to admit he shared secrets

From staff and wire reports

David Petraeus, the best-known military commander of his generation, has agreed to plead guilty to mishandling classified materials.

The plea agreement — which carries a possible sentence of up to a year in prison — represents a stunning fall for the retired four-star Army general who led American forces in Iraq and Afghanistan and was perhaps the most admired military leader of his generation.

He was the architect of a counterinsurgency strategy that at one time seemed a model for future warfare.

Petraeus, 62, agreed to plead guilty to one count of unauthorized removal and retention of material. The case was filed in federal court in Charlotte, the hometown of Paula Broadwell, the general’s biographer and former mistress.

Broadwell, a former Army Reserve officer, had an affair with Petraeus in 2011 when she was interviewing him for a biography, “All In: The Education of General David Petraeus,” published in 2012. He resigned as the director of the CIA three days after President Barack Obama was re-elected. At the time, Petraeus acknowledged the affair. He has since denied any criminal wrongdoing.

A plea deal spares Petraeus a high-profile trial where embarrassing details about the affair would have been made public. Petraeus is still married to Holly Petraeus.

Petraeus received most of his accolades for service in Iraq. He was credited with directing the 2006 surge of U.S. forces that pushed militants of al-Qaida, who had taken control of several major cities and provinces, out of the country, stabilizing Iraq and allowing the withdrawal of all American forces about five years later.

Number of SOFA personnel crimes on Okinawa drops

**BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND CHIYOMI SUMIDA**

Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — New statistics show the number of U.S. servicemembers, family members and civilian workers accused of committing crimes on Okinawa dropped last year to the lowest level since the reversion of the tiny island pre-

fecture back to Japan in 1972.

Out of 3,410 total arrests prefecture-wide in 2014, only 27 involved Status of Forces Agreement personnel, down from 38 in 2013, according to statistics released Feb. 12 by Okinawa Prefectural Police. Of those, only 10 were servicemembers on active duty, the same as the previous year.

The overall number of crimes

allegedly perpetrated by SOFA personnel dropped from 32 to 29.

The number of what are referred to in Japan as “heinous” crimes, including rape, murder, robbery and arson, went up in 2014 — to a single arrest for rape. However, the number of arrests for violent crimes such as assault and extortion dropped from seven to four.

FDA: Prozac ingredient found in fitness supplement

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A fitness supplement that was twice pulled from exchange store shelves, first following soldier deaths and then after an outbreak of liver disease, has now been found to contain the active ingredient in the prescription drug Prozac, the Food and Drug Administra-

tion announced Saturday.

OxyElite Pro Super Thermogenic is sold as a weight-loss supplement but the FDA said it has discovered the product contains fluoxetine, a drug used in treating mental disorders such as depression, bulimia and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Fluoxetine and other drugs in its class can have seri-

ous side effects such as suicidal thinking, seizures and abnormal bleeding, the FDA said in its warning.

The agency said consumers should not buy or use OxyElite Pro. The Marine Corps Exchange, the Navy Exchange and the Army and Air Force Exchange Service said Monday that they do not stock it.

NFL teams make tagging choices

The Associated Press

NFL games have begun for 2015. Don't bother checking out your Sunday Ticket, though. This is not football the teams are playing, it's tag.

Monday was the deadline for franchises to decide whether to hold onto key players who are pending free agents by giving them the franchise or transition tag. The alternative: letting them hit the open market on March 10.

A lot more goes into tagging than simply wanting to hold on to a standout or a budding star.

There's nearly as much game-planning for it as there is for an opponent during the season.

Teams ask themselves:

- What position does he play and how much is the tag for that position?

- Should we use the exclusive franchise tag, when no other team can approach the player? Or go with the non-exclusive, allowing other teams to pursue the player, but with the original team maintaining the right to match any offer, or decline and gain two first-round draft picks?

- Should we go with the lower transition tag, in which other teams can set the market for a player and if the contract is not matched, there is no compensation when the player walks?

- What is our salary cap situation? Does it make sense to commit so much money to one player? Is he that much of a difference maker?

This year, the Lions decided not to tag Ndamukong Suh, an All-Pro defensive tackle. Among the reasons could be his penchant

for unacceptable on-field behavior — there's always the chance Suh could go off during a game and wind up with a suspension for his actions.

More likely, Detroit looked at the salary cap implications of tagging Suh for nearly a \$27 million cap hit because of his previous contract restructuring. The Lions felt adding to the huge price tags on receiver Calvin Johnson and quarterback Matthew Stafford would preclude the team from improvements in several other areas.

No team wants to commit more than 30 percent of its cap spending to three players — unless those players have won championships for the franchise. Most teams prefer to stay under 25 percent for its top three players. Stafford has a salary cap hit of \$17.7 million in 2015, and Johnson is at \$20.5 million.

Detroit still might sign Suh to a long-term deal, and it could avoid the hefty one-year cap hit with some creativity over a span of a few seasons. That room for creativity doesn't exist with franchise-tagged players.

The Packers have plenty of salary cap money, but it doesn't mean they are going to spend it on wide receiver Randall Cobb and offensive tackle Bryan Bulaga.

And so, Green Bay general manager Ted Thompson decided to pass on using a protective hold on either player, thereby sending a message that he won't be overpaying for them.

Kansas City bit hard and put the non-exclusive tag on linebacker Justin Houston. Except Houston might want to be considered a defensive end: the tag at that position is nearly \$1.7 million higher.

While the Chiefs negotiate with Houston's agents, they also must find ways to trim salaries. That shouldn't be too difficult;

much harder will be dealing with a potentially long holdout by Houston if the sides can't agree on which position the league's leading sackmaster plays. And how much he is worth.

The Giants had an easier decision in franchising defensive end Jason Pierre-Paul. When healthy and motivated, he's a force, as his 12½ sacks and 21 quarterback hits for a weak defense showed in 2014. He also had 16½ sacks in 2011, and is only 26.

With Steve Spagnuolo returning as defensive coordinator, New York will build again around the pass rush. Pierre-Paul is the foundation.

Denver also had little choice with tagging receiver Demaryius Thomas at \$12.823 million. With Peyton Manning likely to return this season, the Broncos had no option but to keep his top target — particularly with tight end Julius Thomas and wideout Wes Welker unsigned.

It's also more probable the Broncos can get a long-term deal done with Thomas — the deadline is July 15 — and they have some flexibility under the salary cap, with around \$150 million available thanks to unspent carryover money from 2014.

Dallas, as expected, tagged its All-Pro receiver, Dez Bryant. The Cowboys are in a tight spot because they have little maneuverability for 2015 if they can't get a long-term agreement with Bryant. Failing to do so could mean losing AP Offensive Player of the Year DeMarco Murray, the league's top running back — just when the Cowboys have become a championship threat again.

Royals look to Morales, Rios for pop

The Associated Press

SURPRISE, Ariz. — Dayton Moore knows perfectly well how rare it was for a team as starved for power as the Kansas City Royals were last season to make the playoffs, let alone the World Series.

He also knows that it would be nearly impossible to replicate the feat.

So after the Royals were finally ousted by the San Francisco Giants in a dramatic Game 7, and the book was finally closed on their first postseason appearance in nearly three decades, the general manager started the grueling task of retooling. And not surprisingly, he began by identifying a couple of players who could provide some pop to the middle of the Kansas City lineup.

One was Kendrys Morales, who would take over for departed free agent Billy Butler. The other was Alex Rios, who will handle right field in place of light-hitting Nori Aoki.

"I feel like we're more complete now in a lot of ways," Moore said.

Of course, the small-market Royals are not throwing away their winning formula from last season. Success will still be predicated on daring baserunning, speedy defense and a shutdown bullpen.

Rather, Moore hopes that the big bats simply augment the rest of a lineup that finished last in the majors last season with only 95 home runs.

Morales once hit 34 homers in a season with the Angels, and had back-to-back 20-homer seasons a couple years ago. And despite getting a late start on last season that threw his timing off and limited him to 98 games, he still managed to send nine out of the ballpark.

"We got the pitching and speed and defense, but to put two power bats like that in our lineup, especially Kendrys from both sides, I think that will help us out, especially in late innings, when you want to turn to the tough righty or lefty in the bullpen," Royals first baseman Eric Hosmer said. "When he's in the middle of the order right there, that's a big help for us."

Rios is the quintessential case of risk-reward. The two-time All-Star has had some big years, eclipsing 20 home runs three times, but he's also had some downright baffling ones. Last year he hit .280 for Texas, but only had four home runs as he dealt with a series of injuries.

Morales and Rios will both have their work cut out for them trying to pop balls over the fence at spacious Kauffman Stadium.

After all, there's a reason the franchise record for home runs in a season is still just 36, set by Steve Balboni in 1985. And why no Royals player has even hit 30 homers in a season since Jermaine Dye had 33 in 2000.

The Royals have no shortage of players capable of lining doubles into the gap, though. What they need is for someone — Morales and Rios, perhaps — to send some balls over the wall.

NASCAR falls flat in follow-up to Daytona

The Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — NASCAR did not have its finest weekend at Atlanta Motor Speedway, where the follow-up to the Daytona 500 began with the theft of a race car and a parked SUV rolling into Denny Hamlin's motorhome.

Qualifying was a debacle for the second week in a row, rain delayed the start of Sunday's race and Jeff Gordon once again managed to crash into a concrete wall that lacked an energy-absorbing barrier.

By the time Jimmie Johnson took the checkered flag to close a cold and wet weekend, everyone was ready to get out of Atlanta.

It was a momentum-killing weekend for NASCAR, which had staged a strong season-opener only to fall flat at one of the more historic tracks on the circuit.

Things went awry early when a trailer carrying the Team XTREME race car for Travis Kvapil was stolen from a motel parking lot early Friday morning.

While the team scrambled to figure out what it would do — with no car, Kvapil was forced to withdraw from the race — Hamlin received a jolt when his motorhome was struck by a rolling SUV that had mistakenly been left in gear.

After those two off-track distractions were dealt with, attention turned toward

the debut of the 2015 rules package. Only that was marred by the second embarrassing qualifying session in as many weeks.

Four series champions were among the 13 drivers who didn't even get to make a qualifying attempt because their cars didn't pass inspection before the session began Friday afternoon.

Among those stuck in the inspection bay were Gordon, Johnson, Matt Kenseth and Tony Stewart.

Gordon, who needed two attempts to get his car through inspection, took the series to task after he failed to make a qualifying attempt in the debut race for new sponsor 3M.

"When you have this many teams having issues going through, there's something wrong with this system or something wrong with the amount of time they're allotted to get through," he said. "There's no way with this many good cars and talented people that they can't figure out how to get these cars through inspection."

"I'm embarrassed for our series."

It remains to be seen if the problem was that NASCAR, which a year ago dramatically reduced its team of officials as it streamlined its processes and began to use more technology and less human capital, didn't have enough inspectors on site and didn't allot enough time to clear 47 cars.

Sprint Cup director Richard Buck indicated the issue was with the way teams set up the cars in their first race with a new rules package.

"They're pushing the limits," Buck said. "That's their job to get every bit they can get through [inspection]. It's our job that everyone gets a fair opportunity to get through there."

Whatever the reasoning is for all those cars failing to make it on the track, it has to be fixed before this weekend's race at Las Vegas. NASCAR can't afford a third straight week of a champion being publicly "embarrassed" of the series.

But that didn't even end up being Gordon's biggest concern.

A week after Kyle Busch broke his right leg and left foot when he crashed at Daytona, Gordon also managed to hit a wall that lacked a SAFER barrier.

Gordon was visibly angry about his hit Sunday, as were many fans, who are as frustrated as the drivers over a seemingly slow pace to get the barriers in enough spots at every track. NASCAR and its race-tracks have shown a sense of urgency in the issue, but it's unsettling to see drivers continuing to find concrete walls.

NASCAR now heads west for a three-race swing that begins in Las Vegas and ends in Fontana, Calif.,

One can only hope that each event goes a lot smoother than last weekend.



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Virginia solves Syracuse, wins the regular-season ACC crown

The Associated Press

SYRACUSE, N.Y. — When Virginia coach Tony Bennett glanced up at the Carrier Dome scoreboard as the first half was dwindling, he winced. His second-ranked Cavaliers had made just one field goal in the first 13 minutes and trailed Syracuse by 11 points.

"I just looked at the guys and I said, 'All we've got is each other. We're going to have to try to figure this out,'" Bennett said. "I've been in those spots before. We couldn't change anything. We're just either going to sink or swim with these guys."

The Cavaliers decided to swim some more.

After the shakiest of starts, they settled down and carved up Jim Boeheim's 2-3 zone, reeling off a 35-12 spurt spanning halftime and won going away, 59-47, on Monday night.

The victory gave Virginia (28-1, 16-1) the outright Atlantic Coast Conference regular-season title for the second straight year.

"It feels great," Virginia's Malcolm Brogdon said. "We've won it before, but you win it a new way every time. It's definitely a gratifying win."

Anthony Gill scored 17 points to lead

four Virginia players in double figures. Brogdon, Mike Tobey, and London Perrantes, playing with a broken nose, all scored 10 points.

Even without Justin Anderson, Virginia's second-leading scorer and top outside threat — out of the lineup for the seventh straight game with a broken finger — the Cavaliers proved too much for the Orange despite that dismal start.

Texas 61, No. 14 Baylor 59

(OT): Isaiah Taylor made a tear-drop shot in the lane with 4.8 seconds remaining to lift host Texas in overtime, snapping the Bears' four-game winning streak and the Longhorns' four-game losing streak.

Texas (18-12) improved to 7-10 in the Big 12 with one game remaining, keeping its hopes for an NCAA tournament bid alive. Last season, Oklahoma State became the first Big 12 team to get an at-large bid with a losing conference record (8-10).

Baylor (22-8, 10-7) had a chance to tie, but Kenny Chery's shot was blocked by Myles Turner with 1 second left.

Seven players from both teams were ejected in the overtime for leaving the bench during a brief skirmish between Taylor and Baylor's Royce O'Neale.

Demarcus Holland led Texas with 12

points. Kendal Yancy scored 11, one more than Javan Felix, who began the overtime with a three-pointer.

After an exchange of turnovers in the overtime, Taylor and O'Neale fell to the court, prompting the brief skirmish. Four Longhorns, including starters Yancy and Cam Ridley, were ejected along with key reserves Prince Ibeh and Connor Lammert. Three Baylor players, starter Johnathan Motley and subs Ishmail Wanwright and John Heard, were tossed.

No. 17 Iowa St. 77, No. 15

Oklahoma 70: Georges Niang had 20 of his 23 points in the second half and host Iowa State rallied from a 21-point deficit to snap a two-game losing streak.

Monte Morris had 19 points for the Cyclones (21-8, 11-6 Big 12), who maintained their shot at a share of the conference title following one of the wilder league games in years.

Oklahoma raced to a 19-point halftime lead. But Iowa State scored 22 straight points in just over 5 minutes and outscored the Sooners 59-33 in the second half.

Buddy Hield had 26 points for the Sooners (20-9, 11-6), who shot just 32 percent in the second half in losing for just the second time in 10 games.

Teams get testy as Heat top Suns

The Associated Press

MIAMI — Tyler Johnson scored a career-high 26 points and Goran Dragic added 21 against his former team as the Miami Heat beat the Phoenix Suns 115-98 on Monday night in a game that included two third-quarter altercations.

Hassan Whiteside finished with 17 points and 10 rebounds before getting ejected for Miami, which got 16 points and nine assists from Dwyane Wade.

P.J. Tucker had 20 points and 14 rebounds for the Suns, who also got 20 points from Eric Bledsoe. Markieff Morris and Brandon Knight scored 13 apiece.

The story line was supposed to be Dragic facing the club that traded him to Miami last month, amid hurt feelings on both sides.

Emotions boiled over instead. In all, there were five player technicals, three ejections and two flagrant fouls assessed in the third quarter alone, the 12 minutes of play needing 42 minutes to complete.

Morris was ejected for a flagrant-2 foul against Dragic in the third quarter, and Whiteside and Alex Len were both tossed later in the period after getting tangled up under the Miami basket.

Nets 110, Warriors 108: Jarrett Jack made a tiebreaking jumper with 1.1 seconds left as host Brooklyn overcame Stephen Curry's stirring fourth-quarter comeback attempt to beat Golden State.

Curry brought the Warriors back from 10 points down with under 4 minutes left to tie it, but couldn't get a final shot off after Jack's jumper.

Clippers 110, Timberwolves

105: Chris Paul had 26 points and 14 assists as Los Angeles allowed only one field goal in the fourth quarter to outlast host Minnesota.

Raptors 114, 76ers 103:

DeMar DeRozan scored a season-high 35 points and Lou Williams had 21 as visiting Toronto snapped a five-game losing streak with a win over Philadelphia.

Mavericks 102, Pelicans 93:

Richard Jefferson equaled his season high with 16 points, seven during a 16-0 Dallas run early in the third quarter, as the Mavericks raced past visiting New Orleans.

SEC chief hesitant to make freshmen ineligible

The Associated Press

Southeastern Conference Commissioner Mike Slive says it would be best to wait until after the NCAA's new initial eligibility standards take effect in 2016 before considering whether to keep freshmen off the field.

Slive said in a statement to The Associated Press on Monday that if the goal is to improve graduation rates and grade-point averages, "we have to remember that each college student has his or her own academic challenges."

"To put a blanket over these student-athletes with a year on the bench doesn't address those individual needs to incentivize academic progress. Many students do come to college prepared both academically and athletically ready to compete in the classroom and in competition, and to penalize those students with a universal policy may create unintended consequences not beneficial to many

student-athletes," he said.

Big Ten Commissioner Jim Delany has said he wants his conference to consider making freshmen ineligible in football and men's basketball, and Pac-12 Commissioner Larry Scott and Bob Bowlsby have both expressed support for at least examining the possibility.

However, Delany has stressed the Big Ten could not act alone on a "year of readiness" for freshmen football and basketball players because it would put the conference at a competitive disadvantage.

Slive's statement made it clear the SEC has no interest in diving into the freshmen eligibility question for at least a couple of years.

The NCAA initial eligibility standards go up starting with the freshman class of 2016. To be immediately eligible for competition, prospective student-athletes must have at least a 2.3 GPA, with a sliding scale tied to SAT scores. An SAT

score of 1,000 requires a 2.5 high school core-course GPA for competition and a 2.0 high school core-course GPA for aid and practice.

Prospects also must successfully complete 10 of the 16 total required core courses before the start of their senior year in high school.

"A lot of thought and preparation went into the new initial eligibility rules that go into effect in 2016. It is more appropriate to implement these new regulations and understand their impact before applying additional eligibility restrictions that may be more cosmetic than effective," Slive said.

Most college sports leaders have spoken out against the NBA's rule requiring American players to be 19 years old and a year out of high school to be drafted. The rule has created the so-called one-and-done player in college basketball.

New pickup Smith scores as Sharks blank Canadiens

The Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Ben Smith scored just hours after being acquired by San Jose in a deadline deal as the Sharks shut out the Montreal Canadiens for the third straight meeting in a 4-0 victory Monday night.

Joe Pavelski, Matt Irwin and Patrick Marleau also scored for the Sharks, who snapped an eight-game home losing streak by beating the team with the most points in the Eastern Conference.

Alex Stalock made 20 saves for his

fourth career shutout and first win since Jan. 6 at Minnesota. That performance followed Antti Niemi's two shutouts against the Canadiens last year, giving San Jose three consecutive shutouts against an opponent for the second time in team history.

Blackhawks 5, Hurricanes 2:

Jonathan Toews had two goals and assisted on Marian Hossa's score as host Chicago rolled to its third victory in four games.

Brandon Saad scored his 20th to reach

that mark for the first time in his career and Marcus Kruger also connected for the Blackhawks.

Corey Crawford made 27 saves for Chicago and lost his bid for a second consecutive shutout when Carolina's John Michael Liles scored at 4:29 of the third period. Alexander Semin also scored late in the third for the Hurricanes, who snapped a three-game winning streak.

Cam Ward allowed four goals on 18 shots through the first two periods for Carolina, and was replaced by Anton Khudobin to

start the third. Khudobin stopped seven of the eight shots he faced.

Rangers 4, Predators 1: Mats Zuccarello and Derick Brassard each had two assists as host New York rebounded from a rare regulation loss and sent NHL-leading Nashville to its season-worst third consecutive defeat.

Marc Staal, Chris Kreider, Dominic Moore and Rick Nash had goals for the Rangers. The team moved into a tie with the Islanders atop the Metropolitan Division.