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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Army substance-abuse clinics woes cited

USA Today

Twenty thousand soldiers who seek help each year at Army substance-abuse clinics encounter a program in such disarray that thousands who need treatment are turned away and more than two dozen others linked to poor care have spiraled into suicide, a USA Today investigation found.

The Army's transfer of substance-abuse outpatient treatment from medical to non-medical leadership in 2010 has led to substandard care, the mass exodus of veteran personnel and the hiring of unqualified clinic directors and counselors, according to senior Army clinical staff members and records obtained by USA Today.

"This is the crux of the whole thing," said Wanda Kuehr, a psychologist who agreed to speak out about the problems after

retiring Feb. 2 as the program's director of clinical services. Nonmedical managers want to "get the reports in on time and fill the slots. They think that makes a good program. Our goal is to give treatment to soldiers. And (the bosses) see that as inconsequential ... What's happening to soldiers matters and the Army can't just keep pushing things under the rug."

Five current staff members who described similar problems in interviews declined to be identified for fear of Army reprisals. They "are very frightened if they tell the truth they will lose their job," Kuehr said. "It's sad when we have (such) a climate."

The Army emphatically denies that its substance-abuse treatment efforts have declined.

Yet Kuehr and the current personnel said the strongest evidence is in quality-review

reports filed by Army clinic reviewers who visit each base, pore through medical files and talk with counselors. Dozens of these reports show chronic problems with poor diagnosis and treatment.

One tragic result: the Army estimates that since 2010, about 90 soldiers committed suicide within three months of receiving substance-abuse treatment. At least 31 suicides followed substandard care, according to tabulations by the clinical staff, although they did not specifically link the deaths to poor treatment.

In a 2012 case, Army managers hired an unlicensed counselor at Fort Sill in Oklahoma over the objections of senior clinical personnel. The counselor began seeing patients and gave a "good" rating to a soldier who hanged himself two hours later, according to an internal

Army report provided to USA Today.

Fourteen years of war have left thousands of soldiers coping with chronic pain from wounds or injuries, post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury, or family and financial discord. Many turn to alcohol to escape or abuse pain medication, counselors say. An Army survey over the past year finds that 104,000 soldiers — one in eight canvassed — report serious drinking problems.

An Institute of Medicine panel of scientific experts on substance abuse warned in a 2012 report that the military faces a public health crisis in drug and alcohol abuse. Members of the panel, part of the National Academy of Sciences, said they were surprised by documents supplied by USA Today showing that treatment efforts have gotten worse.

Iraqi troops, Islamic State group clash in Tikrit

The Associated Press

TIKRIT, Iraq — Rockets and mortars echoed across Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit on Thursday as Iraqi security forces clashed with Islamic State militants a day after sweeping into the Sunni city north of Baghdad.

Recapturing Tikrit is seen as a key step toward rolling back the extremist group, which seized much of northern and western Iraq last summer and controls about a third of Iraq and Syria.

Iraqi troops and allied Shiite militiamen entered Tikrit for the first time Wednesday from the north and south.

The head of the military operation told The Associated Press on Thursday that troops would launch phase two of the

offensive later in the day as they try to reach the city center.

The militants were trying to repel security forces with snipers, suicide car bombs, heavy machine guns and mortars, he said, speaking anonymously as he was not authorized to brief the media.

Tikrit, the capital of Salahuddin province, sits on the Tigris River about 80 miles north of Baghdad.

Several of Saddam's palaces remain there, and supporters of the deceased dictator are believed to have played a key role in the Islamic State group's seizure of the city last year.

In an interview with The Associated Press on the front line, Iraqi Defense Minister Khaled al-Obeidi said he expected security forces to reach the cen-

ter of Tikrit within three to four days. The operation to retake Tikrit is "essential to opening a corridor for security forces to move from the south to Mosul," he said, referring to Iraq's second-largest city and the militants' biggest stronghold.

He described the operation as "100 percent Iraqi, from the air and ground."

Military officials told the AP they are advancing with caution in an effort to limit damage to the city's infrastructure so residents can return quickly once Tikrit is retaken.

Earlier Thursday, al-Obeidi visited troops and met with senior military commanders of the Tikrit operation as well as Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force, an elite unit of Iran's Revolu-

tionary Guard. Soleimani and other Iranian advisers have played a key role in pushing the militants back in recent months.

The overt Iranian role and the prominence of Shiite militias in the campaign have raised fears of possible sectarian cleansing should Tikrit, an overwhelmingly Sunni city, fall to the government troops.

The U.S. has said its allied coalition carrying out airstrikes targeting the extremists has not been involved in the ongoing Tikrit offensive. Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has appealed for more aid for his country's beleaguered ground forces, though the U.S. spent billions of dollars training and equipping Iraq's army during its eight-year occupation.

Study: US must alter plan against Boko Haram

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The United States should develop a new approach to counter the Boko Haram militant group in Nigeria, in part because Nigerian leaders continue to use heavy-handed tactics that have alienated their citizens and yielded few results, according to a new report prepared for the U.S. military.

The report, “Rethinking the U.S. Approach to Boko Haram,” was released by CNA Corp., a Washington-area think tank, on Tuesday. It was requested by U.S. Naval Forces Africa as it developed a supporting plan to U.S. Africa Command’s regional vision for the Gulf of Guinea and West Africa, CNA officials said.

Boko Haram, designated a terrorist organization by Washington in 2013, on Saturday swore allegiance to the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria, although the strength of any ties between the two groups has been questioned by some U.S. intelligence officials.

The United States has cultivated a relationship with Nigeria, Africa’s most populous country with 180 million people, because it considers it strategically important and worthy of investment, CNA analysts said.

Black Hawk recorder located; ‘high-impact crash’ killed 11

The Associated Press

NAVARRE, Fla. — Military search crews have found the core of the Black Hawk helicopter that crashed amid dense fog during a Florida training mission, killing 11 people. The flight recorder is still in the wreckage, which settled below about 25 feet of water in the middle of Santa Rosa Sound, authorities said.

With the discovery of the copter’s shattered core, which has been inspected by divers, the response officially changed from search-and-rescue to search-and-recovery, Col. Monte Cannon, vice-commander of the 96th Test Wing, said at Eglin Air Force Base.

“It was certainly a high-impact crash,” said Eglin Fire

Chief Mark Giuliano.

“Very, very, very dense fog” still complicates recovery efforts, Giuliano added. There’s almost no visibility at the crash site, and search crews in boats are moving as slowly as they can in the rough surf to avoid running into each other or wreckage from the crash, he said.

The military is not yet releasing the names of those killed, nor any details about them, Cannon said.

Neither has it described the cause of the crash, which happened Tuesday night in weather conditions so bad that another helicopter turned back.

The same fog and crashing Gulf waves surrounded a pier where a large gathering held vigil Wednesday night, creat-

ing a somber backdrop to the songs, tears and prayers of people with strong ties to the military and the sprawling Eglin Air Force Base.

Dozens of airmen walked the shores of Santa Rosa Sound on Thursday, and the Coast Guard searched for debris in the water, said Mike Spaits, a base spokesman. Pieces of clothing and bits of the UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter have washed ashore, and homeowners have contacted the military to pick it up, he said.

The helicopter that crashed had a veteran crew from Hammond, La., that served multiple tours in Iraq and helped humanitarian missions after Gulf Coast hurricanes and the BP oil spill.

Oklahoma students hope racist video spurs change

NORMAN, Okla. — A video of University of Oklahoma fraternity members engaging in a racist chant outraged and angered students across the campus, but its release also has sparked a dialogue that many students hope will lead to positive changes at the school.

Protests and rallies have been

held every day on the campus in Norman since the release earlier this week of the video, which shows students participating in a chant that referenced lynching and indicates black students would never be admitted to OU’s chapter of Sigma Alpha Epsilon. On Wednesday, a town hall-style forum on diversity sponsored by the black student group Unheard was planned on

campus, and a student spokeswoman for the group said the incident appeared to be serving as a catalyst for change.

Among the group’s grievances are low numbers of black faculty and administrators, poor retention rates among black students and a lack of programs aimed at supporting black students.

From The Associated Press

2 officers shot outside Ferguson police station

The Associated Press

FERGUSON, Mo. — Two officers were shot in front of the Ferguson Police Department early Thursday as demonstrators gathered after the police chief resigned in the wake of a scathing Justice Department report alleging bias in the police force and local courts.

St. Louis County Police Chief Jon Belmar said one officer was shot in the face, just

below his right eye, with the bullet lodging behind his ear. The other officer was hit in the shoulder, and the bullet came out his back.

Both men were expected to recover without suffering any long-term damage, Belmar said, but the wounds easily could have been mortal.

“We could have buried two police officers next week over this,” he said.

The 32-year-old officer who was shot in the face was from nearby Webster Groves. The second officer, 41, came from St. Louis County.

Both were taken to a hospital, where Belmar said they were conscious.

Authorities believe the shots came from a handgun. There were no suspects in custody.

Based on where the officers were standing and the trajec-

tory of the bullets, the shots appeared to be aimed at the police, Belmar said.

“This is really an ambush,” he said. “You are basically defenseless. It is hard to guard against.”

The shots were fired shortly after midnight as protesters gathered following Wednesday’s resignation of embattled Ferguson Police Chief Thomas Jackson.

Suh signs with Dolphins

The Associated Press

The free agency frenzy, trading out-break and stunning retirements of the first day of the NFL's business year gave way to one headliner Wednesday: Ndamukong Suh.

Miami signed the All-Pro defensive tackle and top prize in this year's free agent crop to a \$114 million, six-year contract. It made Suh the highest-paid defensive player in NFL history, surpassing J.J. Watt's \$100 million, six-year deal with Houston.

They expect him to plug the line against the run, and threaten — and sack — quarterbacks.

"I'm excited about the pressure," Suh said, referring not to the pass rush but to the expectations that come with such a contract. "I don't necessarily look at it as pressure. I look at it as something I'm built for."

Also, All-Pro running back DeMarco Murray was expected to visit Philadelphia on Thursday, a person familiar with the meeting said. The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity Wednesday night because the Eagles haven't announced the visit. Philadelphia agreed to a three-year contract with running back Ryan Mathews earlier in the day, according to two people with knowledge of the deal.

Suh, the second overall pick in 2010, had

36 sacks in five seasons in Detroit, including 8½ in 2014.

Miami also released veteran defensive tackle Randy Starks.

While Suh was leaving the NFC North, one of the prime offensive tackles on the market was staying there.

Green Bay re-signed right tackle Bryan Bulaga, ensuring that the NFL's highest-scoring team will keep its entire offense intact for 2015. The deal is believed to be for five years and \$34 million, with an \$8 million signing bonus.

Days before Bulaga came back, the Packers re-signed receiver Randall Cobb.

Some second-tier quarterbacks were on the move Wednesday.

The Jets acquired Ryan Fitzpatrick from Houston, and he was replaced there by Brian Hoyer.

The Jets also signed G James Carpenter, who won a Super Bowl with Seattle.

In other moves Wednesday:

■ Chicago agreed to terms with three-time Pro Bowl safety Antrel Rolle on a three-year deal, and LB Pernell McPhee on a five-year contract.

Rolle, a 10-year veteran, has 26 interceptions with the Arizona Cardinals and New York Giants.

McPhee played behind Terrell Suggs and Elvis Dumervil in Baltimore and had 7½ sacks last season.

■ Kansas City and offensive guard Paul Fanaika have agreed to terms on a three-year deal, a person familiar with the ne-

gotiations told The Associated Press.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity Wednesday night because the Chiefs have not announced the deal. Fanaika still must pass a physical for it to be complete. Fanaika was a seventh-round draft pick of the Eagles in 2009, when Chiefs coach Andy Reid was in charge.

■ Cincinnati reformed its offensive line by re-signing G Clint Boling and OT Eric Winston.

■ Tampa Bay released DE Michael Johnson, an expensive free agent the Bucs added last year, and tackle Anthony Collins. They also agreed to a four-year, \$20.5 million deal with linebacker Bruce Carter.

■ St. Louis traded with Houston for backup QB Case Keenum and also re-signed TE Lance Kendricks.

■ Minnesota re-signed DT Tom Johnson, who had 6½ sacks in 2014, and added QB Shaun Hill to back up Teddy Bridgewater.

■ New England added to its receiving group by signing Brandon Gibson and Kevin Dorsey and re-signing Brian Tyms.

■ Oakland bulked up its defense with DT Dan Williams and LB Curtis Lofton.

■ Philadelphia added CB Walter Thurmond III on a one-year contract.

■ Tennessee agreed to terms with WR Harry Douglas and signed S Da'Norris Searcy.

■ Washington signed defensive lineman Stephen Paea.

Rangers take lead in Metro

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — New York Rangers goalie Cam Talbot found himself in a difficult spot, facing a 5-on-3 power play with two of the NHL's top three scorers on the ice for the Washington Capitals.

With a flick of the wrist Wednesday night, Talbot came through with a tough-as-can-be stop, helping the Rangers move atop the Metropolitan Division with a 3-1 victory over Alex Ovechkin, Nicklas Backstrom and the rest of the Capitals.

Ovechkin scored his 45th goal and 21st on a power play — both best in the NHL — but otherwise was quieted by the Rangers.

Maple Leafs 4, Sabres 3 (SO): Tyler Bozak tied the score late in regulation and then had the only shootout goal for host Toronto.

Jonathan Bernier had 30 saves through overtime and then stopped all three shots he faced in the tiebreaker.

Flames 6, Ducks 3: Johnny Gaudreau and Matt Stajan each scored two goals, leading host Calgary to a win.

Sean Monahan and Jiri Hudler also scored for the Flames, who returned to play at the Saddledome for the first time since a 6-3 loss to the Ducks on Feb. 20.

Aldridge, Blazers hold off Rockets

The Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — Portland won the game and the series, and that could have implications down the line.

The Trail Blazers held off a late charge by the Rockets on Wednesday night for a 105-100 victory, pulling into a tie with Houston for third in the Western Conference. LaMarcus Aldridge led the way with 26 points and 14 rebounds.

But the win was more than that: Portland won the regular-season series 2-1 and claimed the head-to-head tiebreaker for the first time since the 2010-11 season.

"It was a big game for us, and we all knew it. I thought everyone was locked in, focused and ready to go," Aldridge said. "Our guys played great."

The Trail Blazers limited James Harden to 18 points. He was averaging just over 27 points to rank second in the league, and he'd scored more than 40 in two previous games against Portland this season.

Clippers 120, Thunder 108: Chris Paul had 33 points and nine assists, J.J. Redick added 25 points and Los Angeles beat host Oklahoma City, ending the Thunder's seven-game home winning streak.

DeAndre Jordan had 18 points and 17 rebounds for the Clippers, who are fighting for a top-four seed in the Western Conference playoffs. Oklahoma City is

battling to merely make the field and fell a half-game behind the New Orleans Pelicans in the race for the final playoff spot.

Warriors 105, Pistons 98: Klay Thompson reached the 5,000-point milestone and knocked down two late three-pointers in a 1:09 span, leading Golden State past visiting Detroit for its fifth straight win.

Nuggets 115, Hawks 102: Danilo Gallinari had 23 points, Will Barton added 16 and host Denver beat Eastern Conference-leading Atlanta for its eighth straight home win over the Hawks.

Kyle Korver had 18 points to lead Atlanta. He hit five three-pointers to give him 1,697 in his career and move him past Kobe Bryant (1,694) for 12th in NBA history.

Celtics 95, Grizzlies 92: Marcus Smart converted a go-ahead, three-point play with 52 seconds left, Avery Bradley added a clutch jumper with 8 seconds remaining and host Boston ended a five-game losing streak against Memphis.

Heat 104, Nets 98: Dwyane Wade had 28 points and nine assists, Chris Andersen tied a career high with 18 points and set a season high with 14 rebounds, and Miami finished off a season sweep of visiting Brooklyn.

Bulls 104, 76ers 95 (OT): Aaron Brooks scored seven of his season-high 31 points in overtime to help short-handed Chicago beat host Philadelphia.

Pau Gasol had 27 points and 16 rebounds, and Nikola Mirotic finished with 16 points and 12 rebounds for the Bulls.

Suns 106, Timberwolves 97: Markieff Morris scored 24 points, Eric Bledsoe had 18 points and nine assists and Phoenix beat visiting Minnesota.

Rookie T.J. Warren added a career-high 17 points, and Marcus Thornton hit back-to-back three-pointers early in the fourth quarter and finished with 14 points.

Kings 113, Hornets 106: Ben McLemore scored 27 points, Rudy Gay added 26 and Sacramento beat host Charlotte to snap a four-game losing streak.

Charlotte's Kemba Walker had six points in 16 minutes off the bench after missing 18 games following knee surgery, but the Hornets lost center Al Jefferson to a strained right calf in the third quarter.

Bucks 97, Magic 91: Khris Middleton scored a season-high 30 points for the second time in three games to lead host Milwaukee past Orlando.

Middleton was 12-for-17 from the floor. Nikola Vucevic had 19 points and 14 rebounds for Orlando.

US blanks France for Algarve Cup

The Associated Press

The United States not only avenged last month's stinging loss to France with its 10th Algarve Cup title, the Americans addressed concerns about their readiness for the Women's World Cup.

Hope Solo stopped a late penalty kick to preserve her 81st international shut-out and lead the U.S. over France 2-0 Wednesday night at Faro, Portugal.

Julie Johnston and Christen Press scored for the second-ranked U.S., which rebounded from a 0-0 draw against Iceland on Monday. Solo made her 160th start in goal, passing Briana Scurry for the American record.

It was Solo's third shutout of the tournament, the U.S. team's last before the World Cup in Canada. She started every Algarve match for the United States.

No. 3 France had defeated the U.S. 2-0 last month in an exhibition in Lorient, the first win for Les Bleus in 17 games against the Americans. It was the U.S. team's 20th Algarve Cup appearance and first title since 2013.



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Dull season removes shine

Buzz for March Madness muted as state of college game decried

The Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, MO. — On a cold night on Tobacco Road, North Carolina and Duke went back and forth in an overtime college basketball thriller. It was gripping, edge-of-your seat stuff. Tense to the final second.

In short, it looked nothing like Duke's game against Florida State nine days earlier, when the teams missed five three-pointers, two free throws, and committed five turnovers, all before the first media timeout. Florida led at that point, 2-0.

"Never seen a media timeout with a score quite like this," tweeted ESPN analyst Jay Bilas, an outspoken critic of the state of college hoops. "Maybe in baseball."

Bilas is not alone in his concern. Scoring is at a near-record low this season. Fouls are soaring. Attendance has dropped precipitously in many places, and U.S. television ratings are struggling to reach last year's levels.

The fact that the NCAA tournament, starting next week and long-considered recession proof, has struggled to build buzz is perhaps the most damning evidence of the dire state of the game.

"I do have some healthy concerns," said Dan Gavitt, the NCAA vice president for men's college basketball. "If the game continues to go in the direction it has been the last several years, with scoring being down and physical play being up, it could really hurt it."

It's a sobering assessment from one of the game's most important stakeholders.

Attendance in men's Division I basket-

ball has fallen for seven straight seasons, from an average of 5,327 in 2006-07 to 4,817 last year. The Southeastern Conference even asked its TV partners for flexibility in scheduling to help drive fans to the arena.

Not that life has been easy on broadcasters, either. ESPN and CBS, two networks with a long college basketball tradition, have both weathered a decline in ratings this season. As of last week, ESPN was averaging just under 1.5 million viewers on its main network for men's basketball games, down about 6 percent from the same period last year.

The NCAA tried to intervene last year, instituting rules designed to boost scoring and free up offenses. They have failed to stick.

Now, some schools have resorted to outlandish gimmicks to sell seats, and TV executives have been force to expand pregame shows to help drive interest.

"We do so many games, you see all kinds," said Nick Dawson, the senior director of programming and acquisitions for ESPN, whose job is to help televise more than 1,300 games. "There are some played at a high level, fantastic entertainment value, great flow. We've seen a bunch. But you also get a bunch that don't have that flow, and that don't live up to those expectations."

Just consider some of those games:

■ Georgia Tech was held to 28 points by Virginia in late January, one of three times Virginia has kept an opponent below 30 points. In one of those games, Virginia didn't do a whole lot better, grinding its way to a 45-26 victory over Rutgers.

■ Arizona and Utah, two teams with

national title aspirations, combined for 46 fouls a couple of weeks ago. Arizona star Stanley Johnson went 3-for-19 from the field.

■ Think that was a lot of fouls? St. Francis and LIU-Brooklyn conspired to commit 66 fouls and shoot 97 free throws last month, accounting for nearly half of the points scored.

■ In a game against West Virginia, Kansas went 0-for-15 from beyond the arc, and won.

"Scoring is down. A lot of that is bad offense," Kansas coach Bill Self said. "It is easier to coach defense than offense, and a lot of times easier to stop people than it is to exploit people. A lot of coaches feel that way."

Self is among the faction that believes college basketball is still a robust product, albeit one that could benefit from a few tweaks. In interviews by The Associated Press with more than a dozen coaches, players and administrators, a few ideas continually came up, dealing either with the layout of the court or the mechanics of the game.

On the court, several officials suggested widening the lane, which would curtail some of the physical play in the post while allowing more freedom of movement. They also suggested extending the three-point line to the NBA arc, which would revive the midrange jumper.

"With social media, Facebook, Twitter, you can dissect it backward and forward, and you can find something wrong with it if you want," TCU coach Trent Johnson said. "But I think the Final Four and the NCAA Tournament is still a great event, as exciting as there is."

Lafayette wins title, NCAA bid

The Associated Press

EASTON, Pa. — Nick Lindner was left off the Patriot League's first and second teams. Right now, the Lafayette point guard is looking like the league's best player.

Lindner scored 25 points — including two game-clinching free throws with 14.5 seconds left — and the Leopards held off several second-half runs by American to beat the Eagles 65-63 in the Patriot League tournament championship Wednesday night.

Fourth-seeded Lafayette (20-12) became the lowest seed to win the league tournament title — and its automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament — in its 25-year history.

Lindner scored 71 points in the three tournament games on 24-for-39 shooting and added 16 assists to earn the tourney MVP honors.

"[Lindner] is on one of the biggest runs I've ever seen," Lafayette's Seth Hinrichs said. "He's just carried us the last three games."

After defending champion and sixth-seeded American (17-16) took 55-53 lead on Marko Vasic's three-point play with 5:07 left, the Lafayette got consecutive three-pointers from Hinrichs and Zach Rufer to regain the lead for good.

With Lafayette up 61-60, Lindner hit a driving shot with 38 seconds left. After American's John Schoof missed a three, and Lindner made his two free throws to seal it.

Hinrichs finished with 16 points and Rufer had five points and five rebounds in 10 minutes off the bench.

"Without [Rufer], we're not winning the game," Hinrichs said.

Rufer hadn't scored that many points since Jan. 2.

"It's something I'm used to," he said of limited minutes. "I've been doing it all year. It's something I just try to get better at."

Vasic and Pee Wee Gardner had 15 points each to lead the Eagles.

Lafayette opened up its biggest lead at 40-27 early in the second half on consecutive three-pointers by Bryce Scott and Michael Hoffman, but American responded with seven in a row to pull within six on Gardner's basket with 15:47 remaining.

Lafayette then led 48-36 after three consecutive pull-up jumpers by Hinrichs, but American scored nine straight points to pull to 50-47 with less than 9 minutes left.

Lindner scored 16 points in the first half to give Lafayette a 34-25 lead at the break.

American had nine field goals and 10 turnovers in the first 20 minutes.

The Eagles led until Lindner hit an open three-pointer from the top of the key to give the Leopards a 17-15 lead with 10:45 to go in the first half. Lafayette led the rest of the half.

Lafayette, which made 13 of 19 shots (68.4 percent) in the opening half, had runs of 11-0 and 7-0 to create a little cushion. Lindner's drive with 1:40 remaining gave the Leopards their biggest lead of the half at 30-21.

The Leopards last won a league tournament title in 2000, the second of two in a row. They were 0-4 in Patriot League finals before Wednesday.

The Eagles finished the regular season with a losing record in league play (8-10) for just the second time since joining the Patriot League in 2001-02 season. Their sixth-place finish also was their lowest in their 14-year affiliation with the league.

NC State improves tournament chances

The Associated Press

North Carolina State should be in. Pittsburgh is almost certainly out.

If there was a single game Wednesday night that produced solid conclusions for both teams involved, it was the Wolfpack's 81-70 victory over the Panthers in the second round of the Atlantic Coast Conference tournament.

North Carolina State earned its 20th win of the season, further solidifying an already decent position as an at-large selection for the NCAA bracket. Pitt, meanwhile, was barely on the bubble with its 8-10 conference record and a three-game losing streak heading into the postseason. By extending that streak to four, the Panthers (19-14) have the looks of an NIT team.

Two more bubble teams, Miami and Texas, were in action later Wednesday night. Miami beat Virginia Tech 59-49 in the ACC and Texas defeated Texas Tech 65-53 in the Big 12.

A look at the potential gains and losses from Wednesday's light schedule and the fuller slate Thursday.

N.C. State: The Wolfpack have won 20 for the fourth straight year. Already considered one of six solid ACC teams in the tournament, the win over Pittsburgh eliminated any doubt. Next up: A quarter-final game against No. 2 Duke, a team N.C. State has already beaten once this year. A win there and the Wolfpack would start getting greedy about seeding, not simply making it.

Texas, Miami: Despite its 3-11 record against teams in the top 50 of the RPI, Texas has more going for it among this twosome. Miami lost by 20 at home to Georgia Tech, which finished second-to-last in the ACC. Nevertheless, both teams won Wednesday and had at least one more chance each to make their case. On Thursday, Miami played Notre Dame and Texas played Iowa State.

UCLA, Temple: These are teams that can still help themselves a whole bunch, because they haven't played a game in their respective conference tournaments yet. But before they take the court (UCLA vs. Southern California on Thursday, Pac-12, and Temple vs. Memphis on Friday, AAC), they could gain plenty if some other bubble teams falter. For instance, Illinois, Stanford and Texas A&M will all have played at least once before either the Bruins or Owls hit the floor.

Old Dominion: Even though Old Dominion is ranked 37 in the RPI, it's the second seed heading into the Conference USA tournament, behind Louisiana Tech. If the Monarchs can't win the tournament and the automatic bid, they'd still have a chance thanks to a good RPI that results from quality wins over LSU and VCU. The selection committee likes programs that go out and play tough teams. It likes them more when they actually win the games.

Iona, Murray State: Iona and Murray State are the most obvious victims of the realities of modern-day college basketball. They pretty much dominated their conference regular

seasons. (Iona won the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference by two games and Murray State went undefeated in the Ohio Valley Conference.) Then, they got to their tournaments, where the automatic bid is awarded, and they flopped. Iona has an RPI of 54 but it's hard to find a true standout win among the 26 the Gaels racked up this year. As for Murray State, well, sometimes the committee likes to reward dominance in a decent conference. But there's a 27-point loss to Xavier and a 35-point loss to Valparaiso and no particularly strong wins to offset those.

BYU: The BYU Cougars have 25 wins, including a victory at Gonzaga last month. They have Kyle Collinsworth, who shares the career NCAA record with six triple-doubles. They have the No. 36 ranking in the RPI. But with a chance to beat Gonzaga in the WCC tournament Tuesday night and seal an automatic bid, the Cougars went flat. They fell 91-75. This is the dictionary's true definition of a bubble team, and all BYU can do for the rest of the week is sit back, watch the games and hope some things break right.

Indiana, Illinois: Before Thursday's games, the Hoosiers and Illini had identical records (19-12, 9-9), were Nos. 60 and 61, respectively, in the RPI but both had Big Ten games on Thursday that they need to win, at least if they want to be considered serious tournament contenders. But there are no gimmes in that conference, and if Illinois falls to Michigan or Indiana loses to Northwestern, the bubble could burst.