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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Official: US coalition joins Tikrit offensive

The Associated Press

TIKRIT, Iraq — The U.S.-led coalition targeting the Islamic State group has begun surveillance flights over the extremist-held city of Tikrit and is sending intelligence to Iraqi forces fighting to retake Saddam Hussein's hometown, a senior official said Tuesday.

The flights and intelligence sharing, which began Saturday, mark the first time the coalition has been involved in the offensive, which up to now largely has been supported by Iranian advisers including Gen. Qassem Soleimani, commander of the powerful Revolutionary Guard Quds Force.

The coalition official, who spoke on condition of anonymity as he was not authorized to speak to journalists about the matter, said the support began at the request of the Iraqi government. He declined to comment on whether the coalition

is providing airstrikes, saying he cannot discuss current or future operations.

Pentagon spokesman Col. Steve Warren declined to say Tuesday whether the U.S. military was conducting aerial intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, or ISR, flights over Tikrit, but told reporters that the U.S. is conducting ISR operations "throughout Iraq and Syria."

He would not say whether the Iraqi government had requested U.S. support for the Tikrit operation.

"I will let the Iraqis speak to their requests," he told reporters.

The U.S. is not conducting airstrikes around Tikrit in support of Iraqi forces, Warren said, although "nothing is ruled in or out."

The coalition official declined to discuss whether U.S. forces were directly communicating with Iranians on the ground

there. U.S. officials repeatedly have said they are not in contact with Iranians in Iraq.

"We are conducting no military coordination with the Iranians," Warren told reporters Tuesday.

Iraqi security forces, backed by Iranian-supported Shiite militias, launched a large-scale offensive to recapture Tikrit earlier this month. The U.S. previously had said that the Iraqi government never asked them to participate in the campaign.

A senior Iraqi military official said that the coalition is not providing airstrikes in support of the Tikrit operation at this time but that it launched airstrikes in the nearby oil refinery town of Beiji on Tuesday.

Tikrit is one of the largest cities held by Islamic State militants and lies on the road connecting Baghdad to Mosul. Retaking it will help Iraqi forces have a major supply link for

any future operation to retake Mosul, the country's second-largest city.

U.S. military officials have said that a coordinated military mission to retake Mosul likely will begin in April or May and involve up to 25,000 Iraqi troops.

But the Americans have cautioned that if the Iraqis are not ready, the offensive could be delayed. The U.S. and other coalition nations have been providing weapons and training to Iraqi and Kurdish forces in the north.

The U.S.-led airstrike campaign, launched in August, nearly has halted the Islamic State rampage across Iraq. The Tikrit operation is the largest to date.

The mission to retake Tikrit has stalled in recent weeks, with Iraqi officials saying they will not rush a final assault.

Stars and Stripes reporter Jon Harper contributed to this report.

All aboard jet that crashed in French Alps feared dead

The Associated Press

SEYNE-LES-ALPES, France — A Germanwings passenger jet carrying at least 150 people crashed Tuesday in a snowy, remote section of the French Alps, sounding like an avalanche as it scattered pulverized debris across the area. All aboard were feared dead, French officials said.

There was no obvious reason why the Germanwings A320 plane should have crashed in the middle of its flight from Barcelona, Spain, to Duesseldorf, Germany, and German Chancellor Angela Merkel urged people not to speculate on the cause. In Washington, the White House said American officials were in contact with French, Spanish

and German counterparts.

"There is no indication of a nexus to terrorism at this time," said National Security Council spokeswoman Bernadette Meehan.

The crash left officials and families across Europe in shock. Sobbing, grieving families at both Barcelona and Duesseldorf airports were led away by airport workers and crisis counselors.

The plane left Barcelona at 9:55 a.m. Germanwings official Thomas Winkelmann said it began descending again shortly after it reached its cruising height of 38,000 feet following takeoff from Barcelona-El Prat Airport. The descent lasted eight minutes, he told reporters in Cologne. Radar and air-

traffic control contact with the plane broke off at 10:53 a.m. at an altitude of about 6,000 feet.

The plane crashed in a mountainous zone in the French Alps at an altitude of about 6,550 feet, said Pierre-Henry Brandet, the French Interior Ministry spokesman.

Winkelmann said the pilot had more than 10 years of experience working for Germanwings and its parent airline, Lufthansa. Airbus said the A320 was delivered to Lufthansa in 1991.

Germanwings said Flight 9525 carried 144 passengers, including two babies, and six crewmembers.

The crash site is at Meolans-Revels, near the popular ski resort of Pra Loup, according to Eric Ciotti, the head of the

regional council in southeast France. The site is 430 miles south-southeast of Paris. But with mountains all around and few clear trails into the area, access to the crash site was expected to take time.

Brandet told BFM television he expected "an extremely long and extremely difficult" search-and-rescue operation because of the area's remoteness. The weather in the area deteriorated Tuesday afternoon, with a chilly rain falling.

"It was a deafening noise. I thought it was an avalanche, although it sounded slightly different. It was short noise and lasted just a few seconds," Sandrine Boisse, the president of the Pra Loup tourism office, told The Associated Press.

Obama, Afghanistan president to finalize plans for US withdrawal

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama welcomed Afghanistan's new president to the Oval Office on Tuesday for their first White House meeting, as the U.S. military firmed up plans to slow its departure from the country.

How many troops the U.S. will leave behind — and for how long — was the focus of daylong White House meetings, the centerpiece of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's highly anticipated visit to the U.S. On the job only six months, Ghani is trying to make the case that he's a reliable partner worthy of American support, despite his fractured government and a litany of problems still rampant in Afghanistan's military — illiteracy, drug abuse and desertions, to name a few.

Ghani arrived at midmorning at the White House, where a U.S. military honor guard lined the driveway leading to the West Wing. Inside, he and Obama chatted casually and sat side by side as reporters were allowed briefly to observe the start of their meeting.

Obama planned to address the troop decision during a joint news conference with

Officials: Suspected US drone strike kills 9

DERA ISMAIL KHAN, Pakistan — Two intelligence officials in Pakistan say a suspected U.S. drone strike just across the border in Afghanistan has killed at least nine militants.

The officials say Tuesday's strike in Afghanistan's Nangarhar province targeted militants with the Pakistani terrorist group Lashkar-e-Islam. That group recently announced it would join forces with the Pakistani Taliban to fight government forces in that country.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity as they weren't authorized to discuss the strike.

It wasn't immediately possible to corroborate the officials' claims about the strike in the rural, mountainous region.

From The Associated Press

Ghani later in the day.

For Obama, Ghani represents the last, best hope to make good on the president's promise to end America's longest war by the time he leaves office, keeping just 1,000 or so troops at the embassy to coordinate security.

Ghani predecessor Hamid Karzai's relationship with the White House was increasingly dysfunctional, and if the dealings with Ghani don't turn out better, Obama risks leaving Afghanistan still vulnerable to the kinds of violent extremist groups that operated with impunity until 14 years ago, when the U.S. attacked after 9/11.

Yet Ghani's government has asked the president to keep more U.S. troops in his coun-

try for longer, as Afghan forces brace for a tough spring fighting season and contend with Islamic State fighters looking to recruit on their soil.

In the run-up to their meeting, the prospect of the U.S. slowing its exit has become almost a foregone conclusion, with officials predicting the U.S. will likely leave many of the 9,800 American troops there now long into next year. The original plan was to cut to 5,500 by the end of 2015.

Also at stake: the future of U.S. bases in Jalalabad and in Kandahar, where the Taliban had their capital until 2001.

U.S. military leaders have seemed receptive to Ghani's request that those bases stay open as long as possible.

US strategy collapses amid chaos in Yemen

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Once hailed by President Barack Obama as a model for fighting extremism, the U.S. counterterrorism strategy in Yemen has all but collapsed as the country descends into chaos, according to U.S. and Yemeni officials.

Operations against militants have been scaled back dramatically amid the fall of the American-backed government and the evacuation of U.S. personnel. What had been consistent pressure on Yemen's dangerous al-Qaida affiliate has been relieved, the officials say, and a safe haven exists for the development of an offshoot of the Islamic State group.

It's a swift and striking transformation for an anti-terrorism campaign Obama heralded just six months ago as the template for efforts to fight the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. The shift has left Obama open to criticism that he failed to anticipate the risks of a light-presence strategy that aims to put fragile governments and beleaguered local security forces, not the U.S. military, at the forefront.

Barbara Bodine, a former U.S. ambassador to Yemen, said even the most optimistic regional experts did not share Obama's view that the Yemen campaign was a model of success.

"It was being defined in terms of what we were doing to develop local forces and use drones and counter the immediate and real security threat," said Bodine, now director of the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy at Georgetown University. "But what we hadn't done, certainly had not done visibly enough, was get at the economic and governance issues that were driving the problem."

Navy to get its own V-22 Osprey fleet

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE

Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The Navy says it plans to obtain its own fleet of 44 V-22 Ospreys, taking possession of eight a year starting in 2020.

The decision to replace the aging fleet of C-2A Greyhound cargo aircraft with the tilt-rotor hybrid was made in an internal working document drafted earlier this year that laid the groundwork for funding, Navy spokesman Lt. Robert Myers wrote in a statement to Stars and Stripes.

The Navy V-22 Joint Program Office expects to issue a contract for development of a Navy variant in fiscal 2016, with production beginning in fiscal 2018. Operating as a basic transport aircraft, the Navy variant will be virtually the same as the

Marine Corps MV-22, but will add an extended-range fuel system, high-frequency radio and public-address system, Myers said.

"The Navy conducted a V-22 Military Utility Assessment to assess the viability of the V-22 to perform the [carrier-onboard-delivery] mission from the aircraft carrier and evaluate its impact on flight deck and cyclic operations," Myers said. "Within the scope of this assessment, the V-22 demonstrated an effective, flexible and safe capability."

Navy pilots currently train alongside their Marine counterparts to develop a knowledge base for the aircraft, Myers said. The Osprey already operates off Navy carriers.

Curry helps Warriors overwhelm Wizards

The Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Closing in on the NBA's top playoff seed, the Golden State Warriors have been at their best.

Stephen Curry scored 24 points, and the Warriors used a smothering defensive effort in the third quarter to pound the Washington Wizards 107-76 on Monday night.

"I think the last few games have been a real progression for us in terms of just being very methodical and professional," coach Steve Kerr said.

The Warriors held the Wizards without a field goal for nearly 11 minutes after halftime, with Washington missing its first 15 shots. Golden State outscored the Wizards 29-8 in the quarter to take a 24-point lead.

"The shots started to fall as we got momentum and confidence in the third quarter and got our crowd into it. It was fun," Curry said.

The MVP candidate added six assists and five rebounds as the NBA-leading Warriors (57-13) moved closer to securing home-court advantage throughout the playoffs. Golden State has a huge lead over Memphis (50-21) in the Western Conference and is pulling away from East-leading Atlanta (53-17) as well.

The Warriors became the first team in league history to complete two perfect six-game homestands in the same season. They are an NBA-best 34-2 at home, where sellout crowds are rocking road teams nightly.

Bradley Beal scored 12 points, and John Wall finished with 11 points, five assists and five rebounds for the Wizards, who have lost three straight. Washington, which shot 33.3 percent, was held to a season low in points.

"It was like we were playing in mud, walking up and down," Wizards coach Randy Wittman said.

Washington was down just three at the

half before falling apart.

Celtics 110, Nets 91: Evan Turner had 19 points, 12 assists and 10 rebounds as the host Celtics snapped a three-game losing streak that had dropped them out of playoff position.

Avery Bradley scored 20 points to lead the Celtics, who moved a half-game ahead of Charlotte for the final playoff spot in the Eastern Conference.

Rockets 110, Pacers 100: James Harden scored 19 of his 44 points in the fourth quarter as the Rockets handed the host Pacers their sixth straight loss.

Josh Smith added 18 points for the Rockets (47-23), who have won four of five.

Indiana's sinking playoff hopes took another big hit despite 23 points from C.J. Watson. George Hill had 20 points for the Pacers (30-40).

Bulls 98, Hornets 86: Nikola Mirotic scored 14 of his 28 points in the fourth quarter as the host Bulls clinched a playoff spot.

Pau Gasol had 27 points and 12 rebounds as Chicago moved into a tie with Toronto for third place in the Eastern Conference. Jimmy Butler added 19 points in his return to the lineup after missing 11 games with a sprained left elbow.

Grizzlies 103, Knicks 82: Zach Randolph scored 23 points, Marc Gasol had 21 as Memphis secured a playoff spot with the road win.

The Grizzlies (50-21) shot 52 percent from the field in their third consecutive victory. Vince Carter added 14 points.

Timberwolves 106, Jazz 104 (OT): Rookie guard Zach LaVine scored 27 points, including two three-pointers to force overtime, as visiting Minnesota rallied.

LaVine's clutch shots in the fourth quarter set up a 6-1 Minnesota run to start overtime that the Jazz couldn't overcome.

Terps oust Tigers

The Associated Press

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — Backed by the president and toting an unbeaten record, Princeton provided the women's NCAA tournament with a very good story line.

That book is now closed, courtesy of top-seeded Maryland.

Laurin Mincy scored 27 points, and the Terrapins used a second-half blitz to knock off Princeton 85-70 Monday night and advance to the Sweet 16 for the fourth consecutive year.

After leading by only 42-38 at the break, Maryland used a 17-2 run immediately after halftime to turn a surprisingly tight game into a rout.

The Terrapins (32-2) will bring a 26-game winning streak into a matchup with Duke on Saturday in Spokane, Wash. Maryland and Duke were longtime rivals in the Atlantic Coast Conference before the Terps moved to the Big Ten this season.

President Barack Obama cheered for the Tigers (31-1) on Saturday in their tournament opener and picked the Ivy League champs to beat Maryland, in part because his niece plays at Princeton.

"Coming in, playing an undefeated team, a team that Obama had picked over us, it gave us some added motivation to come in and make a statement," Mincy said.

That didn't come until the second half, after Maryland struggled through a lackluster opening 20 minutes.

Tennessee 77, Pittsburgh 67: Bashaara Graves scored 21 points and had 14 rebounds as host Tennessee withstood a late rally.

The second-seeded Lady Vols (29-5) improved to 56-0 in NCAA tournament home games and advanced to a Spokane region semifinal Saturday against No. 11 seed Gonzaga (26-7).

Oklahoma City Regional

Stanford 86, Oklahoma 76: Amber Orange scored 24 points and Lili

Thompson added 19 as Stanford's back-court mates took the game over in the second half to lead the fourth-seeded host Cardinal.

Bonnie Samuelson scored 19 points and Briana Roberson provided a spark with 13 points and tough defense to help Stanford (26-9) protect its home court.

Greensboro Regional

Florida State 65, Florida Gulf Coast 47: Shakayla Thomas scored 12 points and Leticia Romero added 11 to help No. 2 Florida State end seventh-seeded Florida Gulf Coast's 26-game winning streak.

Arizona State 57, Arkansas-Little Rock 54: Sophie Brunner had 16 points and scored the go-ahead basket with less than a minute left, helping host Arizona State rally from a 16-point deficit.

Promise Amukamara added 17 points for the Sun Devils (29-5), who face Florida State in the regional semifinal on Friday.

North Carolina 86, Ohio State 84: Jamie Cherry hit a jumper with 0.6 seconds left for host North Carolina.

Stephanie Mavunga had a career-high 27 points and 14 rebounds, Allisha Gray added 20 points and Brittany Rountree had 15 for the fourth-seeded Tar Heels (26-8).

Albany Regional

UConn 91, Rutgers 55: Kaleena Mosqueda-Lewis scored 23 points to lead No. 1 UConn (34-1) to a rout of visiting Rutgers on Geno Auriemma's 61st birthday, putting the Huskies into the regional semifinals for the 22nd consecutive season.

Louisville 60, South Florida 52: Jude Schimmel scored 13 points, Myisha Hines-Allen added 12 and No. 3 seed Louisville reached its third consecutive Sweet 16.

Louisville (27-6) will face Dayton in the round of 16.

Senators gain wild-card edge with 7th straight win

The Associated Press

OTTAWA, Ontario — Now that the Ottawa Senators have moved into a playoff position in the Eastern Conference, they have a few weeks left to make sure they get to the postseason.

Mika Zibanejad scored twice, and the Senators held off the San Jose Sharks for a 5-2 win Monday night.

The Senators (37-24-11) earned their seventh straight win and jumped one point ahead of the Boston Bruins for the second wild-card spot in the East with a game in hand. Ottawa is above the postseason cutoff for the first time since late November.

Ottawa's run has been impressive, as the Senators are 17-2-2 in their past 21 games. They trailed the Bruins by 14 points in early February.

"We've been chasing it, and that's been our goal to get inside the eight, so it's real enjoyable," Ottawa coach Dave Cameron said. "Wins are always nice, and they're really nice in this case because we're in the top eight with a day off [Tuesday]."

"It's time to sit back and regroup and actually enjoy it for a day."

Alex Chiasson, Jean-Gabriel Pageau and Mike Hoffman, with an empty-net goal, also scored for Ottawa. Andrew Hammond, making his seventh straight start, stopped 29 shots and improved to 14-0-1 in his first 15 NHL starts.

Joe Pavelski and Chris Tierney scored for the Sharks. Antti Niemi made 32 saves.

Kings 3, Devils 1: Anze Kopitar had a goal and two assists as defending Stanley Cup champion Los Angeles beat host New Jersey at the start of a five-game trip.

Andrej Sekera and Tyler Toffoli also scored for the Kings, who are on the outside of the Western Conference playoff picture. Marian Gaborik added two assists, and Jonathan Quick made 19 saves.

Blackhawks 3, Hurricanes 1: Andrew Shaw scored two goals as visiting Chicago held off Carolina.

Corey Crawford made 43 saves for the Blackhawks, who have earned a point in 18 of their past 21 games and are fourth in the Western Conference.

Patrick Sharp had a goal and assist, and Blackhawks coach Joel Quenneville earned his 750th NHL victory.

Wild 2, Maple Leafs 1: Devan Dubnyk added to his iron-man streak, making his 32nd straight start as Minnesota extended its string of road wins to nine, hanging on

against slumping Toronto.

Charlie Coyle and Thomas Vanek scored for Minnesota, which is 23-6-2 since acquiring Dubnyk on Jan. 14.

Stars 4, Sabres 3: Cody Eakin scored at 16:46 of the third period as Dallas rallied to beat visiting Buffalo.

Stars captain Jamie Benn netted his team's first two goals and earned his 200th NHL assist on the third by Patrick Eaves, who tied it 3-3 at 12:35 of the third.

Flames 3, Avalanche 2: Lance Bouma and David Jones had a goal and an assist each to lead host Calgary over Colorado.

Jiri Hudler also scored for the Flames, and Kari Ramo made 25 saves to earn his 15th win of the season.

Calgary held onto third place in the Pacific Division, ahead of the Los Angeles Kings, who won at New Jersey.

Jets 4, Oilers 1: Lee Stempniak scored the winning goal as Winnipeg solidified its Western Conference playoff spot with a victory over host Edmonton.

Drew Stafford, Tyler Myers and Michael Frolik also scored for the Jets, who have won five in a row.

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins had the lone goal for the Oilers, who have lost nine of 11.



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Veterans combine gives NFL free agents another shot

The Associated Press

TEMPE, Ariz. — While Trent Steelman was on active duty in the Army, often his thoughts strayed to getting another shot at the NFL.

While Michael Bush and Felix Jones were at home, wondering why they weren't still in the league, they also focused on one more chance.

On Sunday, all three were chasing the dream again at the first veterans combine.

Which is exactly the idea.

"This group either has outdated or brief or short résumés in the NFL," said Matt Birk, a Super Bowl-winning center who played 15 NFL seasons and now is the league's director of football development. "This is an opportunity to bring a large pool of players together for the clubs to evaluate at once. They are fighting for their football lives and will do whatever they can to get into a camp."

For Steelman, that means changing positions. He was a quarterback at West Point, where they don't throw the ball. So even though he was facing two years in the service, Steelman found time to work on his game — as a receiver.

Although he dropped one pass during the combine, he looked natural on the other end of throws. Considering he hadn't played in anything more competitive than flag football while stationed in Savannah, Ga., Steelman looked like he belonged on this hot, sunny day.

"I wouldn't trade my time in the Army for anything else," said Steelman, who attended a mini-camp with the Ravens in

2013. "It taught me to interact with teammates, with the different type of cultures and it's that way in sports, with the different cultures and sportsmen. I put that to work when I am with these guys, too."

All the while adjusting to a new position.

"It's like the Julian Edelman path," he said. "He did the same, played quarterback in college and making that transition. There's not much call for a 6-foot, triple-option quarterback in the NFL."

There's plenty of call for a swift running back with receiving and kick return skills. Jones, the Cowboys' first-rounder in 2008 (22nd overall) spent five seasons in Dallas, leading the NFL with a 5.9-yard rushing average in his second season. But he rarely was the team's first consideration as a rusher. After spending 2013 with Pittsburgh, Jones was out of football last year.

The 27-year-old Jones showed some burst at the combine, and hoped it was noticed.

"Every veteran wants another opportunity to showcase what he can do," he said. "I can bring speed, quickness and excitement. I'm a special teams player, I can catch the ball out of the backfield, I can even play in the slot if they want me to do it. Whatever it takes."

Jones was stunned he didn't hook up with anyone in 2014, and he had no intention of getting used to the feeling of idleness.

"It's tough to leave from a game or from anything you want to be a part of," he said. "It's tough watching and knowing you can still play with these guys that are

out there."

Bush, a 30-year-old running back and six-year vet who last played in the league with Chicago in 2013, prepped hard for the combine. He said he practiced all kinds of drills, only to find few of them were being used Sunday.

Still, he seemed relieved to learn the three-cone drill and some others were dropped.

But when told he ran a slow 4.91 in the 40, Bush was almost despondent.

"There goes my career," the usually jovial Bush said, a frown rapidly crossing his face. "It hurts."

But, like the other 104 guys on hand, Bush has no intention of giving up the pursuit.

"Put it like this: You sign me, you're going to get an angry, ticked-off football player who wants some respect," he added.

Unlike most of the others, Bush had never been through a combine. He broke his leg coming out of college at Louisville and missed the draft-eligible sessions in Indianapolis.

And while happy for the chance to display his skills before scouts from all 32 clubs, Bush also was a bit irritated it had come to this.

"I'm still shocked I had to come and do this with all the film out there," he said. "But it's part of the process. I gave it my all; if it does not work out, it does not work out."

"Yeah, this shows people I am still around. Put me in pads. I always get the job done."

Wichita St. taking it one game at a time

The Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Wichita State should know how to avoid distractions by now.

When the NCAA tournament field was first set, all anybody wanted to talk about was the Shockers finally getting a shot at Kansas. Nobody wanted to mention that they first had to take care of Indiana just to give the game a chance of happening.

It came to pass, of course. And behind a stellar effort on both ends of the floor, the No. 7 seed Shockers beat the Jayhawks 78-65 on Sunday night, advancing to the Sweet 16.

Now, all anybody will talk about is a potential rematch with overall No. 1 seed Kentucky, the same team that ruined the Shockers' perfect season in the NCAA tournament a year ago.

Except Wichita State first has to beat No. 3 seed Notre Dame.

"We're going to approach it the same way we did this time," Shockers star Fred VanVleet told The Associated Press. "We'll let y'all do all the looking ahead, anticipating."

Don't worry. There will be no shortage of it.

The Shockers (30-4) have played enough win-or-go-home games that they should be immune to looking ahead, though. VanVleet and fellow backcourt mates Ron Baker and Tekele Cotton were part of the team that advanced to the Final Four two years ago, beating No. 1 seed Gonzaga and second-seed Ohio State before falling to eventual national champion Louisville.

So even in the moments after an emotional victory over Kansas, a school that has refused to play the Shockers for years, VanVleet was already able to focus on the Fighting Irish.

"Listen, Notre Dame is a heck of a team," he said of the ACC tournament champs. "We don't have time to overlook anybody. That's what teams do with us. We know how it feels."

The Shockers beat the Jayhawks with the same formula that has carried them to so many wins under coach Gregg Marshall: They fought for every rebound, they pestered the Kansas guards in the half-court, and they executed flawlessly whenever they had the ball.

VanVleet had 17 points and six assists. Cotton poured in 19 points. Baker had 12 points without a turnover in 37 minutes. Even unheralded guard Evan Wessel drained four three-pointers and had 12 points to go with nine rebounds against the bigger, longer Jayhawks.

"It's definitely one of the biggest wins I've been a part of. Definitely hits home, being a Wichita kid, growing up a Wichita State fan," Wessel said. "My family went to Wichita State. It's big for the community, and I'm just glad we got the win and we can move on."

The Shockers headed home after their game Sunday, but they won't have a whole lot of time to rest. Their matchup against Notre Dame in the Midwest Regional is Thursday night.

"Our coaches are already scouting them," freshman forward Shaquille Morris said. "We didn't see them all year. Now that this game is over, that's what we're focused on."

Likewise, the Fighting Irish will surely be focusing on Wichita State.

Owners consider injury proposal

The Associated Press

PHOENIX — Millions of viewers and thousands of fans saw a wobbly Julian Edelman remain in the Super Bowl.

After looking at video of that situation and several similar ones, the NFL's powerful competition committee is proposing a change.

NFL owners are considering a proposal to stop games when a medical adviser sees a player displaying obvious signs of disorientation.

The suggestion was a late addition by the committee at the owners' meetings that began Monday. It would allow a medical spotter upstairs to communicate with the officiating crew when a player appears unstable.

The game would be halted to remove the player, who then would undergo sideline examination at the very least.

That is one of two dozen proposals and rules changes being considered by the owners in a busy agenda.

Other suggested changes include using instant replay for reviewing all penalties called by game officials, yes, pass interference and holding calls, too; all personal fouls; penalties against defenseless players; any foul that results in an automatic first down; and clock issues.

Also Monday:

■ The league eliminated local TV blackouts of games for next season.

There were no blackouts last season, because the minimum number of tickets, by NFL sellout standards, was sold for

every game, and the league had only two blackouts in 2013.

■ The Oct. 25 game in London between Buffalo and Jacksonville will be streamed live internationally. The experiment, which will start at 9:30 a.m. ET, means the game won't be shown on television outside of the local teams' markets.

■ Foreign sites are being considered for the Pro Bowl. Next year's game will be played in Honolulu. Beyond that, just about anywhere seems to be in play, including Brazil.

"For 2017 and beyond, we are studying the future of the Pro Bowl," NFL spokesman Michael Signora said.

"Brazil, an area with a growing number of NFL fans, as a possible host is one of the ideas that seems to hold a lot of appeal for additional analysis," he added.

Agent: Vikings aren't in Peterson's best interest

Adrian Peterson and the Minnesota Vikings have reached a standstill in their relationship.

Peterson's agent, Ben Dogra, said in an interview on Tuesday that he believes a return to Minnesota this season is not in the "best interest" of the standout running back.

Peterson previously expressed uneasiness about continuing to play for the Vikings, but Dogra has advanced that stance to the point of wanting out.

General manager Rick Spielman has told Dogra the team doesn't plan to release Peterson, who turned 30 on Saturday.

The Vikings have leverage with Peterson's contract, which covers the next three years with a \$12.75 million salary for 2015. However, none of the remaining money on the deal is guaranteed.

2 players signed from veterans combine

PHOENIX — The NFL's experiment with a veterans combine has worked immediately for at least two players.

Wide receiver Nathan Slaughter is the first success story from Sunday's session, signing with the Arizona Cardinals on Monday. Cornerback Deveron Carr became the second when he signed later Monday with the Indianapolis Colts.

Slaughter played four seasons at Division II West Texas A&M, where he caught 74 passes for 1,978 yards and 14 touchdowns, along with three kickoff return TDs.

He signed with Houston as an undrafted free agent last year, but was cut in May. He caught on with Jacksonville in training camp, then was waived with a left foot problem on Aug. 6.

The 5-foot-11, 190-pound Carr followed a similar path to the veterans combine.

An undrafted free agent, he played in nine games with Tampa Bay in 2013, all on special teams, before he was cut in August.