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Experts: No early resolution on Bergdahl

BY JON HARPER,
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Stars and Stripes

Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, promoted twice during absence from his unit in Afghanistan, now faces charges that could bring potential penalties from dishonorable discharge to prison time.

But disposition of the case is likely a long way off, experts said, and at this stage unpredictable.

The Army announced on Wednesday that it would pursue charges of desertion and misbehavior before the enemy against Bergdahl, who spent five years as a captive of the Taliban after allegedly walking away from his post in Afghanistan. The U.S. secured Bergdahl's release in May 2014 in a controversial prisoner swap for five Taliban prisoners who had been held at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

The charges come three months after the Army wrapped up its investigation into the matter and forwarded its findings to Gen. Mark Milley, commanding general of Forces Command, who has general courts-martial convening authority.

But the referral of charges against Bergdahl is an early step in the military's judicial process and gives no hint whether the soldier from Idaho will spend any time in prison. Next, there will be a hearing to investigate the charges against him, known as an Article 32 hearing.

As a Pentagon news release announcing the charges against Bergdahl put it, the hearing is a legal procedure "designed to determine whether there is sufficient evidence to merit a court-martial" and is often compared to a civilian grand jury. One important difference in the military process is that the defendant and defense counsel are present for the hearing and can

cross-examine witnesses.

An investigating officer conducts the hearing, looks at evidence and hears from witnesses, then issues a report with recommendations and conclusions to the convening authority. The convening authority can refer the charges to a special or general court-martial, dismiss the charges, or take any other action he or she deems appropriate.

Bergdahl's Article 32 is expected to take place at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, according to the Pentagon. The government has up to 120 days to arraign Bergdahl on the charges, meaning the hearing is likely to happen in the coming few months.

Though the military justice system does have provisions requiring a speedy trial, that doesn't mean the trial will happen anytime soon. Motions and other procedures can delay the trial for months or years, as was the case in the trial of Fort Hood shooter Nadal Hasan.

Even the Article 32 can be delayed by such means. Rules for courts-martial require "speedy trial" protections, and the government has 120 days to arraign a suspect at court-martial after charges are first filed or preferred. But the defense and the convening authority can extend that.

Bergdahl also could waive the hearing, but that would deprive him and his defense counsel of seeing the evidence the government has against him.

"I don't see the benefit in waiving the 32 in this case" said Kyle Fischer, a former Army lawyer who now has a defense practice near Fort Benning, Ga. Bergdahl's lawyer "will certainly want to see what evidence the government has regarding the Article 99 (misbehavior before the enemy) charge."

The desertion charge is pretty self-explanatory, Fischer said in a telephone interview

Thursday. The Uniformed Code of Military Justice defines desertion as intent to leave a unit "permanently."

Fellow soldiers have accused Bergdahl of deserting his unit at Combat Outpost Mest-Lalak in Paktika province, and some have said that servicemembers died while searching for him.

Walter Huffman, a former judge advocate general of the Army, said the legal threshold for proving intent is extremely high.

Without a confession from Bergdahl, military prosecutors would need to rely on other witnesses, such as soldiers from his unit and Afghan villagers who may have come in contact with him after he left the U.S. base.

However, misbehavior before the enemy is a rare charge, experts said, and it carries a heavier penalty than desertion.

"It is incredibly rare," said Zachary Spilman, a former Marine Corps lawyer. "I can't say when the last prosecution was.

"It does have a higher maximum. In this case, it's the bigger offense," Spilman said in a telephone interview Thursday.

Depending on the outcome of the Article 32 hearing, Eugene Fidell, Bergdahl's attorney, could request that the military simply discharge his client in lieu of a court-martial.

"But given the amount of time spent on this case and the sensitivity of it. I'm not sure the military would agree to do that," Huffman said. "Part of the reason for seeking a court-martial would be to deter others from this kind of behavior, if he acted as charged."

In a statement released Wednesday, Fidell said that there have been no plea negotiations.

Bergdahl, who turns 29 on Saturday, remains on active duty and has been working in an administrative position at Fort Sam Houston since he moved

out of medical observation last year. Pentagon spokesman Col. Steve Warren told reporters Thursday that Bergdahl is not under pretrial confinement. He said he did not know if Bergdahl is currently free to leave the base where he's stationed.

If Bergdahl does go to trial, a military panel — similar to a jury — is likely to decide his fate. The panel could be made up of all officers or a mixture of officers and enlisted members. He could also request a trial by judge alone.

Military panels have erred toward leniency in recent desertion cases, including the high-profile court-martial last month of Marine Cpl. Wassef Hassoun, who was convicted of deserting his unit twice — once in Iraq. Hassoun was sentenced to two years in prison, a dishonorable discharge, and lost pay and rank.

Because military juries have no minimum sentencing guidelines, were Bergdahl found guilty of the charge, he could be sentenced to no punishment — or to life without parole, Spilman said.

Some officials have suggested that the Army should not bring the hammer down on Bergdahl, arguing that his years spent as a militant prisoner were punishment enough.

Bergdahl said in a letter released Thursday by his defense lawyer that he was tortured in the five years he was held captive by the Taliban, beaten with a copper cable as he spent months blindfolded and chained spread-eagle to a bed. He says he suffered from hunger, thirst and serious infections from sores that developed where his hands and feet were bound to the bed.

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Germanwings co-pilot deliberately crashed

The Associated Press

PARIS — The co-pilot of the doomed Germanwings jet barricaded himself in the cockpit and “intentionally” sent the plane full speed into a mountain in the French Alps, ignoring the pilot’s frantic pounding on the door and the screams of terror from passengers, a prosecutor said Thursday.

Co-pilot Andreas Lubitz’s “intention (was) to destroy this plane,” Marseille prosecutor Brice Robin said, laying out the horrifying conclusions reached by French aviation investigators after listening to the last minutes of Tuesday’s Flight 9525.

The Airbus A320 was flying from Barcelona, Spain, to Duesseldorf, Germany, when it began to descend from cruising altitude of 38,000 feet after losing radio contact with air traffic controllers. All 150 on board died when the plane slammed into the mountain.

Robin said the pilot, who has not been identified, left the cockpit, presumably to go to the lavatory, and then was unable to regain access. In the meantime, Lubitz, 28, of Germany, manually set the plane on the descent that drove it into the mountain.

The pilot knocked several times “without response,” the prosecutor said, adding that the cockpit door could be blocked manually only from the inside.

The co-pilot said nothing from the moment the captain left, Robin said. “It was absolute silence in the cockpit.”

The A320 is designed with safeguards to allow emergency entry into the cockpit if a pilot inside is unresponsive. The override code known to the crew does not go into effect, however — and indeed goes into a lockdown — if the person inside the cockpit specifically denies entry.

During the flight’s final minutes, pounding could be heard on the cockpit door as the plane’s instrument alarms sounded but the co-pilot’s breathing was calm and that

of a fully conscious man, Robin said.

“You don’t get the impression that there was any particular panic, because the breathing is always the same. The breathing is not panting. It’s a classic, human breathing,” Robin said.

No distress call ever went out from the cockpit, and the control tower’s pleas for a response went unanswered.

Air traffic control cleared the area to allow the plane to make an emergency landing if needed, and asked other planes to try to make contact. The French air force scrambled a fighter jet to try to head off the crash.

Just before the plane hit the mountain, passengers’ cries of terror could be heard on the voice recorder.

“The victims realized just at the last moment,” Robin said. “We can hear them screaming.”

Airlines in Europe are not required to have two people in the cockpit at all times, unlike the standard U.S. operating procedure after the 9/11 attacks changed to require a flight attendant to take the spot of a briefly departing pilot.

Robin said Lubitz had never been flagged as a terrorist and he would not give details on Lubitz’s religion or his ethnic background. German authorities were taking charge of the investigation into him.

Lubitz had joined Germanwings in September 2013, directly out of flight school, and had flown 630 hours. Spohr said the airline had no indication why he would have crashed the plane. He said pilots undergo yearly medical examination but that doesn’t include psychological tests.

Lufthansa’s chief said Lubitz started his training in 2008 and there was a “several-month” gap in his training six years ago. Spohr said he couldn’t say what the reason for that was but after the break “he not only passed all medical tests but also his flight training, all flying tests and checks.”

US bombing Tikrit after Iran-backed militia pulls back

By JON HARPER
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The top U.S. commander in the Middle East testified Thursday that U.S. aircraft began bombing militants in Tikrit only after Iran-backed militias withdrew from the fight.

U.S. Army Gen. Lloyd Austin, commander of U.S. Central Command, told lawmakers that there were a number of preconditions that had to be met before the U.S.-led coalition would come to the rescue of the stalled offensive.

“Once those conditions were met, which included Shiite militias not being involved [in the operation], then we were able to proceed,” he said. After “three tours in Iraq commanding [U.S.] troops who were brutalized by some of these Shiite militias, I will not and I hope we never coordinate or cooperate with Shiite militias.”

The U.S.-led coalition began airstrikes Wednesday, and Iraqi troops have launched the final phase of an offensive to recapture the city, according to coalition officials. In the first wave of air attacks on Tikrit, coalition forces conducted 17 airstrikes using fighters, bombers and drones against the Islamic State group.

The attacks struck a militant-controlled building, two bridges, three checkpoints, two staging areas, two berms, a roadblock and a militant command-and-control facility, according to Combined Force Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve.

The strikes were requested by Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi and were approved by the Ministry of Defense, according to U.S. and coalition

officials.

The coalition is also providing airborne surveillance, intelligence-sharing and advisory support to Iraqi Security Force headquarters elements.

“The United States is deeply involved in this operation now,” retired Gen. John Allen, the special presidential envoy for the counter-ISIL coalition, told lawmakers Thursday. “The intent, of course, is ... the liberation of a not-insignificant urban center and population center with the idea ultimately of driving [the Islamic State] out of the province of Salah ad-Din.”

U.S. officials had been reluctant to aid the operation because of the role that Iranian-backed Shiite militias had been playing in the operation. Iranian military advisers have been providing significant support since the Tikrit offensive began March 2, arming and training Iraqi Shiite militias, which have played a prominent role on the battlefield. Militiamen made up more than two-thirds of the force fighting the Islamic State group in Tikrit.

Although they may not be directly involved in the clearing operation, Pentagon spokesman Col. Steve Warren said Thursday that Shiite militiamen are helping Iraqi troops encircle Tikrit while the city is cleared by government forces.

Allen urged against painting all Shiite militia with the same brush.

“They are not [all like] Hezbollah with the close ties to Iran,” he told lawmakers. “And I think we need to be very nuanced in how we look at them because ... they came to defend their country.”

Information from The Associated Press was used in this report.

Final plays rarely follow script

The Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — In the 2008 national championship, with Kansas trailing Memphis by three and 10.8 seconds left in the game, coach Bill Self called for his team to run a play called “Chop.”

The play, designed to provide multiple scoring options in moments of desperation, began with Sherron Collins dribbling up the court. Veering to his right, Collins handed off to Mario Chalmers at the top of the key, and Chalmers took the first of his options: He shot the three-pointer.

It splashed through the net to force overtime.

Kansas went on to win the title, and that perfectly executed play became known as “Mario’s Miracle.” And if anybody thinks calling it a miracle is hyperbole, well, chances are they haven’t been watching as teams flounder through the final minutes in this year’s NCAA tournament.

Turnovers, missed shots, poor coaching and worse execution. Just call it organized chaos, late-game blunders that have nevertheless produced some memorable finishes.

“First of all, the reason you struggle in games is because the other team’s pretty doggone good,” explained North Carolina coach Roy Williams, whose team survived two close games to reach the Sweet 16. “The other thing is the attention, the pressure — they’re still 18-, 19-, 20-year-old kids. I mean, they’re not going to get it right.”

Indeed, many of today’s brightest stars are freshmen and sophomore, players unaccustomed to the game’s biggest stage. That dearth of veteran leaders, several

coaches have argued, is also one of the big reasons that that scoring continued its downward trend this season.

Another reason for the late-game flubs: Low- and mid-majors are often trying to upset a heavyweight, and the talent gap becomes more pronounced when the game is on the line.

That appeared to be the case last Thursday, when UC-Irvine had Louisville on the ropes.

The Anteaters were inbounding the ball near midcourt, trailing 57-55 with about 6 seconds left. Alex Young was promptly stripped by the Cardinals’ Terry Rozier, a turnover 40 feet from the hoop that prevented the Big West champs from even attempting a tying shot.

“We had a quick play lined up and unfortunately I lost the ball,” Young said. “We couldn’t get a timeout, and it just happens. It’s basketball.”

Speaking of timeouts, Northeastern burned through its allotment in the second half against Notre Dame, leaving coach Bill Coen unable to set up a final play with the Huskies trailing by two in the closing seconds. Instead of getting a tying shot off, Quincy Ford coughed up the ball, and the Fighting Irish added a couple of free throws to seal the victory.

Asked about his timeout dilemma, Coen replied: “I wish we’d had one left.”

Irvine and Northeastern weren’t the only teams that failed to get shots off with the game on the line, either. The same thing happened to Valparaiso, whose coach Bryce Drew knocked down that infamous three-pointer that sent the Crusaders past Ole Miss in 1998.

Valpo was trailing Maryland 65-62 with time running out on Friday, and Keith

Carter got stuck in the corner in front of his own bench. He never even got a three-pointer off.

“I’ll take the blame from that,” Drew said afterward. “I thought Maryland did a really good job. We tried to do something a little different off one of the plays we usually run.”

When the Jayhawks flawlessly ran “Chop” in the 2008 title game, they had practiced that exact play hundreds of times. And the person who took the three-pointer? Chalmers, a seasoned junior.

“There is a lot of pressure,” acknowledged Williams, who whose Tar Heels survived a tense finish against Harvard in their NCAA opener. “You’ve got to find some kids that can block all that out, and especially if they’re really, really talented, you’ve got a better chance.”

North Carolina took a 67-65 lead on the Crimson on a run-out with 23.8 seconds left. But rather than go to the basket for a layup or to draw a foul, Harvard’s Wesley Saunders let loose a tightly guard three-pointer with almost no time left that bounced off the back of the rim.

The Tar Heels advanced. The Crimson headed home.

“We certainly have situations that we go over when we’re down one possession and things that we’re looking for,” Harvard coach Tommy Amaker said. “Wesley is our playmaker. ... If he was going to get a three, get a drive, get a two, we were going to live with his decision there.”

Just like many other teams that now have to live with their last-second slipups.

Six teams have lost at least 10

The Associated Press

The NCAA tournament has never had so many teams with so many losses make it so far.

Six of the regional semifinalists have 10 or more losses, including three with 13. The reaction around college basketball has been a collective shrug.

There simply are more opportunities to lose nowadays.

That’s because teams are playing more regular-season games than ever, and top programs are trying to schedule mostly high-caliber nonconference opponents which can enhance their résumés for NCAA tournament selection and seeding.

“There was a time years and years ago where you’d feel like if you had 20 wins you’d get in the tournament,” North Carolina State coach Mark Gottfried said. “Now it comes down to who you schedule. You may lose some games because you’re playing a difficult nonconference schedule. And then in our league, it’s tough night in and night out with 18 games in the ACC.”

Gottfried’s Wolfpack, Xavier and UCLA all have 13 losses heading into this week’s games. Michigan State and North Carolina have 11 each and Oklahoma has 10.

The previous record for Sweet 16 teams with double-digit losses was five, last year and in 1985 and ’86, according to STATS. The only other time there were even two 13-loss teams was 2000.

The NCAA has allowed teams to play as many as 31 regular-season games since 2006-07. Before that the maximum was 28. With conference tournaments, some teams now play 34 or 35 games before the NCAA Tournament. As of this week, 58 teams had played at least 35 games. A decade ago, only 13 teams played that many.

Other factors, ESPN analyst Jay Bilas said, are that high major teams are beating each other up in conference play, and premier programs are sought out for made-for-TV nonconference games.

Beating a heavyweight can help a lot, and losing to one might only hurt a little in the eyes of the NCAA selection committee.

N.C. State (22-13), which plays Louisville (26-8) in Syracuse, N.Y., on Friday, used strong nonconference schedules to get off the NCAA bubble in 2012 and 2014. This season the Wolfpack played tournament teams Boise State, Wofford, Cincinnati and Purdue before losing twice to Virginia, splitting meetings with North Carolina and beating Duke and Louisville in ACC play.

Xavier (23-13), which plays Arizona (33-3) in Los Angeles on Thursday, lost nine games in the Big East. That conference sent six teams to the NCAA Tournament, and Xavier is the only one still standing.

“I think it’s great that the Big East has been able to test us with some really tough teams,” center Matt Stainbrook said, “and I think the fact that we’ve grown as a team together has made us really special at this point.”

Carr’s 61 points still tournament record

The Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Austin Carr never imagined his record would last five years. It has stood for 45.

“It’s been that long?” he said. “Yeah, that does surprise me.”

On March 7, 1970, Carr, Notre Dame’s unguardable guard, set the NCAA tournament record by scoring 61 points in a 112-82 first-round win over Ohio in Dayton. Since then, Carr’s massive mark has endured rule changes (there was no three-pointer), the tournament’s expansion and the madness of many a March.

On the list of seemingly “unbreakable” sports records — Joe DiMaggio’s 56-game hitting streak, Cal Ripken’s 2,632-consecutive game streak, Wilt Chamberlain’s 100-point game come to mind — Carr’s could elbow in for room near the top.

No one has challenged 61, just three fewer points than unbeaten Kentucky scored on Saturday in its win against Cincinnati. The closest threat was Navy’s David Robinson, who scored 50 against Michigan in 1987.

Carr actually holds three of the top-five scoring games in NCAA Tournament history. Following the win over Ohio, he scored 52 in a victory over Kentucky and

had another 52-point performance the next year against TCU. The No. 1 overall draft pick in 1971 by Cleveland, Carr averaged an incredible 52.7 points in the 1970 tourney and his career tournament scoring average of 41.3 (seven games) is easily the highest. Princeton’s Bill Bradley is next at 33.7.

For Carr, who spent nine of his 11 seasons in the NBA playing for the Cavaliers, the majestic 61 remains a source of pride.

“It’s a good feeling to have the record,” Carr said last week. “But at the same time, I was always told records are made to be broken so I don’t really get caught up in that. But I’m amazed that it has lasted that long.”

Maybe more amazing is what Carr would have done if there had been a three-point line. While many of his baskets came off layups and short jumpers, he drained a few long-range shots.

“I was told by a guy who went back through and broke down the game that I would have scored 73,” Carr said, smiling. “I could have scored 73.”

Carr’s record might be untouchable in today’s game for several reasons.

First, teams play more sophisticated defenses designed to stop scorers — or

at least slow them down.

Advancements in technology allow coaches to have advanced scouting reports on teams. The more film on a player, the easier it is to expose his flaws. Also, it’s rare to find any college team who relies so heavily on one player to carry an offense. Carr averaged 38.1 points in 1970. For comparison’s sake, Wisconsin All-American Frank Kaminsky averaged 18.4 this season for the Badgers.

“The style of game has changed where coaches now have three guys do what one guy did,” said Carr, a longtime TV broadcaster for the Cavs.

The 6-foot-4 Carr, equally devastating inside and outside, knew early on he was in for a big game against the Bobcats. The Fighting Irish geared their offense around the unstoppable Carr and he had 20 points in the first nine minutes and 35 at halftime.

“The ball was flowing,” Carr said. “Most of my game was without the ball and Jackie Meehan, our point guard, he would get you the ball right where you could do something with it, and that night we were just clicking right away and the ball was feeling good going in and I just kept going.”



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NFL may alter extra point rules

The Associated Press

PHOENIX — It's the duller play in football, the one when viewers head for the fridge, fans in the stands head for the concessions. Even some of the players don't pay attention when the extra point is being tried.

The NFL's answer: Spice it up.

Yes, the extra point appears headed for some changes, perhaps significant ones, for the 2015 season. Those changes likely will come in May when the owners have their next major meetings.

"There's a clear movement to wanting to change and change it this year," said Rich McKay, co-chairman of the competition committee and president of the Falcons.

But there were so many suggestions by teams that the owners tabled any decisions for two months. McKay's committee will "develop alternatives and be ready for a potential vote" in San Francisco.

Those meetings will have a heavy California feel not just because of the venue.

Relocating one or even two teams to Los Angeles is a hot topic that will gather momentum in the next few weeks. The three clubs interested in moving to LA — the Rams, Raiders and Chargers — are expected to contact Commissioner Roger Goodell's office by late April with stadium information.

Goodell noted the league "wants to succeed long term" in LA, so "right now

the focus is on the process and also understanding what it takes to be successful in the LA market."

Long before a club lands in the City of Angels, the extra point seems destined to undergo change.

Among the possibilities are moving the line of scrimmage back for PAT kicks; placing the ball on the 1½-yard line for a two-point conversion; eliminating the PAT kicks entirely and requiring teams to run a play from scrimmage; and allowing the defense to score, as in college football, if the ball is turned over on a two-point try.

McKay described the discussions as "lively, with lots of ideas ... it's time to make this a football play."

"A couple coaches said they favor just lining up on the 2 and going for the two-point play," he said. "Or move the ball to the 1½ for two points, or kick from the 15 for one, your choice."

The league experimented with extra-point kicks from a longer distance last preseason.

Currently, the line of scrimmage for both an extra point and two-point conversion try is the 2-yard line.

Voted down at the meetings concluded was Chicago's proposal that each team get a possession in overtime regardless of what happens on the first series.

Now, if the side receiving the OT kick-off scores a touchdown, the game ends. If it kicks a field goal, the opponent gets a possession.

Unsportsmanlike penalties handed out at the end of a half now will carry over,

either to the second half or to overtime.

Lining up players with eligible numbers at ineligible positions, as New England did against Baltimore in the playoffs, now has more specific guidelines. Those players must line up inside the tackle box.

The owners also approved allowing teams with retractable domes to open them at halftime, weather permitting, and allowing linebackers to wear numbers from 40-49. Previously they could wear only numbers in the 50s and 90s.

Goodell spoke briefly about two high-profile personal conduct cases in which both players, Greg Hardy and Adrian Peterson, remain on the exempt list.

The league continues to review Hardy's case to determine if discipline is warranted. He signed earlier this month with Dallas.

Goodell said the date for Peterson's suspension to end remains April 15. The Vikings running back had the ban overturned by appeal, a decision the NFL now is appealing itself.

Also Wednesday:

■ Expansion of the playoffs by two teams was discussed, but won't be happening for a while. Goodell mentioned scheduling issues as well as competitive questions for such delays.

■ Ted Wells' investigation into the deflated footballs in the AFC championship game is ongoing, with no timetable on its conclusion.

■ Texting during a game by Browns general manager Ray Farmer is still being investigated to see if any league rules were broken.

Streaking Stars edge Flames in shootout

The Associated Press

CALGARY, Alberta — The Dallas Stars need every point they can get. They gladly took two on Wednesday night.

Ales Hemsky scored twice in regulation, Tyler Seguin had the only goal in the shootout, and Dallas beat the Calgary Flames 4-3 for its seventh win in eight games.

Jamie Benn also scored for the Stars, six points behind Winnipeg for the second Western Conference wild-card spot with eight games left this season.

"This was a game that we needed two points. We had to get two points somehow," Dallas coach Lindy Ruff said. "It's a situation where we might have to run the table, and in all reality that might not get you in."

Seguin got a shot past Karri Ramo in the first round of the shootout, and Stars goalie Kari Lehtonen was perfect against Joe Colborne, Johnny Gaudreau and Sean Monahan to get the victory.

"It's been exciting the last couple weeks. We've been playing well and getting results and climbing a little bit, but we still have a little bit to go," said Lehtonen, who improved to 33-14-10.

Deryk Engelland got his first two goals of the season, and Gaudreau also scored for Calgary. The Flames remained third in the Pacific Division, one point up on Los Angeles — which sits outside of a playoff spot but has played one fewer game.

"Early on, it seemed we had no energy. We were coming from a day off and for one of the rare times, we got outskated," Flames coach Bob Hartley said. "We battled back, and looking at the situation it's a huge point, but at this time we're shooting for two."

Calgary trailed 3-2 after two periods before Engelland tied it with his second of the night with 8:41 remaining. The defenseman, who also tied it at 2 in the second, got the puck at the blue line and sent a floater toward the net that found the top corner.

Engelland's first career two-goal game came after he had gone without a goal in his last 77 games, dating back to season.

Flyers 4, Blackhawks 1: Claude Giroux, Wayne Simmonds, Ryan White and Michael Raffl scored goals to lead Philadelphia past visiting Chicago.

Giroux had his 22nd goal for his first even-strength score at home this season. Steve Mason was stout again for the Flyers, finishing with 34 saves.

Flyers fans gave Chicago defenseman Kimmo Timonen a standing ovation during a video tribute for the returning defenseman who helped lead Philadelphia to the 2010 Stanley Cup finals.

Timonen returned to Philadelphia for the first time since he was traded to Chicago in February for two draft picks.

Oilers 4, Avalanche 3: Derek Roy scored the tiebreaking goal midway through the third period and host Edmonton recovered after giving up a three-goal lead.

Martin Marincin, Jordan Eberle and Taylor Hall all scored in the first 9:36 of the game for the Oilers, who have won two of their last three games. Ben Scrivens stopped 31 shots.

Jarome Iginla and Alex Tanguay scored in the second period, and Ryan O'Reilly tied it early in the third for Colorado, which has lost three in a row and is 10 points out of a playoff spot with just nine games remaining.

Butler scores 23 as Bulls top Raptors

The Associated Press

TORONTO — The Chicago Bulls are feeling good about themselves as they head toward the playoffs.

Jimmy Butler scored 23 points, Pau Gasol had 18 and the Bulls beat Toronto 116-103 on Wednesday night for their fifth consecutive victory over the Raptors.

Making his second straight start after missing 11 games with a sprained left elbow, Butler was 7-for-8 from the field and 7-for-9 at the free-throw line. The All-Star guard also had five rebounds and three assists.

"The more he plays, that rhythm will come back," Chicago coach Tom Thibodeau said. "He's put a lot of extra work in the last couple of days. Obviously we need him on both sides of the ball."

Tony Snell scored 17 points as the Bulls moved 1½ games ahead of the Raptors for third in the Eastern Conference. Aaron Brooks had 16 points, and Nikola Mirotic finished with 15.

Butler said he's not concerned about Chicago's opponent in the first round of the postseason or playoff positioning for that matter.

"I think we can beat anybody," he said. "I don't think it matters what seed we end up in. We just want to win as many games and get in a rhythm and get rolling heading into the playoffs."

Toronto backed into a playoff berth when Miami beat Boston and Charlotte lost to Brooklyn. That was of little consolation to coach Dwane Casey on the heels of the Raptors' second straight loss and third in four games.

"There are no moral victories in this league," Casey said.

Toronto's DeMar DeRozan was more optimistic.

"Our confidence is still high," he said. "All we need is that one game to get our-

selves going."

Toronto (42-30) needs one more win or another Boston loss to clinch its second straight Atlantic Division title.

Cavaliers 111, Grizzlies 89: Kyrie Irving scored 24 points, and Kevin Love added 22 points and 10 rebounds as visiting Cleveland rolled past Memphis.

LeBron James finished with 20 points, Timofey Mozgov added 14 and J.R. Smith 13 to help Cleveland win its fourth straight and eighth in nine.

Heat 93, Celtics 86: Goran Dragic had 22 points and seven assists as banged-up Miami beat host Boston.

Miami has won four of six and is seventh in the Eastern Conference playoff race.

Kings 108, Suns 99: DeMarcus Cousins scored 24 points, all but four in the first three quarters, and had 11 rebounds to help Sacramento beat host Phoenix.

Cousins also had three assists, two steals and a block, and Rudy Gay scored 14 points for the Kings. They have won four straight.

76ers 99, Nuggets 85: Rookie Robert Covington equalized a career high with 25 points as Philadelphia beat host Denver.

Nerlens Noel had 14 points and 15 rebounds to help the 76ers sweep the season series.

Rockets 95, Pelicans 93: James Harden had 25 points and 10 assists, and Dwight Howard had seven rebounds and a block on Anthony Davis in his return from a two-month absence as Houston handed host New Orleans its fourth straight loss.

Davis had 24 points and 14 rebounds for the Pelicans, but uncharacteristically missed eight free throws, including one that could have pulled New Orleans to 94-

93 with 7 seconds left.

Spurs 130, Thunder 91: Tony Parker had 21 points and six assists as San Antonio stopped visiting Oklahoma City's four-game winning streak.

Thunder star Russell Westbrook was held to 16 points on 5-for-16 shooting. He left midway through the third quarter with the Spurs leading by 30. Westbrook averaged 32.7 points, 11.2 assists and 9.6 rebounds in his previous 13 games.

Hawks 95, Magic 83: Paul Millsap had 25 points and 11 rebounds as Atlanta ended a three-game losing streak with a win over host Orlando.

Clippers 111, Knicks 80: DeAndre Jordan raised the NBA's best shooting percentage above 71 percent by making all seven shots and scoring 14 points, as visiting Los Angeles pounded New York.

Pacers 103 Wizards 101: George Hill made a driving layup with 2.7 seconds left to lift visiting Indiana past Washington, ending the Pacers' six-game losing streak.

Nets 91, Hornets 88: Brook Lopez had 34 points and 10 rebounds and visiting Brooklyn handed slumping Charlotte its fifth loss in six games.

Trail Blazers 92, Jazz 89: Damian Lillard had 23 points and 12 assists as Portland overcame a 10-point deficit in the fourth quarter to beat host Utah.

Lakers 101, Timberwolves 99 (OT): Jordan Clarkson hit two free throws with 0.3 seconds left in overtime to lift visiting Los Angeles past Minnesota.