

STARS AND STRIPES[®]

Saturday, March 5, 2016

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Attitude shift seen in Afghan millennials

BY TIM CRAIG

The Washington Post

At this stage of his career, Ahmad Jawad would like to be selling the terraced estates that housed Taliban leaders before they were driven from the Afghan capital in 2001.

But the real estate agent hasn't sold a house in nearly a year, and he is so desperate for money that he hopes the Taliban returns to Kabul to impose "rule of law."

"If they can enforce the law like it was enforced during their reign, they are welcome," said Jawad, 27, who blames unemployment, graft and the lack of security for a collapse in Kabul's housing market. "There was less crime. There was less corruption. There was less embezzlement."

His words reflect a shift in the opinions held by some of Kabul's millennials on both the Taliban and President Ashraf Ghani's government: Bashing the Islamist insurgency has gone out of style as frustration with the current leadership mounts.

In the years after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, young urban Afghans were among the most vocal opponents of the Taliban, recoiling not just at its brutality, which included public executions, but also the restraints it imposed on women and its demands that men grow beards.

These progressive 20-somethings, with their embrace of technology, education and Western culture, were seen as an emblem of Afghanistan's bright future. They also formed the backbone of an urban workforce that thrived when more than 100,000 troops and billions of dollars of relief money flowed into the country after 9/11.

Now, as the drawdown of coalition forces saps revenue from the local economy, many younger Afghans appear more open to the idea of the Taliban assimilating into, and perhaps even changing, the existing government and constitutional order.

'I don't care who rules'

"The current situation is so bad, I don't care who rules the country," said Khalid Asif, 24, a technician. "There is an ugly face to the Taliban, but there is an ugly face to everything."

The shift comes as Ghani's government

hopes to re-engage the Taliban in peace talks this week. Although discussions are expected to drag on for months, the erosion of public support for the president could strengthen the Taliban's hand at the bargaining table.

And as misery builds in Kabul, more young urbanites are reassessing some of their views.

Over the past year, the currency's value has dropped 21 percent, driving up the cost of imported goods. The unemployment rate is also rising — ranging now from 25 percent to 40 percent, according to separate analyses from the Labor Ministry and the Afghan Central Statistics Organization.

It's not just a matter of economic woes. The dream of Kabul eventually becoming a more modern city also appears to be fading.

Because of security concerns, Western diplomats and contractors now shuttle around the capital in low-flying helicopters that rattle windows and nerves. Last month, Afghan officials say, militants blew up several transmission lines, cutting off much of Kabul's electricity for three weeks.

The city of at least 3 million doesn't even have a mayor because Ghani and Afghanistan's chief executive, Abdullah Abdullah, have been unable to agree on how to fill thousands of vacant government positions.

Zafar Hashemi, a spokesman for Ghani, said the president understands the youths' frustrations, especially those who have lost high-paying — albeit limited-length — jobs with international contractors or nongovernmental agencies, but he said the government has been hampered by limited resources.

"A majority of the youth does understand the new reality of their country, and the government tries its best to bring about the reforms the country needs so it can utilize its resources efficiently and effectively and create sustainable programs and jobs," Hashemi said. Still, he says that saying that youth are turning against the president is "a very over estimation and exaggerated statement."

"By suggesting that they would like to see the Taliban to join a peaceful life, they do not necessarily want the Taliban's way of life but simply an end to the Taliban's senseless violence."

Interviews with two dozen young adults suggest there are some limits to what they would give up for peace and economic

stability.

They won't stand for restrictions on free speech, women's rights, the media or use of the Internet or social media, they say. But increasingly, it seems, more things are creeping into the category of negotiable.

Accepting possible return

"There is no room for negotiation about the Internet, but in terms of TV stations, they could change some," said Nim Asad Saadat, 19, a student at Kabul University, adding that some "Indian TV shows and Turkish soap operas" run counter to "Islamic values."

Even some Shiite millennials appear to be softening their views of the Sunni-dominated Taliban. When the group ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, thousands of Shiites were killed in clashes with the government.

"We still think they are cruel people ... but now we also see the result of this government," said Najibullah Hamidiyar, 34. "So we Afghans think if the Taliban takes part in this government, and if the situation brings peace, that is OK."

Over the past two years, analysts say, Kabul's young people have cycled through various stages of grief as government promises of jobs and security failed to materialize.

In 2014, younger Afghans largely backed an agreement with the United States to keep troops here, believing that would ensure long-term stability. By last summer, however, young people made up the bulk of the 250,000 Afghans who fled the country in hopes of reaching Europe.

Musa Fariwar, a law professor and political analyst, said younger Afghans now increasingly accept that the Taliban may return in some form.

"They see that foreign intervention has failed, and if the whole international community can't defeat the Taliban, we have no choice but to start peace talks," Fariwar said.

There are exceptions to the trend. Young ex-soldiers and youths who frequent Western-style gyms and underground bars are the most unequivocally anti-Taliban.

"We hate them because we know they will not let us live life free," said Hekmatullah, 22, who was lifting weights at Gold's Gym. (Hekmatullah uses just one name.)

'Kill team' leader wants new trial

McClatchy Washington Bureau

FORT BELVOIR, Va. — U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Calvin Gibbs, convicted of masterminding the murders of three Afghan civilians in 2010, asked a military appeals court in Virginia on Friday to consider new evidence that could lead to a new trial.

Gibbs, a former soldier at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington state, is serving a life sentence at the military prison at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., after a jury found him guilty of leading a team of soldiers in a scheme to slay innocent people while on patrol in Afghanistan.

On Friday, Gibbs' attorney, Phillip Stackhouse, asked the U.S. Army Court of Criminal

Appeals in Fort Belvoir, Va., to consider new evidence that includes new statements from two fellow soldiers who back Gibbs' contention that at least one of the killings was due to legitimate combat engagement.

Anne Hsieh, an attorney representing the government, argued that Gibbs' request should be denied, citing "overwhelming evidence" to support his conviction.

Stackhouse told the judges that while Gibbs admitted to a "significant amount of misconduct" during his trial, he was adamant that he did not engage in premeditated murders.

During court proceedings in 2010 and 2011, Gibbs said he

shot one Afghan who had fired at him first. After killing the man, Gibbs said, he cut a finger off the dead man's body because he was "pretty pissed off."

Gibbs was found guilty on 15 criminal counts by a military jury in November 2011. Along with the three murder charges, he was convicted of conspiring to kill innocent civilians, assaulting a junior-ranking soldier, keeping body parts from corpses and illegally possessing "off the books" weapons. Twelve soldiers from Gibbs' platoon in JBLM's 5th Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division came home accused of criminal misconduct.

Trump changes course on torture

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Donald Trump retreated Friday from his promise that if elected president, he would order the military to kill family members of militants who threaten the United States.

Trump's campaign issued a statement quoting him as saying he would not order the military to take actions contrary to international or U.S. law.

But fewer than 24 hours earlier, in Thursday's GOP debate, when a debate moderator asked him what he would do if the military refused to carry out such orders, Trump replied: "They're not going to refuse me. Believe me."

The issue drew additional attention this week when more than 100 Republican defense and national security figures, including former senior Pentagon officials, issued a statement blasting Trump's foreign policy positions and calling his embrace of the expansive use of torture "inexcusable."

Trump had made clear at Thursday's debate, that, as president, he would not hesitate to go beyond waterboarding.

He also had defended his position on targeting the family of militants.

On Friday, however, Trump reversed course.

"I will use every legal power that I have to stop these terrorist enemies," the statement issued by his campaign said. "I do, however, understand that the United States is bound by laws and treaties and I will not order our military or other officials to violate those laws and will seek their advice on such matters. I will not order a military officer to disobey the law. It is clear that as president I will be bound by laws just like all Americans and I will meet those responsibilities."

iPhone could ID conspirators in attack

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Information contained in an encrypted iPhone could help finally answer if there was a third assailant in the San Bernardino terror attack that killed 14 people, according to court papers filed by the county's district attorney.

San Bernardino Police Chief Jarrod Burguan said Friday that the question of a third attacker has nagged investigators despite no supporting evidence.

Still, he said investigators

would like to definitively answer the question, and unlocking the phone could help do that.

Syed Rizwan Farook and his wife, Tashfeen Malik, opened fire Dec. 2 at an annual training of his San Bernardino County co-workers. The two attackers died hours later in a shootout with police.

In a brief, San Bernardino County District Attorney Michael Ramos cited two 911 calls reporting three perpetrators during the attack.

The district attorney is among

many weighing in on the fight between Apple and the government ahead of a March 22 hearing in which Apple is asking a judge to reverse an order requiring the company to create a software program that overrides iPhone security features.

Apple said unlocking Farook's phone would make all other iPhones more vulnerable.

Among those backing Apple are civil liberties advocates and some of the company's biggest competitors, including Google, Microsoft and Facebook.

Greek border region inundated with migrants

Associated Press

IDOMENI, Greece — A regional governor called on the Greek government Saturday to declare a state of emergency for the area surrounding the Idomeni border crossing where thousands of migrants are stranded due to border restrictions along the route toward Western Europe.

Some 13,000 to 14,000 people are trapped in Idomeni, while another 6,000 to 7,000

are housed in refugee camps around the region, said Apostolos Tzitzikostas, governor of the Greek region of Central Macedonia. That means the area handles about 60 percent of the migrants in the country.

Neighboring Macedonia has stopped all but a trickle of Iraqi and Syrian refugees from crossing its border, following similar restrictions by countries farther north. The moves have caused a massive bottleneck in Greece, whose islands' proximity to the

Turkish coast has made it the preferred entry point for refugees and other migrants.

Greek authorities said about 180 people crossed the border between 6 a.m. Friday and the same time Saturday morning.

The governor said the region needed the emergency measures — or for the law to be amended — so regional authorities can obtain the necessary emergency supplies and food to support the refugees and improve their living conditions.

Vanderbilt playing up to par

Associated Press

Vanderbilt is finally living up to expectations after a sluggish start to the season, peaking at just the right time to boost its NCAA Tournament hopes.

Another SEC team is headed in the wrong direction.

Once in solid position to make the bracket, Florida finds itself on the outside of the bubble after a disappointing loss to No. 22 Kentucky on Tuesday, the Gators' fourth straight.

"We let a lot of cheap games go by that we could've had, but this is where we're at and we just got to continue to fight and continue to battle," sophomore John Egbunu said after the 88-79 home loss to the Wildcats. "We still have a few games in the SEC tournament coming up."

The Gators may need to win it at this point.

Florida enters its regular-season finale against Missouri with a losing conference record (8-9) and is 17-13 overall. Even if the Gators beat the Tigers, it won't help their chances all that much, leaving them in likely need of winning or at least reaching the championship game of the conference tournament.

The Commodores, on the other hand, picked the right time to get rolling, knocking off Kentucky and Florida during a four-game winning streak that puts them at 19-11 overall and 11-6 in the SEC heading into Saturday's regular-season finale against No. 20 Texas A&M.

Find a way to beat the Aggies on the road and it might be hard to keep the Commodores out of the NCAA bracket.

On the rise

■ **Butler:** Once in danger of their bubble bursting, the Bulldogs (20-9, 9-8 Big East) took a huge step in the résumé-building process by knocking off Seton Hall. Beating a team that's headed to the NCAA Tournament is a boost, but there's still work to be done, starting with Saturday's game against Marquette. Win that and a couple of games in the Big East tournament, the Bulldogs might feel a little safer next Sunday.

■ **Providence:** The Friars (21-9, 9-8 Big East) and do-everything guard Kris Dunn appeared to be in trouble after a stretch of six losses in eight games. Providence boosted its chances with wins over DePaul and Creighton and could enter the Big East tournament on a three-game winning streak if it beats St. John's. Get to the tournament semifinals and the Friars should be in. Lose to St. John's and bow out of the Big East tournament early and Selection Sunday might not be much fun.

■ **Ohio State:** The Buckeyes (19-11, 10-6 Big Ten) still have a long way to go, but knocking off No. 16 Iowa last weekend at least puts them back in the bracket conversation.

■ **Southern California:** Seemingly careening away from the NCAA Tournament with five losses in six games, the Trojans (20-10, 9-8 Pac-12) gained a little momentum by knocking off fellow bubble team Oregon State on Wednesday. Beating No. 9 Oregon on Saturday would certainly get them back on the right track heading into next week's Pac-12 tournament.

Fading hopes

■ **Syracuse:** The Orange (19-11, 9-8 ACC) missed out on huge opportunity Monday night, when they lost a potential résumé-boosting game to No. 8 North Carolina. A win in Chapel Hill would have all but locked up an NCAA Tournament bid. Now the Orange probably need a win over Florida State and a couple of wins in the ACC tournament to feel safe.

■ **Cincinnati:** The Bearcats (21-9, 11-6 AAC) have a solid record at first glance, but it's a bit deceiving. Cincinnati is 0-3 against teams in the RPI top 25 and is 2-4 against the top 50. Adding to that is a loss to Houston on Thursday. Knocking off No. 24 SMU on Sunday would certainly boost their chances.

■ **Virginia Commonwealth:** Despite a win over Davidson last Friday, the Rams (22-8, 14-3 A10) are not on the most solid ground for an NCAA bid. VCU's record looks good, but among its losses were a disheartening setback to struggling George Mason. Beating Dayton on Saturday would give the Rams at least a share of the Atlantic-10 title, but they still may need a good run in the conference tournament.

■ **Gonzaga:** Another record-can-be-deceiving team. The Bulldogs enter this weekend's West Coast Conference tournament at 23-7 and 15-3, yet don't have many marquee wins and have struggled in potential résumé-building games. Gonzaga also has lost to St. Mary's twice and may need to at least reach the WCC tournament title game.

Older Busch wins pole

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Kurt Busch won the pole for Sunday's NASCAR Sprint Cup race in his hometown, claiming the spot for the second straight week with a top speed of 196.328 mph on a day of dizzying speeds.

After setting the track qualifying speed record in Round 1, Busch won his second career pole at Las Vegas Motor Speedway in his No. 41 Chevrolet, turning a lap in 27.505 seconds on Friday.

"It was insanely fast," Busch said. "I was hoping to put on a show for the home crowd, get the pole, but now we've got to go to work (Saturday). I hope we can get the car dialed in for long-run speed for Sunday."

Joey Logano will start up front alongside Busch after clocking a lap in 27.572 seconds. Matt Kenseth came in third at 25.582, and Brad Keselowski was fourth with defending champion Matt Kenseth in sixth.

NASCAR's new low-downforce package, the Goodyear tires and the Vegas surface combined to put drivers in position for high speeds. In all, 14 drivers ran a faster lap than the previous track record.

"This is a track where you need more guts than brains," said Logano, who is in the front row in Vegas for the third straight year. "(You've got) to tell yourself to put your foot on the throttle when you really feel like you shouldn't. It is fun for that reason."

Busch hit 196.378 mph in the first round to set the new track record. The older brother of Kyle Busch is in his 15th race at the modern track next to the ³/₈-mile bullring where the Busch boys started their racing careers.

Kurt also won the pole in Atlanta last week, but only after Kyle was sent to the back for failing inspection.

Every car qualified for the race, since the 39-car field is one smaller than the limit. Last week's race in Atlanta was NASCAR's first since 2014 with a smaller-than-maximum field, as well as the smallest number for a Cup race since 37 cars ran at North Wilkesboro Speedway in 1996, according to STATS.

What to expect: Speed and wind. The bumper crop of impressive lap times could lead to a speedy race Sunday — or the expected high winds could create caution and uncertainty. Logano and Kurt Busch don't know exactly how the factors will affect the field.

"What we do hope is that it is a constant wind," Logano said. "The gusts of wind is what crashes cars. ... It is going to be dangerous, treacherous for sure."

Wall work: After Jamie McMurray hit the wall during the first round, Carl Edwards followed suit in Turn 2 during the second session, forcing him to unload his backup Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota. Edwards wasn't sure what happened, but he thought the right rear tire blew. The two-time Las Vegas winner was strong in the opening round of qualifying, but will drop to the back to start Sunday's race.

Return date still uncertain for Stewart

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Tony Stewart still doesn't know when he'll be back in his car to begin his final NASCAR season.

And yes, the three-time Sprint Cup series champion says he's still done after this year.

Stewart is hoping to return to his car quickly, but he'll know more about his recovery from back surgery when he has X-rays next week. He defied his doctors' wishes with a cross-country flight to Nevada this week, although he spent most of it flat on his back.

"I'm definitely breaking the rules," Stewart said Friday. "But I can't lay in bed any longer. It's about to kill me. We did everything short of bubble-wrap me to ride out here on the plane."

Rest is necessary to ensure a full recovery for his broken vertebra, but Stewart wanted to support his Stewart-Haas Racing teammates and employees at Las Vegas Motor Speedway this weekend when NASCAR opens its three-race Southwest swing. Brian Vickers is driving Stewart's No. 14 Mobil 1 Chevrolet in Las Vegas, and Ty Dillon also will drive the car in other races.

Although he isn't following the letter of his doctors' instructions, Stewart also

won't return to his car until his body is ready.

"This is a different injury than the leg injury," Stewart said, referring to his broken leg in 2013. "The leg injury was a much more severe injury, but this is a much more sensitive injury. If this doesn't heal right, if we do something that messes it up, it could affect me the rest of my life. It's more important to let this thing heal right. We're not rushing to get back in the car."

Stewart was injured in a low-speed dirt buggy accident near the California-Arizona border on Jan. 31. He had surgery to stabilize his back, but his doctors haven't examined his progress or allowed him to begin rehabilitation.

Stewart's injury and his truncated season led to speculation that the notoriously competitive driver wouldn't want to go out like that. Some wondered whether he would run a limited schedule next year, perhaps competing in the Daytona 500, which he has never won.

Stewart quashed that speculation in Las Vegas, shaking his head at the suggestion of a future Sprint Cup career beyond this season — and he lamented the circumstances of his injury, which happened in a 25-foot drop off a sand dune.

"I'm not going to change the plan be-

cause I got hurt," Stewart said. "These are the cards we were dealt. It was a weird accident that nobody ever thought would happen. ... The story about how I got hurt, I can't even make it sound cool. I got hurt driving 5 miles an hour. I wish I could tell the story of — I was jumping a 50-foot gap, running 60 miles an hour, it flipped over, caught on fire and I broke my back. That's not what happened."

Stewart sat at a podium to answer a few questions Friday, even though he knew sitting wasn't good for him. He needs to be flat on his back, or he has to keep moving around.

Although he's getting off to a late start, Stewart hopes to get a medical waiver from NASCAR that would allow him to compete for a spot in the Chase for the Sprint Cup if he wins a race and manages a top-30 finish in the standings. Kyle Busch got into the Chase last year despite missing the first 11 races with a broken leg, and he ended up winning the championship.

But Busch was injured during a NASCAR event, while Stewart was on his own time.

"I'll do the best I can," Stewart said. "Whatever they decide, they decide, and I would like to think it's going to be similar to what they did last year with Kyle."



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Raptors hold off Trail Blazers

Associated Press

TORONTO — DeMar DeRozan set an NBA record by making 24 straight free throws on his way to a season-high 38 points and the Toronto Raptors overcame a huge game from Damian Lillard to beat the Portland Trail Blazers 117-115 on Friday night for their franchise-record 12th straight home win.

Lillard scored 50 points, one shy of his career high set last month in a 137-105 win over Golden State.

DeRozan went 24-for-25 from the free-throw line, both career highs. Kyle Lowry had 28 points and Jonas Valanciunas had 17 points and 10 rebounds for Toronto.

Portland lost the season series to Toronto for the first time since 1996-97. C.J. McCollum added 24 for Portland, but he and Lillard were the only Blazers in double figures.

Cavaliers 108, Wizards 83: LeBron James flirted with a triple-double before sitting out the fourth quarter, Kyrie Irving scored 21 points and host Cleveland avenged a recent ugly loss to Washington.

The Cavs were blown out at Washington on Sunday, when James watched from the bench and the Wizards built a 30-point lead.

But with James energized after not playing since Monday, and Cleveland using a "small" lineup as forward Kevin Love got the night off, the Cavs snapped Washington's four-game winning streak.

James finished with 19 points, 13 rebounds and seven assists. Timofey Mozgov scored 14 points, 12 on dunks, for Cleveland.

John Wall scored 17 and Markieff Morris 13 for the Wizards.

Nets 121, Nuggets 120 (OT): Brook Lopez had 20 points and tipped in a basket with .4 seconds left in overtime to lift visiting Brooklyn over Denver.

Nikola Jokic missed badly on a backward desperation shot off an inbound pass as time expired, and the Nets beat the Nuggets for the fifth straight time.

Markel Brown had 21 points to lead the Nets and Bojan Bogdanovic added 17 points. Bogdanovic made 2 of 3 free throws in the final seconds of regulation to force overtime.

Emmanuel Mudiay had 25 points to lead the Nuggets. Gary Harris added 21 points and Kenneth Faried had 17 points.

Grizzlies 94, Jazz 88: Zach Randolph scored 25 points and grabbed four rebounds in the final minute to lead host Memphis.

Randolph, who finished with eight rebounds, was 9-for-18 from the field as Memphis won its third straight and seventh in the last nine. Lance Stephenson, acquired by the Grizzlies at the trade deadline, had 16 points on 8-for-11 shooting, while Mike Conley had 12 points.

Gordon Hayward led the Jazz with 18 points, including keying Utah's offense in the third quarter. Derrick Favors scored 14 points, shooting 7 of 17. Rudy Gobert had 13 points, 18 rebounds and five blocks. Shelvin Mack had 12 points and eight assists for Utah, which lost its fifth straight, striking another blow to its play-offs hopes.

Hornets 108, Pacers 101: Kemba Walker scored 33 points and had 10 assists, Nicolas Batum added 31 points and host Charlotte got its ninth win in the last 11 games.

Walker shot 9 of 17 from the field and made all 11 free throws for his 10th 30-point game of the season as the Hornets swept the three-game series with the Pacers for the first time in franchise history. Walker has averaged 29.6 points during Charlotte's current three-game win streak.

Al Jefferson chipped in with 13 points for Charlotte, which shot 48.1 percent for the game to improve to 21-9 at home.

Bucks 116, Timberwolves 101: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 27 points, 12 assists and nine rebounds, and Khris Middleton scored 32 points as Milwaukee beat visiting Minnesota.

Celtics 105, Knicks 104: Isaiah Thomas had 32 points and eight assists,

Avery Bradley hit a go-ahead layup with 17.7 seconds left and Boston won its 13th straight at home.

Evan Turner had 21 points and eight rebounds for the Celtics, and Jae Crowder finished with 20 points and eight rebounds.

Boston trailed by eight points in the fourth quarter but used a series of mini-runs to eventually take the lead for good on the driving layup by Bradley.

Carmelo Anthony had a chance to win the game in the closing seconds but badly missed a 3-pointer off the backboard as time expired.

Anthony had 30 points and seven rebounds. Arron Afflalo added 17 points and Kristaps Porzingis finished with 15 points for the Knicks, who lost their third straight.

Heat 112, 76ers 102: Hassan Whiteside had 19 points and 19 rebounds, Dwyane Wade scored 21 points and visiting Miami won its fourth straight.

Goran Dragic added 15 points and 11 assists for the Heat. Luol Deng scored 13 points and Joe Johnson, Amar'e Stoudemire and Gerald Green had 12 points each.

The Heat improved to 7-2 since losing Chris Bosh to a blood clot in his calf. They are 4-0 since signing Johnson after the seven-time All-Star agreed to a buyout with Brooklyn.

Suns 102, Magic 84: Alex Len scored a career-high 31 points and grabbed 15 rebounds, and Phoenix held Orlando scoreless for a 7½-minute stretch to snap a 17-game road losing streak.

Hawks 106, Lakers 77: Reserve Dennis Schroder led six players in double figures with 16 points and visiting Atlanta completed its first season sweep of the Lakers since 1973-74.

Los Angeles fans began chanting Kobe Bryant's name in the closing minutes, but he was nursing a sore right shoulder and wasn't around.

Longhorns power past Cowboys

Associated Press

STILLWATER, Okla. — Texas needed someone to step up and take control in the second half Friday night, and Kerwin Roach Jr. answered the call.

Roach scored 15 points, all in the second half, and added six rebounds, as No. 23 Texas closed the game on a 16-2 run to defeat Oklahoma State 62-50 in the regular-season finale for both.

"He did what he's been getting better and better at doing all season long," said Longhorns coach Shaka Smart. "He hit a couple of really big outside shots and he's been really good at slashing and making plays and he finished them off. That was huge for us because we had some guys who didn't particularly have their best offensive games."

Isaiah Taylor added 12 points for Texas (20-11, 11-7 Big 12), which reached the 20-win plateau for the 16th time in the last 17 seasons.

For Roach, who scored nine points in the final five minutes and the Longhorns' final seven of the game, it was just a case of riding a wave of confidence.

"All I know is that I had my team behind me," said Roach, who averaged 9.8 points over his previous 11 outings. "My team was cheering me on and it made me keep going. Coach Smart kept saying keep attacking, so it gave me a lot of confidence."

Leyton Hammonds, returning to the lineup after missing a game with a dislocated finger, scored 20 points and added six rebounds to lead Oklahoma State (12-19, 3-15), which lost its sixth straight and ninth in its last 10.

"We're just struggling offensively," said Cowboys coach Travis Ford. "Our defense is keeping us in the game, we're just challenged offensively to have a guy that can make that play for you, whether it be creating for someone else or whether it be knocking down that shot."

After the teams entered the second half tied at 29, neither squad was able to build more than a three-point lead through the first 15 minutes.

Hammonds' long jump shot put the Cowboys ahead 48-46 with 7:44 remaining, but Roach capped off a 6-0 Texas run with a layup to put the Longhorns on top, 52-48, with 4:32 remaining.

Chris Olivier answered for Oklahoma State with 4:11 to go to pull to within 52-50, but that would be the last points for OSU, which made just 5 of 12 free throws in the second half.

Roach sealed the game when he connected on a three-pointer as the shot clock expired with 1:40 left to make it 60-50.

Texas: Texas entered the day leading the Big 12 in fewest turnovers per game, averaging 9.8 in conference play, and they committed six on the night, including just one in the first half.

Oklahoma State: It was Senior Night for the Cowboys, and Ford started all five seniors on the active roster, including little-used forward Codey McElroy and guard Ford Stuen, who had each made just three appearances for a grand total of nine combined minutes. Also starting were usual reserves Chris Olivier and Anthony Allen. The quartet played the first 2:19 before coming out, with Oklahoma State trailing 5-2, for the usual starters. Neither McElroy nor Stuen saw the court again.

Raanta sharp as Rangers top Capitals

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Missing Henrik Lundqvist because of neck spasms sustained in a meltdown loss at Pittsburgh, the New York Rangers knew they had to rally around backup Antti Raanta against the NHL-leading Washington Capitals.

Raanta was good and his teammates provided timely scoring and stingy defense in a 3-2 victory Friday night.

"We had a discussion before the game that everybody needs to come show up to the game today and let's play aggressive hockey, let's put our bodies on the line," said Raanta, who stopped 32 shots.

Raanta was so sharp that the Rangers wondered if he only allowed one goal. Jay Beagle's seventh goal 10:58 into the second period required a lengthy video review, and New York coach Alain Vigneault said he and his staff couldn't see that the puck went over the line even after the NHL sent its definitive replay angle.

It was a moot point afterward because Derek Stepan scored the game-winner 17 seconds into the third period, banking a shot off Capitals defenseman Brooks Orpik's skate and past Braden Holtby. Stepan's 15th goal of the season was another example of him coming up big in big moments.

"He's supposed to be one of our go-to guys and he's played in important games and he

knows that he's got to step it up," Vigneault said. "The teams that win are getting good goaltending and obviously solid play from their top players and Step is one of ours."

Jesper Fast and Keith Yandle also scored for the Rangers, who haven't lost consecutive games since Dec. 17 and 20. Their 10 wins in a row following a regulation loss is the longest in franchise history within a single season, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

This was an impressive show of resiliency because it came without Lundqvist and because New York had to handle responding to a questionable video review and blowing a two-goal lead.

"It was a good sign for us responding under tough conditions, travel here and obviously going against the top team in the league and proving that we can come out on top," captain Ryan McDonagh said.

There wasn't much for the Capitals to complain about, either, despite just their sixth regulation loss at Verizon Center. Goals by Beagle and T.J. Oshie got them back into the game after another rough start, and Holtby made 20 saves.

Coach Barry Trotz justified the loss as somewhat of a counter balance to picking up two undeserved points for a shoddy effort Wednesday against the Toronto Maple Leafs.

"I thought we played the right way," Trotz said. "As I said to the guys after the game,

'I'll take that game any day of the week.' We just got to clean up a couple areas and we'll be fine."

Stars 4, Devils 2: Valeri Nichushkin had a goal and an assist on his 21st birthday, and host Dallas stopped a four-game slide.

Vernon Fiddler, Jason Spezza and Colton Sceviour also scored for Dallas, and Kari Lehtonen made 18 saves. Fiddler's short-handed score into an empty net with 20 seconds left was his 100th career goal.

With about a month left in the season, Dallas, Chicago and St. Louis are locked up in a tough race for the Central Division title. The Stars (39-20-7) and Blackhawks (40-21-5) each have 85 points, followed by the Blues (37-20-9) with 83.

New Jersey has lost seven of nine.

Blue Jackets 6, Oilers 3: Defenseman David Savard had two goals, and host Columbus scored on its first two shots.

Boone Jenner and Scott Hartnell each had a goal and an assist as last-place Columbus won for the third time in four games. Cam Atkinson and Fedor Tyutin also scored, and Joonas Korpisalo had 25 saves.

Connor McDavid had a goal and an assist for Edmonton, which had won three in a row. Taylor Hall and Leon Draisaitl also scored.

McDavid, the No. 1 overall pick in last year's draft, has eight goals and 14 assists in 17 games since returning from a broken left collarbone.