

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## Whistleblower retaliation costs admiral promotion

*The Washington Post*

WASHINGTON — The Navy has denied promotion to the admiral in charge of its elite SEAL teams, effectively ending his military career, after multiple investigations found that he had retaliated against whistleblowers.

Officials said Navy Secretary Ray Mabus, under pressure from Congress, decided this week to reject Rear Adm. Brian Losey's pending promotion to become a two-star admiral.

The Washington Post reported in October that the Navy was poised to promote Losey despite findings from Pentagon investigators that he illegally demoted or punished three subordinates during a fruitless hunt for an anonymous whistleblower who had reported him for a minor

travel-policy infraction.

Navy leaders began reconsidering Losey's status in December after Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., blocked the nomination of Janine Davidson to become the Navy's second-ranking civilian leader. Wyden said he didn't have any problem with Davidson, but wanted to force the Navy to revisit Losey's case, adding that promoting him would send a message that retaliating against whistleblowers was acceptable.

Losey is being replaced by Rear Adm. Timothy Szymanski, the assistant commander for operations at the Joint Special Operations Command at Fort Bragg, N.C.

On Thursday, Navy officials said Losey would submit an official request to retire.

## AF general fired because of inappropriate relationship

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — A senior Air Force general officer has been fired from his job and will retire after an investigation found that he had an inappropriate, unprofessional relationship with a lower-ranking female Air Force officer.

The Air Force released an investigation Thursday saying that Lt. Gen. John Hesterman, the assistant vice chief of staff, was found guilty of misconduct. The charges stem from several groups of emails he exchanged with an Air force lieutenant colonel in 2010 and 2011.

The investigation found that the emails included language that was "sexually suggestive in places and romantic in other places." One of Hesterman's

emails signed off with "much love."

In another he talked about wanting to see her, saying: "I've missed you my lovely girl."

Hesterman told investigators that he didn't recall some of the exchanges and that he didn't remember being that friendly.

According to the investigation, there were email exchanges between the two officers when both were based at RAF Lakenheath in England, where the U.S. has a military presence.

Other, more recent exchanges were when he was stationed at the Pentagon and later, when he was deployed to Qatar and she was living in Virginia.

The lieutenant colonel's name was redacted from the report.

## N. Korea launches 2 ballistic missiles

BY PAUL ALEXANDER

*Stars and Stripes*

North Korea used mobile launch platforms to fire a pair of ballistic missiles Friday, a worrying development from a country that is eagerly pursuing multiple ways to attack its enemies while cutting reaction time for defenses.

One of the medium-range missiles fell into the sea after flying about 500 miles across the country, while the other disappeared from radar shortly after launch, suggesting that it may have exploded or otherwise failed, South Korea's Yonhap News quoted officials as saying.

It was the latest move in the cat-and-mouse game with the provocative North that South Korean and U.S. officials fear could become deadly, either by intent or miscalculation.

Earlier in the week, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said the country would soon try out several types of missiles and would conduct another nuclear test despite tightened U.N. Security Council sanctions against both activities.

This time, it appeared that the Rodong missile was the threat of choice. The Rodong, last tested two years ago, is believed to have a range of about 800 miles, putting all of South Korea and part of Japan within striking distance, and could carry either explosives or chemical weapons.

"The U.S. tracked the launch of two ballistic missiles from North Korea," a U.S. Department of Defense statement said. "Neither was assessed to be a threat to the U.S. or our regional allies."

The North appeared to be trying to give as little warning of the launch as possible. Yonhap cited military sources as saying it did not declare a no-sail zone as is required under international conventions for the safety of ships in the area.

The use of mobile launch platforms is also worrying because they are more difficult to track before use, as is recent work the North has carried out at its traditional rocket site that appears aimed at camouflaging preparations for a launch. New satellite photos also have shown a flurry of activity at its submarine bay that could be part of efforts to develop the capability to launch ballistic missiles from submarines.

The North earlier claimed to have successfully test-fired sub-launched missiles, but experts said the visual evidence appeared to have been faked.

The launches are the latest in a series of provocations by Pyongyang — starting with its fourth nuclear test on Jan. 6 and the launch of a long-range rocket a month later — that have set off a steadily escalating crisis. It has further isolated the reclusive country and left officials wondering what Kim's long-term motives and goals are and what lies ahead.

The U.N. Security Council has passed the toughest sanctions against the North in 20 years, with China reluctantly agreeing. Beijing prefers negotiations and fears that exerting too much pressure on Pyongyang could lead to the collapse of the regime and chaos on their joint border, but also seems to be losing patience over the repeated bouts of brinkmanship.

# 14 Wyo. airmen suspected of drug activity

BY COREY DICKSTEIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Fourteen United States airmen have been removed from duty at a Wyoming nuclear missile facility under suspicion they were involved in illegal drug activity, an Air Force general said Friday.

An investigation was launched Tuesday at F.E. Warren Air Force Base into the suspected activity of the airmen, all security force personnel ranging in rank from airman to senior airman, after it was reported by another member of their unit, said Air Force Gen. Robin Rand, the commander of Air Force Global Strike Command.

Rand called the allegations “credible,”

but he declined to detail what the activity might have involved.

“We will wait for the investigation to be complete before I will comment on the specifics,” he said.

The suspected activity occurred while the airmen were off duty, the general said. He declined to say Friday whether it occurred on the base.

Warren AFB is home to the 90th Missile Wing that operates about 150 Minuteman III Intercontinental Ballistic Missile systems, capable of carrying nuclear warheads. Rand said the suspected activity had no “operational impact” on the base’s mission.

Air Force security force personnel are

responsible for base law enforcement and security and protection of the missile field. Those implicated in the investigation, which is being conducted by the Air Force Office of Special Investigations, are a tiny fraction of the security forces at Warren, Rand said.

There are about 1,300 airmen, including about 1,000 junior enlisted, assigned to the 90th Security Forces Group, the general said.

U.S. military personnel are regularly screened for illegal drugs. None of the suspected airmen had recently failed a drug test, and Rand said Friday he did not plan to order commandwide drug screenings.

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## First woman tapped to lead combatant command

BY TARA COPP  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — U.S. Air Force Gen. Lori Robinson has been nominated to become the first-ever female combatant commander, Secretary of Defense Ash Carter said Friday.

Robinson would assume command of U.S. Northern Command and North American Aerospace Defense Command, replacing outgoing Adm. William Gortney. The joint command is responsible for the defense of the United States, particularly the country’s response to any missile threats against the homeland.

If approved, Robinson would

become the first female combatant commander in the U.S. military, Carter said.

Carter praised Robinson’s “very deep operational experience,” particularly her role as the first female to lead the nations’ combat air power at U.S. Pacific Air Forces, a role that she has served in since 2014. The command has a high pace of operations given security challenges posed by North Korea and China, Carter said. The defense secretary also said the nomination reflects that “we have coming along now a lot of female officers who are exceptionally strong. Lori certainly fits into that category.”

Robinson’s nomination would

need to be approved by the Senate.

Robinson’s rise follows recent gains by women in the military to serve in combat roles and opens the door to a future female chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

U.S. law requires any nominee for chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to have served either as the top chief in any of the military branches, such as commandant of the Marine Corps or chief of Naval Operations; as a vice chairman of the joint chiefs; or as a combatant commander.

A woman first rose to the rank of a four-star general in 2008, when now-retired Gen.

Ann Dunwoody was picked to lead U.S. Army Materiel Command in 2008.

Robinson joined the Air Force in 1982 through the ROTC program at the University of New Hampshire.

She has served as vice commander of the 405th Air Expeditionary Wing in 2003 at the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom; as commander of the 17th Training Wing at Goodfellow Air Force Base in San Angelo, Texas; as a deputy commander for U.S. Air Forces Central Command in 2013; and as vice commander of Air Combat Command in 2014.

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## Obama authorizes limited plan to train Syrian rebels

*Tribune Washington Bureau*

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama has authorized a limited new plan to train and arm rebel fighters to confront Islamic State militants in Syria, relaunching a Pentagon program that was suspended last fall after a series of embarrassing setbacks.

The renewed effort, which

was recommended by Defense Secretary Ash Carter, appears far less ambitious than the original program, which aimed to train and arm 5,400 fighters a year but never achieved that goal.

“This is part of our adjustments to the train-and-equip program built on prior lessons learned,” said Col. Steve Warren, spokesman for the U.S.-led

military coalition in Baghdad.

He said training will be focused on “select individuals in key capabilities,” and support for them “will be measured against their performance” against the Islamic State group.

Warren declined to say how many fighters would be trained, where the training would occur, when it would start or other de-

tails, citing operational security. The program is separate from a covert CIA-run training operation.

Warren said the new effort would “leverage the new relationships we have developed on the ground, and our approach to focus on existing groups currently active” in fighting the Islamic State group.



# No. 12 seeds break through in openers

Associated Press

One 12 seed got its first NCAA Tournament win in program history, another staged a huge comeback then hung on for a double-overtime victory and two 11 seeds also pulled upsets. In total, seven lower-seeded teams won in the tourney's first 16 games, but of course, the No. 1 seeds have so far assured themselves a spot in the second round.

Not bad for the opening day at the NCAA Tournament.

## West Regional

**Yale 79, Baylor 75:** At Providence, R.I., Makai Mason had a career-high 31 points, including six of Yale's final nine points, and the No. 12 seed Bulldogs held on to upset fifth seed Baylor on Thursday.

Yale (23-6) earned its first NCAA Tournament victory. It comes in its first appearance since 1962.

Justin Sears added 18 points. Brandon Sherrod finished with 10.

The Bulldogs led by as many as 13 points in the second half before having its lead cut to 1 point. But a late turnover by the Bears helped Yale secure the victory.

Taurean Prince led Baylor (22-12) with 28 points. Johnathan Motley finished with 15 points and seven rebounds.

Yale will play No. 4 seed Duke on Saturday.

**Duke 93, UNC Wilmington 85:** At Providence, R.I., Marshall Plumlee ditched the mask guarding his broken nose and responded by scoring a career-high 23 points to lead defending national champion Duke past UNC Wilmington.

Plumlee had 10 of his points and two blocks as the Blue Devils stepped up the defensive pressure early in the second half to build a lead after trailing at the break.

Duke (24-10), seeded fourth in the West, will next play Yale or Baylor. UNCW (25-8), seeded 13th, was in it until the closing moments after Plumlee and Matt Jones fouled out.

Grayson Allen also scored 23 points for the Blue Devils, but 15 came from the foul line as he shot just 4-for-12 from the field. Brandon Ingram added 20.

Craig Ponder led UNCW with 22 points. Chris Flemmings had 18, Denzel Ingram 17 and C.J. Bryce 16.

## Midwest Regional

**Little Rock 85, Purdue 83 (20T):** At Denver, Little Rock is advancing thanks to an out-of-nowhere comeback that led to a victory over Purdue.

Josh Hagins sent the game into overtime with a shot from the edge of the midcourt logo, and then into double OT with an arcing shot off glass over an outstretched defender.

The 6-foot-1 senior finished with 31 points, including six in the second overtime.

The 12th-seeded Trojans (30-4), trailed 65-52 with 3:33 to go in regulation, and then went on a 12-0 run to make it a game. Trailing by three on the final possession, Hagins tried to find space, then stepped back and launched from 30 feet to tie it.

Little Rock will face Iowa State on Saturday in the second round.

Vince Edwards led Purdue (26-9) with 24 points.

**Gonzaga 68, Seton Hall 52:** At Denver, Gonzaga is moving on in the NCAA Tournament after pulling away from Seton Hall behind 21 points and 16 rebounds from Domantas Sabonis.

Kyle Wiltjer added 13 for the Bulldogs (27-7), who will play Utah on Saturday for a trip to the Sweet 16.

Gonzaga came in as an 11 seed — a team that struggled at times this season and was no sure bet to make its 18th straight trip into March Madness until it won its conference tournament.

But against sixth-seeded Seton Hall (25-9), this didn't feel like an upset.

**Virginia 81, Hampton 45:** At Raleigh, N.C., Anthony Gill scored 19 points and Virginia beat Hampton.

London Perrantes had 12 points and Malcolm Brogdon finished with 11 for the top-seeded Cavaliers (28-6).

They shot 55 percent, hit 12 three-pointers and put this one well out of reach with a 20-3 run late in the first half before coach Tony Bennett collapsed and was taken to the locker room a few seconds early.

Virginia reported that Bennett was dehydrated, and he was back for the second half. His team had no problems advancing to face ninth-seeded Butler (22-10) on Saturday.

**Iowa State 94, Iona 81:** At Denver, Monte Morris showed no lingering effects of his right shoulder injury, scoring 20 points and dishing out eight assists in Iowa State's win over Iona.

Georges Niang's 28 points led the No. 3 seed Cyclones (22-11), who saw all five of their starters score in double figures. They will play Little Rock on Saturday at the Pepsi Center.

Less than 24 hours after declaring he'd never felt better, Morris went out and proved it. Abdel Nader added 19 points, Matt Thomas had 14 and Jameel McKay 11 for the Cyclones.

**Butler 71, Texas Tech 61:** At Raleigh, N.C., Kelan Martin scored all 11 of his points in the final 8½ minutes, including consecutive three-pointers to break a tie game, to help Butler beat Texas Tech.

Kellen Dunham scored 23 points to lead the Bulldogs (22-10), including a critical three of his own with 2:26 left as the Midwest Region's No. 9 seed finally pulled away in the final minutes. Butler shot 52 percent after halftime, using some NCAA Tournament experience to rally from an early eight-point deficit and finally push ahead midway through the second half.

Devauntah Williams scored 18 points to lead the eighth-seeded Red Raiders (19-13).

**Utah 80, Fresno State 69:** At Denver, sophomore 7-footer Jakob Poeltl scored 16 points and pulled down a career-high 18 rebounds to help Utah hold off feisty Fresno State.

Utah, the third seed in the Midwest, used a blistering 20-2 run down the stretch to regain control after falling behind for the first time all night with 10:32 remaining.

Lorenzo Bonham had 17 points and Brandon Taylor added 16 for the Utes (27-8), who will try for their second straight

trip to the Sweet 16 when they face Seton Hall or Gonzaga on Saturday night.

Marvelle Harris, the Mountain West's player of the year, led the Bulldogs (25-10) with 24 points. It was their first NCAA appearance since 2001.

## South Regional

**Wichita State 65, Arizona 55:** At Providence, R.I., Fred VanVleet and Ron Baker combined for 29 points and Wichita State's swarming defense did the rest as the Shockers beat Arizona.

Wichita State (26-8) will play Miami (26-7), the third seed in the South Region, on Saturday.

Arizona coach Sean Miller called a timeout 53 seconds into the game after VanVleet and Baker pounced on a loose ball in the Wildcats end. It was evident from the outset that Wichita State's in-your-face defense was going to be the decisive factor against Arizona (25-9).

The Shockers forced 19 turnovers they converted into 22 points and snared nine steals.

**Kansas 105, Austin Peay 79:** At Des Moines, Iowa, Svi Mykhailiuk scored a career-high 23 points, Perry Ellis added 21 and top-seeded Kansas throttled Austin Peay.

Landen Lucas scored 16 points for the Jayhawks (31-4), who will face Connecticut on Saturday with a chance to return to the Sweet 16 for the first time since 2013.

Kansas, the No. 1 seed in the South Region, jumped ahead by 20 by halftime and cruised to its 10th straight win in an NCAA Tournament opener.

Josh Robinson scored 24 points for the Governors (18-18), who learned quickly that the magic they leaned on to win four straight and the Ohio Valley title was no match for talent-laden Jayhawks.

**Connecticut 74, Colorado 67:** At Des Moines, Iowa, Rodney Purvis, Daniel Hamilton and a stifling defense carried Connecticut back from an 11-point first-half deficit, giving the Huskies enough for a victory over Colorado that kept coach Kevin Ollie unbeaten in the NCAA Tournament.

Purvis scored 15 of his 19 points after halftime, Daniel Hamilton had 17 points and 10 rebounds and the No. 9 seed Huskies (25-10) advanced to the second round of the South Region.

Josh Scott had 23 points and 11 rebounds for the No. 8 Buffaloes (22-12), finishing 0-3 in the NCAA Tournament in his career. He had five of Colorado's 11 misses in 30 free-throw attempts, aiding UConn's comeback.

**Miami 79, Buffalo 72:** At Providence, R.I., Angel Rodriguez had 24 points and seven rebounds as third-seeded Miami held on to defeat No. 14 seed Buffalo.

Sheldon McClellan added 20 points and five rebounds. It is Miami's first tournament win since it went to the Sweet 16 in 2013. The Hurricanes advance to play Wichita State in the second round of the South Region on Saturday.

Miami (26-7) kept the Bulls at bay for most of the second half, leading by as many as 12.

The Bulls (20-15) finally got some traction, closing within 72-68 on a jumper by Lamonte Bearden with less than two min-

utes to play. But Miami hit enough free throws down the stretch to put the game away.

## East Regional

**North Carolina 83, Florida Gulf Coast 67:** At Raleigh, N.C., Brice Johnson scored 18 points and No. 1 seed North Carolina needed an overwhelming second-half start to put away 16th-seeded Florida Gulf Coast.

Isaiah Hicks added 12 points off the bench for the Tar Heels (29-6), who led by just a point after a frustration-filled opening 20 minutes in which the Eagles stayed right with the East Region's top seed. But UNC dominated the opening 10 minutes of the second half, running off a 20-3 burst by controlling the boards and locking down defensively to build a 20-point lead.

That helped the Tar Heels avoid the unwanted history of being the first 1-seed to lose to a 16-seed in tournament history.

**Indiana 99, Chattanooga 74:** At Des Moines, Iowa, Yogi Ferrell had 20 points and a season-high 10 assists, O.G. Anunoby pitched in 14 points and No. 5 seed Indiana took charge of its NCAA Tournament opener against Chattanooga.

Thomas Bryant had 13 points and Troy Williams added 12 points and eight rebounds for the Hoosiers (26-7), who had their high-powered offense in prime form. They shot 37-for-57 from the floor for 64.9 percent. Anunoby, the long-armed freshman forward, was 6-for-7 with a highlight-reel array of three-pointers and dunks.

Duke Ethridge had 14 points and Justin Tuoyo scored 12 points for the No. 12 seed Mocs (29-6), whose stellar first season under young coach Matt McCall came to a screeching end.

**Kentucky 85, Stony Brook 57:** At Des Moines, Iowa, Jamal Murray led five players in double figures with 19 points and fourth-seeded Kentucky routed Stony Brook, setting up a showdown with rival Indiana in the second round.

Isaiah Briscoe scored 13 with 11 rebounds for the Wildcats (27-8), who haven't faced the Hoosiers since beating them in the Sweet 16 in 2012.

Kentucky opened the second half on a 20-6 run that put it ahead 53-25 with 14 minutes to go. The Wildcats hit 13 of their first 16 shots after the break, helping validate coach John Calipari's cries that they were under-seeded.

Jameel Warney had 23 points and 15 rebounds for Stony Brook (26-7), which was making its first NCAA Tournament appearance.

**Providence 70, Southern California 69:** At Raleigh, N.C., Rodney Bullock hit a layup with 1.5 seconds left and Providence beat Southern California.

Ben Bentil scored 19 points and Bullock finished with 16 points and 10 rebounds to help the ninth-seeded Friars (24-10) earn their first win in the tournament since 1997. They will face top-seeded North Carolina (29-6) on Saturday in the second round of the East Regional.

Jordan McLaughlin had 15 points for eighth-seeded Southern California (21-13), which missed the front ends of two one-and-ones in the final minute.



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# Spurs top Blazers, improve to 34-0 at home

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — Kawhi Leonard and LaMarcus Aldridge each had 22 points as the San Antonio Spurs beat the Portland Trail Blazers 118-110 Thursday night to secure the second-best home start to a season in league history.

The Spurs have won 34 straight at home to open the season and only trail the 37 wins by the Chicago Bulls during their historic 72-victory season in 1995-96.

A dominant third quarter enabled San Antonio to sit its starters for much of the fourth quarter in advance of Saturday's showdown with Golden State. The Warriors and the Spurs have both clinched playoff berths and division titles and are on pace to finish with two of the three best single-season records in league history.

Tony Parker had 18 points and a season-high 16 assists. The Spurs shot 52 percent while committing seven turnovers, which was one off its season low.

C.J. McCollum had 26 points and Damian Lillard had 23 for Portland.

**Raptors 101, Pacers 94:** DeMar DeRozan and Kyle Lowry each scored 28 points to lead visiting Toronto over Indiana in overtime.

DeRozan had 10 points in the fourth quarter. He had a chance to win the game for Toronto at the end of regulation but missed a fade-away jumper on the wing as time expired. He's scored at least 25 points in five of Toronto's last six games.

Lowry added four assists and eight rebounds for the Raptors but also committed eight turnovers. Bismack Biyombo finished with 16 points and a career-high 25 rebounds.

Paul George led the Pacers with 18 points and nine rebounds. George Hill added 18 points and CJ Miles scored 13

points off the bench.

Playing their fourth game in five nights, the Raptors kept pace with conference-leader Cleveland. Indiana fell to 1-7 in overtime this season.

**Wizards 99, 76ers 94:** John Wall had 16 points, 14 assists and 13 rebounds for his fourth triple-double of the season as Washington held on against host Philadelphia.

Wall made eight free throws in the final 14.6 seconds to help the Wizards win their third straight following a five-game losing streak that put their playoff hopes in peril. Washington, which began Thursday 1½ games behind Detroit for the final playoff spot in the Eastern Conference, followed resounding victories this week over current playoff teams Detroit and Chicago with a win over the last-place 76ers.

Ish Smith scored 20 points and Nerlens Noel had 14 points and 16 rebounds for Philadelphia, which has lost 16 of 17.

**Hornets 109, Heat 106:** Al Jefferson and Kemba Walker each scored 21 points to help visiting Charlotte overcome a 15-point first-half deficit to beat Miami.

Nic Batum scored 19 for the Hornets, who split four games with Miami this season and now have the same 39-29 record as the Heat in the jam-packed Eastern Conference playoff chase. The Hornets are now 15-3 in their last 18 games.

Charlotte trailed 45-30 in the second quarter, then took the lead by halftime and held it for most of the second half. Courtney Lee had 13 and Marvin Williams scored 12 for the Hornets.

Luol Deng led the Heat with 22 points. It was the 10th time this season that Miami lost a game in which it led at one point by double figures, with six of those coming at home.

**Bulls 118, Nets 102:** Doug McDermott

scored 25 points and Jimmy Butler added 22 as host Chicago beat Brooklyn.

It's the third straight 20-plus point game for McDermott as Chicago moved a half-game in front of idle Detroit into eighth place and the final playoff spot in the Eastern Conference. Bobby Portis added 12 points and 14 rebounds.

The injury-ravaged Bulls raced to a 24-point lead in the second quarter, then held on and finally finished off the lowly Nets, who outscored Chicago 37-24 in the third and closed to within four points early in the fourth.

Chicago got a season-high 60 points from its reserves, including McDermott's output.

Bojan Bogdanovic led the Nets comeback with 26 points, one game after scoring a career-high 44.

**Hawks 116, Nuggets 98:** Tim Hardaway Jr. scored a season-high 21 points in his first start of the season and surging Atlanta beat visiting Denver.

Paul Millsap and Jeff Teague each had 16 points for the Hawks, who have won four straight and seven of eight to move to third place in the Eastern Conference. The Hawks had eight scorers in double figures, including Thabo Sefolosha, who had 14 points.

D.J. Augustine had 17 points and Joffrey Lauvergne had 16 for the Nuggets, who have lost the first three games on their five-game trip.

Hardaway was given the start as Kent Bazemore was held out with a bone bruise in his right knee. Bazemore hurt his knee in a fall late in Wednesday night's win at Detroit.

**Bucks 96, Grizzlies 86:** Tyler Ennis scored all 13 of his points in the fourth quarter to lead host Milwaukee to a victory over short-handed Memphis.

Playing all reserves, the Bucks used a

15-2 run capped by Ennis' reverse layup that gave Milwaukee an 83-75 lead with 5:47 to play. Damien Inglis, who scored 10 points, and John Henson each had a key block that helped put some life in the Bucks' offense.

The game got testy late in the fourth when Henson came up behind Lance Stephenson who had just grabbed a rebound. Henson swiped the ball away and in the process dumped Stephenson to the floor. After a review, Henson was called for a Flagrant 1 foul and a technical. Barnes made the technical and Stephenson made two free throws that pulled Memphis to 88-83 with 3:43 left in the game. Ennis hit consecutive shots to push the lead to nine, but Milwaukee had to weather the ejection of Henson with 5.5 seconds left.

**Jazz 103, Suns 69:** Joe Ingles had a season-high 15 points and a career-high six steals and Trey Lyles had 17 points as host Utah beat Phoenix to close the playoff gap with 14 games remaining. The Jazz are now one game behind the Rockets and Mavericks, who are tied for the last two Western Conference playoff spots. They are also 1½ back of the Trail Blazers for sixth.

Utah's defense smothered Phoenix most of the night, and a 5-minute stretch to begin the second half put the Suns away. The Jazz opened the third with a 10-run for a 56-38 lead, and the Suns were unable to manage a single point for the first 5:27 of action.

Ingles got his second consecutive start with Gordon Hayward out with a foot injury. Shelvin Mack was close to a triple-double with 15 points, 10 assists and eight rebounds.

Brandon Knight led the Suns with 17 points. The 69 points were a season low.

## Pens win 4th straight

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Sidney Crosby scored a pair of highlight-reel goals as the Pittsburgh Penguins rallied past the Carolina Hurricanes 4-2 on Thursday night for their fourth straight victory.

Crosby beat Eddie Lack with a slick backhand in the first and added a re-direct from his knees in the second to extend his points streak to 10 consecutive games as Pittsburgh strengthened its grip on seventh place in the crowded Eastern Conference playoff race.

Phil Kessel had a goal and an assist and Nick Bonino picked up his fifth of the year.

**Kings 4, Rangers 3:** Anze Kopitar scored the tying goal with 4:10 to play and tipped home the winner at 1:34 of overtime, propelling host Los Angeles past New York.

Kopitar deflected a slap shot by Jake Muzzin to end it for the Pacific Division-leading Kings, who rallied from a two-goal deficit for their third straight win over a certain playoff team.

**Coyotes 3, Sharks 1:** Shane Doan scored with 1:31 left and Mike Smith stopped 27 shots in his first home game in nearly four months as host Arizona took advantage of two disallowed goals to beat San Jose.

Smith returned from a 40-game absence due to a core muscle injury with a 44-save shutout of Edmonton on Saturday and was sharp again in his first home game since Nov. 27.

**Stars 4, Lightning 3:** Jamie Benn scored two goals to give him a career-best 36 as host Dallas took sole possession of

first place in the Western Conference by rallying for victory over Tampa Bay.

Benn's winning goal 11:50 into the third period came about 2 minutes after Stephen Johns' first NHL goal as the Stars dropped the Lightning to 31-2-0 when leading after two periods.

**Panthers 4, Maple Leafs 1:** Jussi Jokinen scored two unusual goals to help lift visiting Florida over Toronto.

Jokinen wasn't attempting to score on either goal against the Maple Leafs, with two passing attempts pinging off Toronto sticks and beating Jonathan Bernier.

**Devils 7, Wild 4:** Devante Smith-Pelly, Mike Siso and Adam Henrique scored two goals apiece as host New Jersey had its best offensive performance of the season in a victory over Minnesota.

Tyler Kennedy had a season-high three assists and Keith Kinkaid made 28 saves as New Jersey snapped a three-game home losing streak.

**Predators 4, Islanders 2:** James Neal and Ryan Johansen each scored a goal and added an assist to lead host Nashville past New York.

Ryan Ellis and Austin Watson also scored for Nashville, which has recorded at least one point in the standings in 16 of its last 17 games.

**Red Wings 3, Blue Jackets 1:** Henrik Zetterberg and Darren Helm scored in the third period to lead visiting Detroit past Columbus.

Luke Glendening also scored and Jimmy Howard stopped 27 shots as Detroit moved a point ahead of Philadelphia for the Eastern Conference's second wildcard playoff spot.

## Owners to consider chop block, automatic ejections

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The NFL's powerful competition committee is recommending making permanent extra-point kick snaps from the 15-yard line, eliminating all chop blocks and ejecting a player for twice receiving certain unsportsmanlike conduct penalties in a game.

When NFL owners meet next week in Florida, they also will consider such proposals as moving the line of scrimmage up 5 yards to the 25 on kickoff touchbacks, allowing coaches and players to use video rather than just photos on sideline tablets, and expanding the penalties on horse-collar tackles to cover the nameplate on the uniform.

Among the rule proposals that teams will present Monday through Wednesday are several involving video review: allowing three coaches' challenges instead of two even when one challenge fails, expanding what can be challenged to include everything but turnovers and scores, and eliminating overtime in pre-season games.

Not being altered is what constitutes a catch, a subject that often infuriates players and fans but is not part of any proposals this year.

Instead, according to Troy Vincent, the league's football operations chief, the emphasis will be on education and enforcement of the three current catch rule considerations: gaining possession, get-

ting two feet down inbounds, and player safety.

After Commissioner Roger Goodell suggested during Super Bowl week that player ejections for two egregious fouls would be considered, the committee is suggesting that specific unsportsmanlike conduct penalties could lead to expulsions. Those are:

- Throwing a punch or a forearm, or kicking at an opponent, even though no contact is made.

- Using abusive, threatening or insulting language, or gestures to opponents, teammates, officials or representatives of the league.

- Using baiting or taunting acts or words that engender ill will between teams.

Under such changes, Giants receiver Odell Beckham Jr. wouldn't automatically have been ejected despite drawing three unnecessary roughness calls in scuffles with Panthers All-Pro cornerback Josh Norman late last season.

But officials don't need to judge fouls as flagrant for an automatic disqualification. And it won't necessarily take two fouls for a player to be tossed.

"We do believe officials should be empowered and should not feel ejection is not an appropriate remedy ... when there is a flagrant foul," said committee co-chairman Rich McKay, president of the Atlanta Falcons.