

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## US strike kills No. 2 Islamic State leader

BY TARA COPP  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The United States killed the Islamic State's second-highest-ranking leader, one of several key figures in the terrorist group that the military eliminated this week, Secretary of Defense Ash Carter said Friday.

Carter made the announcement during a news conference with Gen. Joseph Dunford, in which the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said the Pentagon also is preparing military options in Iraq for the White House to consider that could increase the number of U.S. forces there.

The Islamic State leader killed — Abd al-Rahman Mustafa al-Qaduli, known as Haji Imam — was one of four top officials for the group that the U.S. State Department had designated as a “specially designated global terrorist” and offered up to \$7 million in rewards for information on his whereabouts.

The Syria-based terrorist had joined the Islamic State in 2012 after his release from prison in Iraq. He was previously a top deputy of al-Qaida in Iraq, and was serv-

ing as the Islamic State's finance minister, Carter said.

The strike was part of the U.S. and coalition effort to eliminate the Islamic State's ability to fund terror operations and to pay its fighters. In a breakfast with reporters Thursday, the deputy of Air Force operations, Lt. Gen. Jay Raymond said airstrikes against Islamic State cash distribution sites since last year have destroyed more than \$500 million of the terrorist group's cash.

“Now we've taken out the leader who oversees all the funding for [the Islamic State] operation, hurting their ability to pay fighters,” Carter said Friday. Haji Imam was “an [Islamic State] senior leader, serving as a finance minister and who is also responsible for some external affairs and plots.”

However, Carter would not say Friday where or how Haji Imam was killed.

More so, the successful strike against the Islamic State's second-in-command comes as the Pentagon prepares proposals for President Barack Obama on an expanded role for the United States in Iraq, after a deadly week in which members of the ter-

rorist group killed more than 30 people in Belgium.

Carter said the death of Haji Imam was an important step in taking down the Islamic State, but “it's far from sufficient.”

Dunford said he expects more ground forces in Iraq will be part of additional pressure the United States puts on the terrorist group.

There are at least 3,870 U.S. forces in Iraq now, though various news outlets have reported this week that it could be as many as 5,000.

“We have a series of recommendations that we will be discussing with the president in the coming weeks to further enable our support for the Iraqi security forces,” Dunford said. “So again, the secretary and I both believe that there will be an increase to the U.S. forces in Iraq in the coming weeks.”

Increased U.S. forces would be deployed in support of the upcoming battle for Mosul, the second-largest city in Iraq, Dunford said. Since the city's capture by the Islamic State in the summer of 2014, Mosul has been used as its de-facto capital in that country.

## Afghanistan braces for season of Taliban attacks

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN  
*Stars and Stripes*

KABUL, Afghanistan — As Afghanistan celebrated its New Year at the start of spring, the Taliban warned of violence and bloodshed in the months to come, adding to fears the country could be on the brink of its deadliest fighting season.

“We are going to increase our attacks,” Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said in a telephone interview with Stars and Stripes. “We will be conducting conventional operations this year too for capturing big cities. The upcoming attacks will prove to foreign invaders that they can't continue their invasion in Afghanistan.”

The fighting season traditionally begins in spring shortly after the start of the Persian New Year, or Nowruz. This past year, however, fighting barely abated during the normally quieter winter, leading some observers to forecast more intensive attacks by the insurgents in 2016. The capability of

Afghan forces already has been challenged severely in some parts of the country where the Taliban have launched repeated, aggressive attacks.

“What is very important for this fighting season is that the Taliban are organized,” said Afghan security analyst Ali Mohammad Ali. “As a result of the withdrawal of international troops and a lack of air support in 2015, the Taliban turned out to be a conventional force.”

The Taliban are known for their guerrilla-style tactics, but stronger capabilities were highlighted in September and October, when the group occupied the northern city of Kunduz for more than two weeks before Afghan reinforcements aided by American special operations forces and air power pushed them out. They have seized other urban centers briefly, but Afghan forces have been able to push them back relatively quickly. Ali said Kunduz could be a sign of things to come.

The international coalition in Afghani-

stan shifted from combat to training-and-advising operations at the beginning of last year. The U.S. continues to conduct counterterrorism operations, but targeting the Taliban is off-limits — unless insurgents attack American forces — as Washington identifies the group as an “armed insurgency,” not a terrorist outfit. However, some commanders have suggested changing that policy to allow international troops to more readily come to the aid of Afghan forces.

Today, with Afghans in charge of security across the country, the Taliban are thought to control more territory than at any time since 2001, when a U.S.-led invasion ousted them from power.

Speaking of the immense difficulties facing the Afghan government, particularly security challenges, the U.N.'s top official in Afghanistan, Nicholas Haysom, told the U.N. Security Council this month, “For 2016, survival will be an achievement.”

# DOD freezes civilian hires to reduce staff

By COREY DICKSTEIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Defense Department issued a hiring freeze this week on many vacant civilian jobs as it takes steps to reduce its headquarters staffs.

Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Work ordered the hiring halt, which went into effect March 20, on civilian jobs in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Defense Agencies and DOD Field Activities, according to a Feb. 23 memo. The hiring freeze includes all open full- and part-time, temporary and permanent civilian positions for which a tentative offer had not been made before March 20. Some “mission-critical” positions are exempt.

The halt in hiring is designed to give the Pentagon a detailed look at its civilian structure as it determines what positions can

be cut from headquarters staffs that have ballooned since 2001. Last year, Work ordered the department to cut 25 percent of its civilian headquarters positions, expanding on a 2013 directive from then-Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel to cut those staffs by 20 percent. It was not immediately clear how many jobs would be cut or how much money would be saved.

Reductions to headquarters staffs, Work wrote in an August 2015 memo, are necessary to divert funds to “higher priority requirements in support of the warfighter and to address underfunded strategic needs.”

The cuts, a part of a broader “delayering” effort to trim the Defense Department bureaucracy, are also designed to bring the reduction of the civilian workforce better in line with that of the military. The Government Accountability Of-

fice in December determined the department’s civilian workforce shrunk about 3.3 percent from 2012 through 2016. Servicemembers were cut about 7 percent during the same time.

Lawmakers for several years have insisted the Pentagon speed up its civilian downsizing, especially in its headquarters staffs, which have many responsibilities, including drafting department policies and managing budgets.

The Defense Department is making an effort to do that, senior leaders have said.

“We have instructions, both internal and from the Congress, to hold down civilian (jobs) commensurate with the drawdown in the military, and we recognize that mandate,” Pentagon Comptroller Mike McCord told the Senate Armed Services Committee this week.

The hiring freeze would en-

sure positions that will be cut are not filled beforehand, Work wrote.

“In order to ensure implementation of organizational delayering commitments made through the delayering process and meet the headquarters reduction targets established by Congress, we must avoid hiring into positions that an organization has committed to eliminate as a result of delayering,” Work wrote in the February memo.

The freeze will be lifted for individual organizations as they complete several tasks. Organizations will be able to fill vacant positions, Work wrote, once their plans for cutting unneeded staff positions have been approved and they’ve entered all data on their staffs into the Pentagon’s comprehensive accounting system.

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## 2 Americans confirmed killed in Brussels

*Associated Press*

BRUSSELS — At least two Americans have been confirmed killed in the Brussels attacks, a U.S. official said Friday, as Secretary of State John Kerry visited the stricken city to express condolences.

Speaking after meeting Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel, Kerry said the “United States is praying and grieving with you for the loved ones of those cruelly taken from us, including Americans, and for the many who were injured in these despicable attacks.”

Kerry did not offer specific details, but the State Department later confirmed that the families of two Americans had been informed of their deaths in the attacks Tuesday. Spokeswoman Elizabeth Trudeau said the names were being withheld out of privacy considerations. The bombings killed 31 people and wounded 270.

Visiting the Belgian capital on a hastily arranged stop, Kerry later laid a wreath for victims of

the attacks at the city’s airport.

The attacks have laid bare intelligence shortcomings that have prompted European authorities to call for quicker and more efficient cooperation.

“People are jumping to conclusions,” Kerry said of critics. “I think they are looking for things that just sometimes are very difficult to analyze in the immediate aftermath of something.”

Failings in Belgium’s record of coordinating intelligence, investigating suspects and controlling its borders have been long known. Mayors in the greater Brussels area complained last year that even when alerted to the presence of suspected radicals in their municipalities, they lacked the power to do anything about it.

After the bombings, Raffaello Pantucci, director of international security studies at the Royal United Services Institute in London, called it “depressingly predictable” that a major attack would occur in Brussels because of “the perfect union”

of homegrown, hardened Muslim radicals who possess the tools of terrorism and a law enforcement structure that isn’t up to meeting the threat.

French Finance Minister Michel Sapin accused Belgian officials of “a kind of naivete” in ignoring the spread of radical Islam among the country’s 650,000-member Muslim population.

Kerry said the reason the Islamic State group “is resorting to actions outside the Middle East is that its fantasy of a caliphate is collapsing before their eyes; its territory is shrinking. Its leaders are decimated. Its revenue sources are dwindling, and its fighters are fleeing.”

Michel thanked Kerry for his visit, calling it a powerful message of solidarity. “It is very important for us today to receive your support,” he said. He offered condolences for the American victims and vowed to step up counterterrorism cooperation with the U.S. and others.

## Zumwalt completes 3 days of builder trials

BATH, Maine — The stealthy destroyer USS Zumwalt has completed builder trials and is on track for the next milestone before delivery to the Navy — acceptance trials and inspection starting next month, officials said Friday.

The 600-foot destroyer, the largest ever built for the U.S. Navy, spent three days in the rough North Atlantic before returning late Thursday afternoon to Bath Iron Works in Maine, where the Zumwalt and two sister ships are being built.

More than 200 defense contractor workers and Navy personnel participated in the outing, aimed at ensuring everything is shipshape before delivery to the Navy.

Lt. Amber Lynn Daniel, a Navy spokeswoman, said the trial “served as a unique opportunity for the crew to train side by side with representatives from industry.”

From The Associated Press

# Four teams cruise into Elite Eight

Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Whether it was nifty moves near the basket or a jumper that fell right all night, Perry Ellis was determined to do whatever he could to push top-seeded Kansas a little bit deeper in the NCAA Tournament.

And thanks to teammates who followed the senior forward's cool lead, the Jayhawks are one step closer to the Final Four.

Ellis scored 27 points to match a season high, Wayne Selden Jr. added 19 and Kansas topped No. 5 Maryland for a 79-63 South Region semifinal victory Thursday night. The win put the Jayhawks back into the Elite Eight for the first time since 2012, when they went on to reach the NCAA championship game before losing to Kentucky.

It took time for the Jayhawks (33-4) to get going. Once they finally seized the lead late in the first half, everything else fell into place for their 17th straight victory. They emerged from the break by making their first six shots and steadily took control behind Ellis, who made 10 of 17 from the field.

"They just tell me to be more aggressive, and that's what I try to do," said Ellis, who also scored 27 against Oklahoma on Jan. 4.

Selden was right there with 7-for-16 shooting to help Kansas earn a berth in Saturday night's regional final against Villanova.

The Terrapins (27-9) dictated the early tempo and briefly engaged in a back-and-forth game with the Jayhawks before eventually falling behind the tournament favorite. Rasheed Sulaimon led Maryland with 18 points.

Landen Lucas added 14 points and 11 rebounds while Frank Mason III had 11 points for Kansas, which outworked Maryland 43-28 on the glass and outscored the taller Terps 40-28 in the paint. Better shooting also helped the Jayhawks, who made 14 of 25 in the second half and finished 29-for-62 from the field (47 percent).

Kansas just had to take its time to slow down Maryland, which entered the game with every starter averaging at least 11 points per contest. Its main focus was keeping Maryland guard Melo Trimble (17 points) from getting hot, a strategy that worked as the sophomore made just 5 of 16 from the field with just one three-pointer.

The Jayhawks defense kept other Maryland players from becoming factors on both ends as well and ended up holding the Terps to just 40 percent shooting including 35 percent after halftime. In fact, Kansas was so effective that Maryland made just 8 of 23 shots in the final 20 minutes.

"I thought we played just superb," Kansas coach Bill Self said. "I thought (in) the second half, we defended, we rebounded."

Maryland coach Mark Turgeon agreed and said, "they were just great on defense. We're a good offensive team, we're hard to guard, and they really locked in on us."

Maryland dictated the early tempo before Kansas regrouped late in the first

half to eventually grab a 36-34 lead at the break.

Sulaimon got the Terps started with the first of two three-pointers in the first 10 minutes to provide an 18-12 lead, significant considering they made just 1 of 18 from long range in their second-round win over Hawaii.

Kansas went 5½ minutes without a field goal but didn't flinch and eventually fought back to take its first lead at 27-26 on two Devonte' Graham free throws with 5:33 remaining in the half. The teams then traded 6-2 runs with the Jayhawks making the last one for a slim edge, better than they could have expected after shooting 41 percent.

Ellis provided the steadying force with 12 points and added a couple more baskets during a 14-9 run for a 50-43 lead, a stretch in which the Jayhawks made their first six shots to start the second half.

Kansas was playing the way it wanted by that point and kept up the tempo in building a 16-point lead with four minutes left.

**Villanova 92, Miami 69:** At Louisville, Ky., Ryan Arcidiacono and Kris Jenkins each scored 21 points, and the No. 2-seeded Wildcats never trailed in routing the third-seeded Hurricanes in the other South Regional semifinal.

The Wildcats (32-5) are back in the Elite Eight for the first time since 2009, when they reached the Final Four. It's their third trip to the regional final with coach Jay Wright. They turned in quite the offensive performance with former coach Rollie Massimino, who led Villanova to the 1985 national championship, sitting nearby.

Daniel Ochefu added 17 points, and Josh Hart had 14 for Villanova, which shot 62.7 percent (32-for-51).

"If any team is shooting the way we're shooting right now, they'll easily be the most dangerous team in the country," Ochefu said. "But hopefully, we'll keep shooting like that, so we can keep playing the way we are."

Miami (27-8) now is 0-3 in this round and 0-2 with coach Jim Larranaga.

Sheldon McClellan scored 26 points for Miami, and Angel Rodriguez added 13.

Miami got here by beating a pair of double-digit seeds, Buffalo and Wichita State. Villanova showed the team from the Atlantic Coast Conference why the Wildcats were ranked No. 1 in the nation for the first time in program history earlier this season. It was the first game between the teams in the NCAA Tournament, and the first overall since March 2004, when both teams were in the Big East.

They turned in a dizzying first half with both teams shooting 64 percent — or better — from the floor and were even sharper beyond the arc where they combined to hit 13 of 19.

"Look at the numbers, it's kind of crazy to think that was good defense," Villanova coach Jay Wright said. "But I'm very proud of the second-half defense. When you play great teams like Miami, that's going to happen. We just got more stops than them."

Villanova led 43-37 at halftime with Jenkins coming through with the highlight shot of the game, knocking down a three with his left foot on the edge of

the logo covering midcourt that drew comparisons online to reigning NBA MVP Stephen Curry.

But Villanova took control from the start by scoring the first eight points. The Wildcats also forced Miami into a bunch of turnovers early and scored some easy points off those mistakes. Villanova took its biggest lead at 29-14 on a three-pointer by Jenkins with 8:35 left.

When Miami put together a 16-2 run that pulled the Canes within 31-30 on Rodriguez's layup with 4:33 to go, Jenkins simply hit another three. Miami never got that close again, and Villanova just padded its lead over the final minutes with each dunk or three giving Wildcats' fans yet another reason to cheer.

## West Regional

**Oklahoma 77, Texas A&M 63:** At Anaheim, Calif., Jordan Woodard scored 22 points and Buddy Hield had 17 points and 10 rebounds to lead the second-seeded Sooners to a romp over the third-seeded and cold-shooting Aggies.

The Sooners (28-7) advanced to the Elite Eight for the first time since 2009.

"We shared the ball really well," Hield said. "I'm real proud of the guys for stepping up and making shots. We were just taking advantage of opportunities. We tried to drive-and-kick and when they doubled somebody I tried to make the right pass."

The Sooners blew open a close game by going on a 19-4 run during the last 7:42 of the first half to take a 45-26 lead. The Sooners forced the Aggies into bad shots and turnovers, and Woodard was the catalyst on the offensive end.

Tyler Davis scored 17 for A&M (28-9), which reached the Sweet 16 with a thrilling double-overtime victory against Northern Iowa after rallying from 12 points down in the final 44 seconds of regulation.

"They just did a great job defensively," Davis said. "They made us pay for our missed shots, they hit threes, we weren't knocking down our free throws, they never let you get comfortable in the post."

The Sooners advanced to the regional finals for the first time since 2009, when they lost to North Carolina in the South Regional. Oklahoma is trying to reach the Final Four for the first time since 2002, when it lost to Indiana in the national semifinals.

Oklahoma shot 49.2 percent while holding the Aggies to 34.2 percent. Texas A&M added to its misery by making only six of 28 three-pointers and just 13 of 24 free throws.

Woodard started the decisive first half run with a three-pointer and had another shot from behind the arc with 3:15 to go. He also fed Khadeem Lattin for a slam dunk and then hit a sweet, off-balance bank shot as the shot clock was close to expiring with about 20 seconds left.

The Aggies went more than seven minutes without a field goal. Tonny Trocha-Morelos made a layup to pull them to 24-20 with 9:32 to go before halftime. The Aggies didn't make another shot from the field in the half until Davis had a put-

back with 2:10 to go. By then, it was 40-24 Sooners.

Woodard made five of six three-pointers. Hield wasn't as effective as normal from behind the arc, making just two of seven.

Christian James added 12 points for Oklahoma while Ryan Spangler and Lattin had 10 apiece.

Jalen Jones had 11 for the Aggies.

**Oregon 82, Duke 68:** At Anaheim, Calif., Dillon Brooks scored 22 points and the Ducks advanced to the brink of their first Final Four in 77 years with a victory over the defending national champion Blue Devils in the other West Regional semifinal.

Elgin Cook had 16 points and nine rebounds for the top-seeded Ducks (31-6).

"I think we don't have a history of being a basketball school, but I think we did some great things this year to prove we deserve it," said Jordan Bell, who had 13 points and seven rebounds. "I think we played one of our best games this year. Everybody, not just including me. I think we showed everybody we're a good team."

After a season-long rise in the Pacific Northwest, the Pac-12 champion Ducks emphatically arrived on the national stage with a strong second-half rally to beat the mighty Blue Devils (25-11) for the first time in school history.

Freshman Brandon Ingram scored 24 points, but Duke fell short of its third Elite Eight trip in five years. The Blue Devils lost five of their final 10 games.

No longer just a football school, Oregon is flying high after comfortably holding off Duke for one of the biggest wins in the program's history.

Oregon was the champion of the first NCAA Tournament in 1939, but hasn't been back to the Final Four since. The Ducks advanced to the Elite Eight for the first time since 2007 and the third time since 2002.

Brooks hit four three-pointers to lead the Ducks, who also broke the school's single-season wins record with their 31st. They've won 10 straight since mid-February while winning the Pac-12's regular-season and tournament titles.

Leading scorer Grayson Allen got 12 of his 15 points in the second half, but Duke couldn't make much progress after Oregon jumped to a double-digit lead early in the second half.

For all of coach Mike Krzyzewski's incredible success, the Blue Devils are 0-5 in NCAA Tournament games in the Pacific time zone.

The Ducks took charge shortly after halftime, following a tight first half in which neither team made a big move. Oregon jumped out to an 11-point lead after back-to-back three-pointers by Casey Benson and Chris Boucher, and they got the arena rocking with back-to-back fast-break dunks from Bell and Cook moments later.

Duke even broke out a zone defense in an attempt to slow down the Ducks, but their balanced lineup always found another scorer.

Kobe Bryant and Apple CEO Tim Cook watched the game from a Duke fan section, while Nike's Phil Knight was among the Oregon contingent.



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# Browns give RG3 fresh start

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Back before he rocketed into the NFL as a freakish touchdown-maker, before the knee injury and his downfall in Washington, Robert Griffin III was convinced he'd play for the Browns.

During pre-draft workouts in Arizona, Griffin and his agent were set for Cleveland to be his home.

"We were ready then," Griffin said, "and we are more than ready now."

Four long, trying years later, Griffin has a chance to revive a career that once seemed unstoppable.

No longer viewed as one of football's brightest and flashiest players but rather a reclamation project, Griffin signed a two-year, \$15 million contract Thursday with the Browns, a team on a perpetual mission to find a franchise quarterback.

RG3 is beginning his second act.

Griffin hasn't been the same since his dazzling rookie season in Washington in 2012, when the former Heisman Trophy winner — possessed with a rocket arm, a tailback's speed and endless swagger — took the league by storm. However, his next three seasons were curtailed by injury and clouded by controversy and the 26-year-old found himself without a team when the Redskins released him March 7.

The Browns, who tried unsuccessfully to trade so they could draft him in 2012, are giving him another shot.

"I'm just excited to come in and compete," Griffin said. "Nothing's ever been given to me in my life, so I just want to go out and compete with the guys and grow

with this team. I feel like that's all I'm really focused on."

He's been given no promises by the Browns, who have the No. 2 overall pick in this year's draft and are expected to take a quarterback — presumably California's Jared Goff or North Dakota State's Carson Wentz. As the team was completing its deal with Griffin, new coach Hue Jackson attended Wentz's pro day workout in North Dakota along with offensive assistant Pep Hamilton.

Griffin, who didn't play a single snap and was demoted to third-string last season, isn't opposed to the Browns drafting another quarterback.

"I'll take the guy under my wing," he said during a conference call. "I'm real excited about that. I'm considered a vet now after four years in the league, and I've been through a lot more than a lot of guys go through their entire career. ... I can help a young guy. But that's not my focus. I don't pick players."

Jackson has spent much of his coaching career grooming quarterbacks. He met with Griffin last week and was impressed by his candor and humility.

"He brings starting experience to our team and organization," Jackson said. "He's a young, athletic, talented passer and he's really just starting out in this league. Just like every player on our team, Robert will have to earn every opportunity he gets."

If he can win the starting job, Griffin could be reunited with former college teammate Josh Gordon, who has applied for reinstatement with the league following a one-year drug suspension

"Josh is family," Griffin said. "I love the guy. I don't know what's going to happen with him and the league or with the team, but he always knows he has a brother in me, so if the opportunity comes that he can get reinstated and play for the Browns then I won't be upset with that. He is family and at Baylor we believe that no matter what happens we've always got your back."

The Browns recently released troubled quarterback Johnny Manziel, once considered the team's savior. They also have quarterbacks Josh McCown and Austin Davis under contract. But, as is always the case with that position in Cleveland, nothing stands still.

After leading the Redskins to the NFC East title as a rookie, Griffin, who had become one of America's most celebrated athletes, began a striking fall from grace. He seriously injured his right knee in the playoffs and needed reconstructive surgery. His next two seasons were filled with squabbles with coaches and little else.

Griffin spent last season watching from the sideline, where he learned more about life than anything he could find in a playbook.

"What I learned most was just the love that's inside of me for this game of football," he said. "What happened down there (in Washington) would break a lot of people. This is my calling. I'm real excited to have another opportunity to grow with a coach who believes in me. That's big. Now I've just got to go out and prove it."

# Nets blow past Cavs

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Brook Lopez scored 22 points and the Brooklyn Nets blew by LeBron James and the Cleveland Cavaliers in the fourth quarter for a 104-95 victory Thursday night.

James was scoreless and missed both shots in the fourth quarter after he scored 30 points on 13-for-14 shooting through three. Lopez had the final five points in a 14-0 run down the stretch as the Nets surged past the Eastern Conference leaders.

Shane Larkin added 16 points and seven assists for the Nets in his return to the starting lineup. Bojan Bogdanovic had 12 points.

The Cavaliers finished 10-for-38 on three-pointers, needing a make by Jordan McRae after the Nets had taken control to extend their franchise-record streak to 10 games with 10 or more makes. But they misfired way too often, with Kyrie Irving finishing 6-for-22 from the field and Kevin Love going 5-for-14.

**Thunder 113, Jazz 91:** Kevin Durant had 20 points, nine assists and eight rebounds to help host Oklahoma City beat Utah for its sixth straight victory.

Russell Westbrook's streak of triple-doubles ended at three. He had 15 points, nine assists and seven rebounds before sitting out the fourth quarter because the game was in hand.

Dion Waiters scored 17 points, Enes Kanter added 14, and the Thunder shot 54 percent from the field. They will take the NBA's longest current winning streak into their home game Saturday against San Antonio.

Trey Burke scored 17 points, and Trey Lyles added 14 for the Jazz.

**Knicks 106, Bulls 94:** Carmelo Anthony scored 26 points, Kristaps Porzingis had 19 and host New York beat Chicago to sweep the home-and-home series.

Derrick Williams added 13 points, Jose Calderon 12, and Arron Afflalo 11 for New York. The Knicks beat the Bulls 115-107 on Wednesday night in Chicago.

Derrick Rose led Chicago with 30 points. Jimmy Butler had 19, and Taj Gibson 10. The Bulls dropped 1½ games behind Detroit for the eighth and final playoff spot in the Eastern Conference.

**Pacers 92, Pelicans 84:** Myles Turner scored 24 points and had a career-high 16 rebounds on his 20th birthday, and C.J. Miles added 19 points in host Indiana's victory over New Orleans.

The Pacers have won two straight but lost Paul George in the third quarter with what was initially described as a bruised right leg. The three-time All-Star did not return.

Alexis Ajinca led New Orleans with 22 points, and Tim Frazier had a career-high 18.

**Clippers 96, Trail Blazers 94:** J.J. Redick hit a 21-foot jumper as time expired to lift host Los Angeles past Portland.

With 1.1 seconds left, Chris Paul in-bounded the ball to Redick cutting off a screen, and he made the basket from just inside the arc.

Paul and Jamal Crawford each scored 25 points for the Clippers. DeAndre Jordan added 12 points and 13 rebounds for Los Angeles.

Damian Lillard scored 18 points and C.J. McCollum added 17 to lead the Trail Blazers, who lost for the eighth time in 12 games. Ed Davis scored 12 points, Mason Plumlee had 11, and Maurice Harkless added 10 points and eight rebounds for Portland.

The loss cut the Blazers' lead to one game over Dallas and Utah for sixth place in the Western Conference with nine games to play.

# Panthers top Bruins, end skid

Associated Press

BOSTON — The Florida Panthers broke another lengthy skid and roared into first place with an impressive victory.

Roberto Luongo made 34 saves, and Jussi Jokinen and Vincent Trocheck each scored a goal and added an assist to put the Panthers atop the Atlantic Division with a 4-1 win over the Boston Bruins on Thursday night.

"Tonight was a huge win coming in here," Panthers coach Gerard Gallant said, "and I don't think we've won in here too often."

Nope. They haven't.

Reilly Smith and Jonathan Huberdeau also scored for Florida, which won for the first time in 10 visits to Boston and passed idle Tampa Bay in the standings. Earlier this season, the Panthers ended a 10-game skid in Washington, a six-game losing streak in Columbus and a nine-game winless run in Nashville.

Luongo ended a rough stretch of his own, winning for the first time in eight starts in Boston dating to his three Stanley Cup losses for Vancouver in the 2011 finals.

Meanwhile, after feeling burned by instant replay in consecutive games and five straight losses, Boston is searching for answers.

With the Panthers leading 2-1 eight minutes into the third period, Patrice Bergeron thought he had tied the game when it appeared the puck went into the corner of the net. But after a lengthy review by the officials, the goal was disallowed.

"Looked like it was in and very conclusive. That's two in two games now. It's

baffling, to say the least," Bruins coach Claude Julien said. "We think we have great technology, but we're obviously still not getting it right."

Boston had a goal disallowed against the Rangers in their last game that also would have tied the game.

**Maple Leafs 6, Ducks 5 (OT):** Nazem Kadri had two goals and two assists, including the overtime winner as host Toronto beat Anaheim 6-5. The Ducks earned a point to clinch a playoff spot for the fourth consecutive season.

The Ducks reached the postseason when they rallied from a 4-1 deficit to force the extra period.

The Maple Leafs scored three power-play goals against the NHL's top penalty kill to win for the fifth time in six games.

**Devils 3, Penguins 0:** Kyle Palmieri scored twice in the first period and Scott Wedgewood stopped 39 shots for his first career shutout as New Jersey beat host Pittsburgh.

Palmieri, who set career highs with 29 goals and 52 points, has a four-game points streak.

**Hurricanes 3, Blue Jackets 2:** Victor Rask, Chris Terry and Elias Lindholm scored in a 1:38 span of the third period, and Eddie Lack made 42 saves to lead visiting Carolina past Columbus.

**Red Wings 4, Canadiens 3:** Riley Sheahan scored a career-high two goals to help host Detroit take a four-goal lead into the third period before holding on to beat Montreal.

**Wild 6, Flames 2:** Zach Parise scored three times for his third hat trick of the season and added an assist as his team spoiled Calgary goalie Niklas Backstrom's return to Minnesota.

Jared Spurgeon scored two power-play goals as Minnesota, which holds the final wild-card spot in the Western Conference, matched a season high with its fourth-straight victory.

**Jets 4, Kings 1:** Dustin Byfuglien and Paul Postma scored less than three minutes apart early in the third period to help host Winnipeg beat Los Angeles.

**Predators 3, Canucks 2 (SO):** Craig Smith had the decisive goal in the shootout after host Nashville scored twice to tie the score in the third period.

Nashville, which holds the Western Conference's first wild-card spot, moved within two points of third-place Chicago in the Central Division.

**Flyers 4, Avalanche 2:** Radko Gudas and Claude Giroux scored 19 seconds apart late in the third period, Steve Mason made 32 saves and visiting Philadelphia beat Colorado.

Pierre-Edouard Bellemare also scored for the Flyers, who are tied with the Detroit Red Wings for the final wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference.

**Coyotes 3, Stars 1:** Martin Hanzal scored his 100th career goal in the second period and added his first short-handed goal in more than seven years in the third to lead host Arizona past sloppy Dallas.

**Oilers 6, Sharks 3:** Patrick Maroon scored the go-ahead goal and assisted on another in his team's four-goal second period that carried visiting Edmonton past San Jose.

Tommy Wingels, Joe Pavelski and Patrick Marleau scored for the Sharks, who missed a chance to clinch the playoffs for a second straight game.