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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Medal set for Inherent Resolve

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The U.S. military is a sharpened blade and the Islamic State group is a venomous desert predator.

The Defense Department rolled out the unusually powerful and aggressive imagery Wednesday when it announced a new medal for troops serving in Iraq and Syria.

The Inherent Resolve Campaign Medal depicts an armored hand thrusting a short sword or dagger through the head of a scorpion, its stinging tail curled as if striking. On the back an eagle perches atop a banner that reads “For Service.”

“The scorpion represents a predator arachnid that is often found in arid desert climates. The sword or dagger is a defensive weapon used to guard and protect from dangerous

elements,” Pentagon spokesman Matthew Allen wrote in an email to Stars and Stripes. “When combining these two symbols into the design of a military campaign they represent the defense of freedom, liberty, and justice from those predators who infringe on these values consider sacred to a free and orderly society.”

Past medals awarded for service in Iraq and Afghanistan featured maps, eagles and Arab scimitars — symbols of solidarity and local national unity. But the brutality of the Islamic State has created new challenges.

Defense Secretary Ash Carter’s go-to analogy for the group has been “parent tumor,” a term he coined at the beginning of the war — but not the kind of imagery that works on a medal.

The sword-and-scorpion design comes as the United States

is ratcheting up the war effort with expanded operations and troops. Momentum appears to finally be turning against the Islamic militants, who have conducted brutal occupations of territory in Iraq and Syria and carried out deadly terror attacks in Europe.

No doubt the military wants to put a metaphorical sword through the Islamic State’s metaphorical carapace in a killing blow. But the White House and military brass have consistently warned of a long fight, raising the possibility of more Inherent Resolve Campaign Medals in the future.

Troops who are serving or have served in Iraq and Syria as well as surrounding waters and airspace beginning June 15, 2014 are eligible. The number of servicemembers in Iraq is limited now to 3,870, though more troops could be headed there soon.

Schools prep for students from Turkey

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — U.S. military schools in Germany are preparing this week to welcome about 70 new students displaced from their schools in Turkey after military families were forced to leave the country because of growing security fears there.

School officials said most of the incoming students are expected to be placed at Kaiserslautern schools, where teachers were encouraging current students on Wednesday to welcome their new classmates.

The students were expected to start school this week, officials said, some less than a day after arriving in Germany.

“We’re prepared to receive students as they come in and get them back into class as quickly as possible,” said Will Griffin, of Department of Defense Education Activity-Europe.

A handful of students and their families will be housed and schooled at the Army’s installations in Wiesbaden, Griffin said.

School for the roughly 250 students at Incirlik Elementary/High School has been disrupted since early March when classes were halted and the school was shut because of security fears.

The first group of families from Turkey arrived at Ramstein Air Base on Wednesday afternoon, a day after the State and Defense departments ordered the immediate, mandatory departure of families of U.S. military and civilian personnel from Incirlik and the smaller bases of Izmir and Mugla. The families of U.S. diplomats in the same areas also were ordered to leave.

CENTCOM, SOCOM get new leaders

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Two of the American military’s most in-demand combatant commands changed hands Wednesday in separate ceremonies at MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., where U.S. Central and Special Operations Commands are headquartered.

Defense Secretary Ash Carter hailed 1980 West Point classmates Army Gens. Joseph Votel and Raymond “Tony” Thomas as “true pioneers” and “innovators” in their secretive world of American special operations, as they took command of CENTCOM and SOCOM, respectively.

Votel, 58, took the CENTCOM reins from retiring Army

Gen. Lloyd Austin after leading SOCOM since June 2014. Thomas, 57, has most recently served as the commander of Joint Special Operations Command, the headquarters that commands the military’s elite counterterrorism organizations including the Navy’s SEAL Team Six and the Army’s Delta Force. Thomas followed Votel as the JSOC chief, as well.

Carter’s choice of Votel to succeed Austin, a 40-plus-year veteran of the Army’s conventional forces who led CENTCOM for more than three years, has been largely hailed as an appropriate move by Pentagon and Capitol Hill leaders.

CENTCOM, which oversees American military efforts in 20 countries throughout the Middle East into central Asia,

has leaned heavily on special operations forces through its wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Votel will now oversee the U.S. missions to train Afghan security forces and hunt down terrorists in Afghanistan as well as its fight against the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria.

Thomas was an easy choice for SOCOM chief, Carter said.

The secretary described the general, who has commanded several units within the Army’s elite 75th Ranger Regiment and Delta Force, as “one of our toughest battle-tested leaders in special operations.”

Thomas will oversee about 70,000 special operators from the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps who are tasked with conducting a wide variety of classified operations.

IG cites 3 generals for inappropriate travel

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon's top watchdog has substantiated allegations involving inappropriate travel against three senior military officers, according to investigative findings released by the Defense Department Inspector General's office.

Marine Lt. Gen. John Wissler, retired Marine Lt. Gen. Kenneth Glueck and Army Lt. Gen. Anthony Crutchfield were cited by the Defense Department Inspector General in two separate investigations whose findings were released within the past week. The investigation of Wissler and Glueck focused on their use of government vehicles while serving consecutively as the commanders of III Marine Expeditionary Force in Okinawa, Japan. The investigation of Crutchfield examined a trip he took from Hawaii to Fort Rucker, Ala., in which he was promoted to his current rank.

The Marine generals said in response to the initial findings in their cases that they did not knowingly break any rules, while Crutchfield said he sought legal advice before his trip and was told it was allowed. In both cases, investigations were opened after complaints were filed with the inspector general.

A defense official said the Army decided not to discipline Crutchfield after reviewing the IG's findings. Army officials said in a statement that it takes "senior leader ac-

countability seriously" while ensuring due process for leaders who don't live up to the Army's standards.

The Marine Corps' assistant commandant, Gen. John M. Paxton Jr., took "appropriate administrative action" against Wissler and Glueck, Marine officials said in a statement. They declined to be more specific, citing privacy issues. Lessons learned from the investigation were shared with other generals during ethics training at an annual meeting of senior officers, officials said.

In the Crutchfield case, first reported by Army Times, the inspector general concluded that the general conducted official travel at the expense of U.S. taxpayers "for predominantly personal reasons," namely to have his promotion ceremony at Fort Rucker, where he had served previously, rather than where he is stationed in Hawaii as the deputy commander of U.S. Pacific Command. Crutchfield arranged a seven-day detour to Fort Rucker while traveling from Pacific Command's headquarters to Washington in early June 2014, the IG found.

The allegation originated with an anonymous complaint that Crutchfield had "invented a way to get a free plane ticket" to Alabama, according to a report detailing the investigation. The IG found that although he was at Fort Rucker for a week, he participated in only seven hours of meetings there and at nearby Maxwell Air Force Base.

Crutchfield spoke to troops at Fort Rucker after his staff solicited a speaking engagement for him, the IG said.

Army Lt. Col. Derrick Cheng, a spokesman for Pacific Command in Hawaii, said Crutchfield followed the advice of PACOM's lawyers "to the letter" in regard to the trip.

In the investigation of the Marine Corps generals, the inspector general found that Wissler and Glueck had used government vehicles for unauthorized travel from their homes on Okinawa to their offices, known in the military as domicile-to-duty transportation.

The practice appears to have begun with Glueck, who commanded III Marine Expeditionary Force from 2011 to 2013 and retired last year after serving two more years at Quantico, Va. He regularly drove his personal vehicle from his home on Okinawa's Camp Foster to an officers club on the base, and then had an enlisted Marine take him several miles to Camp Courtney, where he had an office.

Wissler took over in July 2013, and "followed an established practice" of meeting a driver with a government vehicle for a ride from Camp Foster, the IG found. However, he asked a top Marine Corps lawyer, Robert Hogue, about the practice that summer and began using his personal vehicle to go to work. The deputy commander at Pacific Command denied Wissler's request for an exception to policy in October 2013.

Okinawa Marines restrain unruly plane passenger

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Marines came to the aid of flight attendants when a belligerent passenger disrupted a Saturday flight from Honolulu to Tokyo.

About 50 Okinawa-based Marines were aboard the United Airlines flight, which had no air marshal, when they were called on to help restrain an out-of-control South Korean man, said Maj. Troy Cronbaugh, of Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Cronbaugh, who sat in the same row as the disgruntled passenger, said Marines were watching in-flight entertainment about 1½ hours into the trip when the 72-year-old man became irate.

The man, a retired farmer, was abusive toward his wife and flight attendants after they tried to stop him from doing yoga during the meal service, The Associated Press reported. He refused the staff's repeated requests to sit down and lashed out at Cronbaugh, yelling for him to "Shut up!" even though he wasn't speaking.

The man also yelled, "You're not God!" the Marines said.

Others grew increasingly nervous as the situation escalated. "They were visibly concerned, shaken and scared," Cronbaugh said of the flight attendants, who took the man to the rear of the plane in an effort to calm him down.

Attempts to reason with him were futile, however, so they asked the Marines for a hand.

"I said I'd be happy to help," said Cronbaugh, who took four of the biggest Marines he could find to the back of the plane, where the man was squatting.

Marines said they showed the man flex cuffs and calmly told him he would be restrained while flight attendants filmed the interaction.

The Korean placed his hands into the cuffs, but became upset when his feet were also cuffed, said Cronbaugh, who added the man made threats and tried to head-butt, spit on and bite the Marines as he was carried to a seat and was buckled in.

An American diplomat sat with the Korean as the plane returned to Hawaii, where he was taken into custody.

Law enforcement officials thanked the Marines for their

professional restraint, Cronbaugh said. Unruly passengers often must be physically forced to comply and can be bruised and battered in the process. The Korean man reportedly was restrained without a scratch.

"You see all this stuff on the news," said Staff Sgt. Timothy Bell. "I didn't believe it [was happening]."

The Associated Press reported the man was released on \$25,000 bond but is not allowed to leave Oahu and must undergo a mental health evaluation.

"I didn't know what we were going to experience when we went to the back of that plane," Cronbaugh said. "I'm glad it turned out well."

A United Airlines spokeswoman confirmed that an incident occurred.

Could this be Cubs' year?

Associated Press

As a boy, he watched his beloved team play the very first World Series game at Wrigley Field. A few Octobers later, he was there to see Babe Ruth call his shot.

A lot changed over the years — a job in a different field, on another kind of bench — but retired Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens never lost faith in the Chicago Cubs.

Now 95 and older than the ivy at the Friendly Confines, Stevens offers an opinion on their title drought dating to 1908.

"I don't think it's a question of whether they'll win a championship," he said. "It's whether I'll still be here to see it."

"They are close," he said. "Will it happen soon enough?"

So let's begin right there as Major League Baseball gets loosened up for Opening Day.

Ace pitchers Zack Greinke, David Price and Johnny Cueto start fresh with new teams. Red Sox slugger David Ortiz and Dodgers broadcaster Vin Scully are on deck for fond farewells.

Bryce Harper, Mike Trout, Carlos Correa, Nolan Arenado and Noah Syndergaard among the young, bright stars all over the diamond.

Barry Bonds is back in play, as the hitting coach for the Miami Marlins. Dusty Baker is back in the dugout, managing the Washington Nationals.

A year after the Cubs, Houston, Toronto and Texas took huge strides to make the playoffs, fans are wondering who's next.

AL Cy Young Award winner Dallas Keuchel saw what happened with the Astros. His first full year was 2013 and they lost 111 games.

"It's a progression," the lefty said. "You

get better individually, and you get better as a team."

MLB has made changes, too, on and off the field.

There's the Chase Utley Rule that outlaws certain vicious takeout slides. But the old "neighborhood play" at second base is now reviewable, and many wonder whether that will put middle infielders in peril.

Some ballparks added extra netting to protect fans from foul balls that rocket into the seats. One of them is Kauffman Stadium, where the Kansas City Royals host the New York Mets on April 3, a tasty Series rematch to open the season.

The next day, Atlanta starts its 20th and final season at Turner Field before moving to the suburbs. Like a lot of teams, the Braves loaded up — the calories, that is.

Concession stands at the Ted are set to serve the "Burgerizza." It's a 20-ounce beef patty, smothered with five slices of cheddar cheese and bacon, between a pair of 8-inch pepperoni pizzas. All for only \$26.

As always, injuries took a toll in spring training. Cardinals shortstop Jhonny Peralta, Dodgers outfielder Andre Ethier and young Colorado pitcher Jon Gray won't be ready for openers.

But pitchers Yu Darvish, Zack Wheeler, Homer Bailey and Alex Cobb seem to be recovering neatly from Tommy John surgery and are expected back soon enough.

So, how will things shake out?

San Francisco hopes its odd-even pattern holds after winning titles in 2010, 2012 and 2014. The Giants missed the playoffs last year, then got starters Jeff Samardzija and Cueto and outfielder Denard Span.

"This is as solid as I think we've been, and that's saying a lot," manager Bruce

Bochy said.

Coming off two consecutive last-place finishes, Boston added Price and closer Craig Kimbrel. Arizona revved its rotation with Greinke and Shelby Miller.

The defending champion Royals apparently didn't do enough to impress the stat-heads. A couple of numbers-based sites predicted Kansas City will finish below .500.

"They're probably never going to pick us to win it, no matter what we do," All-Star outfielder Lorenzo Cain said.

A season after getting swept by the pitching-rich Mets in the NL Championship Series, the Cubs acquired outfielder Jason Heyward, starter John Lackey and all-purpose player Ben Zobrist.

They joined Cy Young winner Jake Arrieta and young boppers Kris Bryant, Anthony Rizzo and Kyle Schwarber on a team clearly dressed for success. As manager Joe Maddon told his guys about clubhouse culture and cuture: "If you think you look hot, you wear it."

Whether that adds up to a Cubs crown, we'll find out. It's a supreme vacancy Justice Stevens wants to see filled.

A few years after he began listening to their games on radio, Stevens was 9 when he saw the Cubs drop the 1929 Series opener at Wrigley. He was back in '32 when the Bambino called his shot.

"Yes, it really happened," he said. "My recollection is still fairly clear about him pointing to the center field scoreboard. Which he did."

Stevens served more than 34 years on the Supreme Court and never moved away from rooting for his Cubbies.

"As a Cubs fan, you do a lot of parallel thinking," he said. "You have the disappointment, and you always have hope."

Soccer federation accused of wage bias

Associated Press

Five players from the World Cup-winning U.S. national team have accused the U.S. Soccer Federation of wage discrimination in an action filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Alex Morgan, Carli Lloyd, Megan Rapinoe, Becky Sauerbrunn and Hope Solo maintain in the EEOC filing they were paid nearly four times less than their male counterparts on the U.S. men's national team. The filing was announced Thursday in a statement from the law firm representing the players.

"The numbers speak for themselves," Solo said in a statement. "We are the best in the world, have three World Cup Championships, four Olympic Championships, and the USMNT get paid more just to show up than we get paid to win major championships."

The union representing the players is involved in a legal dispute with U.S. Soccer over the terms of their collective bargaining agreement. The federation filed a lawsuit this year seeking to clarify that its contract with the U.S. Women's National Soccer Team Players Association runs through the Rio Olympics until Dec. 31. The union maintains the memorandum of understanding agreed to in March 2013 can be terminated at any time.

U.S. Soccer issued a statement saying it had not seen this complaint and couldn't comment on specifics, but added it is "disappointed" with the action.

UNC's Paige finds shot just in time

Associated Press

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. — Marcus Paige spent two months in an all-out fight with his shot, trying not to let frustration take over with each spun-off-the-rim floater and rattled-out three-pointer.

The senior's shot has come around at just the right time for Final Four-bound North Carolina.

Paige has scored in double figures in six straight games — his longest run all season — and shot 48 percent from behind the arc in the NCAA Tournament. Consider it a welcome (back) addition of a reliable perimeter scorer and shooter to an already deep offense entering Saturday's national semifinal against Syracuse in Houston.

"I'm just playing more free and more confident and more relaxed," Paige said Tuesday, "and the ball's been going in."

Those January and February shooting struggles sunk Paige's season numbers for the Tar Heels (32-6), the No. 1 seed in the East Region that's back in the Final Four for the first time since 2009. The slender 6-foot-2 native of Marion, Iowa, is averaging 12.3 points and shooting just 39.6

percent, while his free-throw shooting fell from about 86 percent over his first three seasons to 77.5 percent this year.

But in the NCAA Tournament, he's averaged 14 points while making 13 of 27 three-pointers — highlighted by him hitting four quick threes on the way to 21 points in the Sweet 16 win against Indiana.

"Sooner or later," sophomore Joel Berry II said, "it was going to click."

The shooting struggles were a head-scratcher for anyone who had watched North Carolina regularly over the past two years, let alone Paige and coach Roy Williams. He had carried the burden of needing to find his shot quickly to get the Tar Heels moving at full speed, and carried it well.

As his shot abandoned him, Paige focused on being one of the team's top wing defenders and on other contributions until he could find it again. And UNC's offense evolved to run first through 6-foot-10 Brice Johnson — named an Associated Press first-team All-American on Tuesday — with Paige in a complimentary role.

That helped the Tar Heels survive Paige's prolonged slump, which would've been

devastating over the past two years. They could be even tougher to slow now that Paige looks like himself again.

Paige had averaged a career-best 17.5 points as a sophomore and 14.1 points last year while playing with a lingering foot injury. He looked ready for a big year when he scored 20 points in his season debut against Maryland after missing six games with a hand injury.

A few weeks later, Paige went for a season-high 30 points at Florida State.

And then suddenly, he just couldn't shoot.

He made five of 35 shots (14 percent) and one of 22 three-pointers (5 percent) over the next four games. As the games went on, his shooting didn't significantly improve, with home crowds in the Smith Center eventually holding their breath every time Paige shot in hopes it would be the one that would break him loose.

On at least one occasion, Paige looked to the rafters in relief when a shot went through the net.

Those days appear to be behind him.

Diaz-McGregor rematch on UFC 200 July card

LOS ANGELES — Conor McGregor is getting a rematch with Nate Diaz at UFC 200 in July.

Jose Aldo and Frankie Edgar also will meet for the interim featherweight title on the same card at Las Vegas' new T-Mobile Arena, the promotion announced Wednesday.

Diaz beat McGregor by submission in the second round of a welterweight bout March 5 at UFC 196, ending one of the most lucrative pay-per-view shows in mixed martial arts history with a remarkable upset.

McGregor's 15-fight winning streak ended in the bout, which was fought 25 pounds above his usual 145-pound fighting weight. The rematch also will be contested at 170 pounds, the UFC said.

UFC 200 is July 9 at the MGM Grand parent company's new arena just off the Las Vegas Strip.

From The Associated Press



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Spurs set home NBA record

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — The San Antonio Spurs set the NBA record with their 38th straight home victory to open the season and matched the highest win total in franchise history.

And none of them cared.

Manu Ginobili scored 20 points and the Spurs beat the injury-depleted New Orleans Pelicans 100-92 on Wednesday night to win their 47th straight home game overall dating to last season.

"It doesn't mean anything," San Antonio coach Gregg Popovich said. "Absolutely nothing. Maybe a cup of coffee, maybe." That's more than the rest of the Spurs would expect.

"It doesn't matter to me," San Antonio point guard Tony Parker said. "No. Championship [is all that matters]."

San Antonio topped the 37-0 start by the Chicago Bulls during their record 72-victory season in 1995-96.

The Warriors and Spurs play twice in the coming two weeks, facing off on each other's home court with their home streaks possibly on the line.

The Spurs are 63-12, matching the franchise record for victories set in 2005-06.

"If you're going to go undefeated at home, you've got to be a team that has championship potential," New Orleans coach Alvin Gentry said. "Obviously, [the Spurs] have championship potential. They've proven that over the last 15 years."

Kawhi Leonard had 16 points in 22 minutes during his return from a three-game absence, showing no discomfort after bruising his right quadriceps on March

23. The 6-foot-7 forward hit three long jumpers to open the game, including his only three-pointer in five attempts.

"He looked like he hadn't missed a beat," Popovich said. "He's ready to go, we just limited his minutes tonight to make sure that everything's OK. He'll probably get back to normal on Saturday, minutes-wise I mean."

Danny Green finished with 16 points, going 4-for-6 on three-pointers on a hot-shooting night behind the arc for San Antonio. The Spurs were 12-for-24 on threes.

Ginobili was 5-for-6 on three-pointers, including 3-for-4 in the first half.

Alexis Ajinca had 18 points for New Orleans, which was without nine players due to injury. Jordan Hamilton added 14 points in his first start in his third game with the team.

"We can't focus on (their injuries)," Parker said "We have to focus on what we have to do to get ready for the playoffs."

New Orleans remained within seven points throughout the first half, but San Antonio wore down the short-handed Pelicans in the second half. The Spurs had 13 players log at least six minutes against the Pelicans' nine-player bench.

San Antonio outscored New Orleans 27-16 in the third quarter, picking up assists on eight of its 12 field goals.

Warriors 103, Jazz 96 (OT): Stephen Curry scored 31 points, including six straight in overtime as visiting Golden State continued its historic run.

The Warriors (68-7) surpassed last season's victory total and can break the 1995-96 Chicago Bulls' record of 72-10 with five wins in their last seven games.

Raptors 105, Hawks 97: DeMar DeRozan scored 26 points while Jonas Valanciunas added 19 points and nine rebounds as host Toronto earned its franchise-record 50th victory of the season.

DeRozan added six assists and five rebounds while Kyle Lowry finished with 17 points, 11 assists and six rebounds as the Raptors (50-24) won for just the second time in five games.

Lakers 102, Heat 100 (OT): Julius Randle hit a tiebreaking hook shot in the paint with 1.9 seconds left in overtime as host Los Angeles rallied late.

Jordan Clarkson scored six of his 26 points in overtime for the Lakers, who ended a four-game losing streak with just their 16th win of the season.

Nuggets 109, Grizzlies 105: Will Barton scored 25 points and Emmanuel Mudiay had 17 as visiting Denver beat reeling Memphis.

The Grizzlies (41-34) have lost four in a row.

Kings 120, Wizards 111: DeMarcus Cousins had 29 points, 10 rebounds, five steals and four blocks as the host Kings hurt the Wizards' playoff hopes.

Clippers 99, Timberwolves 79: Chris Paul had 20 points, 16 assists and eight rebounds in leading the visiting Clippers to their fourth straight victory.

Mavericks 91, Knicks 89: J.J. Barea scored 26 points and made the go-ahead layup with 49.9 seconds left to help host Dallas rally in the fourth quarter.

Bucks 105, Suns 94: Khris Middleton scored nine of his 26 points in the final 7:31 while Jabari Parker added 21 points as host Milwaukee stopped a five-game slide.

Women's Final Four features newcomers

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Geno Auriemma marvels at what his colleagues accomplished this season.

In six short years, Oregon State coach Scott Rueck took a program that needed open tryouts to fill its roster six years ago to the women's Final Four.

First-time college head coach Mike Neighbors needed three seasons to lead Washington to an improbable tourney run.

Syracuse coach Quentin Hillsman rewarded the school's 10-year wait for its greatest season.

And on Sunday, those three first-time Final Four participants will join Auriemma's perennial powerhouse in Indianapolis on the sport's biggest stage.

"I remember in 1991, when we went to the Final Four and we were the first team from north of the Mason-Dixon line to ever play in the Final Four, and it was like we had somehow landed on the moon," Auriemma said during a national conference call with reporters Wednesday. "Now 20-some years later, you have three teams in the Final Four for the first time — and not three teams that were knocking on the door and finally got there. These are three teams that by all measures, only the kids on those teams and only the coaches expected them to be there."

Inside the programs, there also were questions.

Rueck acknowledged later Wednesday that when he took over at Oregon State, he wasn't sure if the Beavers could even crack the top half of the Pac-12 in six years — much less play on the season's final weekend. And after one of his top players, Sydney Wiese, was injured early this season, he again wondered whether his team could achieve its ultimate goal.

The NCAA's selection committee didn't make things any easier by setting up a contest against powerhouse Baylor on its pseudo-home court, in Dallas.

"There was still — I can't lie and say — I mean, there was still a little bit of doubt, can we get all the way to this level?" Rueck said. "You know things need to go your way a bit."

But Oregon State overcame all of those obstacles and will now face the unbeaten and the three-time defending champion Huskies on Sunday.

The Beavers might not have even had the toughest road to Indy.

Washington, which had only reached one Sweet 16 in the previous 19 seasons, upset second-seeded Maryland on its home court, upset third-seeded Kentucky on its home court and then had to beat perennial Pac-12 power Stanford in Lexington, Ky., to earn a ticket to Indy.

The Huskies won them all with a rotation of seven to eight players and for a coach who once took a \$58,000 pay cut to pursue his dream of coaching college basketball and will now face Syracuse, a team also getting acclimated to the Final Four environment.

Syracuse's climb might have been even steeper.

Auriemma, who played the Orange in the old Big East Conference, credited Hillsman with bringing the program from "nowhere" to the precipice of playing for a national championship.

How bad was the program? Auriemma said even the people in Syracuse didn't know it existed.

Flyers move out of tie for last playoff spot

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — The Philadelphia Flyers shouldn't have any frowns when they gather for their team picture on Thursday.

Nick Cousins and Sam Gagner scored in a shootout after Brayden Schenn tied the game in regulation late in the third period to lift the Philadelphia Flyers to a 2-1 victory over the Washington Capitals on Wednesday night.

The win propelled the Flyers out of a tie with idle Detroit for the final playoff spot in the Eastern Conference.

Alex Ovechkin scored in regulation for Washington (54-16-6), which was seeking a franchise record for victories after already clinching home-ice advantage throughout the playoffs with the league's best regular-season record.

Steve Mason made 29 saves in regulation and overtime for the Flyers and stopped T.J. Oshie and Evgeny Kuznetsov in the tiebreaker.

"I think we'll all be smiles for the team photo," Mason said. "I just tried to stay patient. You try and wait them out, and I was fortunate."

Cousins, Philadelphia's first shooter, beat Braden Holtby through the five-hole. After an excellent glove save by Mason on Kuznetsov, Gagner shot past Holtby to send the Flyers into a wild celebration in front of their own goal.

"Tonight is a nice step forward," Flyers coach Dave Hakstol said. "We're excited with the way our group is playing. We needed those points."

The game pitted teams that could match up in the first round of the playoffs. Washington claimed the second

Presidents' Trophy in club history with Monday's 4-1 win over Columbus.

Meanwhile, Philadelphia is fighting just to get into the playoffs.

"The biggest difference in the two teams is probably the desperation level of Philadelphia," Capitals coach Barry Trotz said. "Ours probably wasn't as high and it probably shouldn't be, human nature and all that."

The Flyers began play tied with Detroit for the eighth and final playoff spot in the Eastern Conference with 87 points. Philadelphia, though, has six games remaining while Detroit has five. The Flyers and Red Wings will meet next Wednesday in Detroit.

"This is the time of year you want to be playing hockey that means something," Schenn said. "We've been scratching and clawing for a while now. We've been playing playoff hockey. As a team, we're gelling."

Ovechkin gave Washington a 1-0 lead with a power-play goal after receiving a pass from Kuznetsov 1 { minutes into the third period. Ovechkin fired a wrist shot from the left circle past Mason's glove side. It was Ovechkin's league-leading 44th goal, and Kuznetsov's team-high 54th assist.

The Flyers tied it at 1 with a power-play goal of their own with 5:28 remaining when Schenn deflected Claude Giroux's slap shot high over Holtby for his 25th tally of the season.

The Capitals had the best chance in a penalty-filled, entertaining overtime. Nicklas Backstrom's slap shot on a power play with 3:54 left in the extra session caromed off the post.

"I don't think we answered their intensity," Backstrom said. "I think we have one more level."

Holtby remained on 46 wins, which is two shy of Martin Brodeur's league record set in 2006-07. He made 33 saves in regulation and overtime.

Ducks 8, Flames 3: Jakob Silfverberg scored twice, Ryan Kesler had a goal and three assists, and host Anaheim tied an NHL record for consecutive regular-season home wins over one team with a thumping of Calgary.

Corey Perry, Brandon Pirri, Jamie McGinn, Nate Thompson and rookie Shea Theodore also scored, helping the Ducks take over first place in the Pacific Division with their 23rd in a row over the Flames at Honda Center.

The Ducks, vying for their fourth straight division title, are a point ahead of the Los Angeles Kings with six games left on the schedule.

Senators 2, Jets 1: Alex Chiasson and Zack Smith scored and Ottawa snapped a four-game road losing streak with a victory over Winnipeg.

Andrew Hammond stopped 20 shots for his sixth win of the season as Ottawa improved to 6-0-1 in its last seven against the Jets.

Mark Scheifele scored the tying goal for Winnipeg at 6:55 of the third period, but Chiasson put Ottawa back in front less than two minutes later. A deflected pass went off Scheifele's skate, leaving a loose puck in front of the Jets' net. Chiasson quickly jumped on it and slapped it in for his eighth of the season.

Michael Hutchinson finished with 18 saves for Winnipeg.