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N. Korean missiles land in sea near Japan

BY KIM GAMEL
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Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea fired a barrage of missiles into the sea near Japan on Monday in a defiant show of force as the U.S. and South Korea conduct annual joint war games.

At least four medium-range ballistic missiles were launched from the Dongchang-ri long-range missile site in northwestern North Korea about 7:36 a.m., according to South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff. All flew about 620 miles and reached an altitude of 160 miles before landing in the sea off the west coast of Japan, Joint Chiefs of Staff spokesman Roh Jae-cheon said during a news briefing.

Navy Capt. Jeff Davis, a Pentagon spokesman, said four missiles splashed down in the Sea of Japan, but he would not confirm whether that was the total number of missiles launched. Another U.S. defense official who spoke on the condition of anonymity said the missiles splashed down about 200 miles off Japan's coast and at least one of the missiles was detected and tracked by the USS William P. Lawrence, an Aegis guided-missile destroyer, which was nearby.

The U.S., Japan and South Korea strongly condemned the launches — the second in three weeks.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe

said North Korea has become “a new kind of threat,” while South Korea's acting president called for the early deployment of an advanced U.S. missile defense system despite China's objections.

The barrage came as President Donald Trump's administration weighs a new approach to dealing with the communist state, which has shown surprising progress in its nuclear weapons program since last year despite diplomatic pressure and U.N. Security Council sanctions aimed at stopping it.

The New York Times reported last week that options on the table for Trump to consider range from pre-emptive military strikes to restoring U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea.

Yonhap news agency quoted an unidentified Defense Ministry official as saying one could be an intercontinental ballistic missile. But Roh said “the possibility seems to be low” when asked about the report.

Japanese officials said three of the four missiles landed in the 230-mile offshore area known as an exclusive economic zone, where Tokyo has sovereign rights for exploring and exploiting resources, according to The Associated Press.

The State Department also strongly condemned the missile launches, noting they violated U.N. resolutions banning Pyongyang from using ballistic-missile technology.

“We remain prepared, and will continue

to take steps to increase our readiness to defend ourselves and our allies from attack, and are prepared to use the full range of capabilities at our disposal against this growing threat,” State Department spokesman Mark Toner said in a statement.

U.S. National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster talked to his South Korean counterpart, Kim Kwan-jin, by phone.

“The two condemned the repeated launches of ballistic missiles by North Korea and agreed to enhance bilateral cooperation for strong and effective sanctions and pressure against the North,” said a statement from the South Korean's office.

Analysts said the launches were a clear protest against the military exercises but also likely were aimed at sending a signal to the Trump administration that Pyongyang is determined to persist with its nuclear weapons program.

“They seem to be wanting to pressure the U.S., to obtain bargaining power and to get Washington to admit their position as a nuclear power,” said Kim Tae-woo, a professor in military studies at South Korea's Konyang University.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said in his New Year's speech that the country was in the “final stages” of preparing to test-launch an ICBM, which would bring it alarmingly closer to its goal of targeting the U.S. mainland with a nuclear-tipped missile.

NCIS probes posting of nude photos of female Marines

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Defense Department is investigating reports that some Marines shared naked photographs of female Marines, veterans and other women on a secret Facebook page, some of which were taken without their knowledge.

The photographs were shared on the Facebook page “Marines United,” which had a membership of active-duty and retired male Marines, Navy corpsmen and British Royal Marines. Along with identified female military members were some unidentifiable women in various stages of undress, and the posts included obscene

comments about some of the women, officials said.

The Naval Criminal Investigative Service is now investigating. The photographs have been taken down, officials said.

Marine Corps commandant Gen. Robert B. Neller on Sunday refused to comment directly about the ongoing investigation. “For anyone to target one of our Marines, online or otherwise, in an inappropriate manner, is distasteful and shows an absence of respect,” Neller said in a statement.

It was not immediately known how many active-duty Marines and other service-members were involved or are under investigation. A Marine Corps official, speaking

on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss personnel matters by name, said at least one government contractor had been removed from his job after he posted a link to the photographs.

In response to the report, Sgt. Maj. Ronald L. Green, the top enlisted man in the Marine Corps, said, “These negative behaviors are absolutely contrary to what we represent.”

The investigation first was reported by the Center for Investigative Reporting. The activity was revealed by The War Horse, a nonprofit news organization run by Marine veteran Thomas Brennan.

Ex-NATO leaders call for new strategy

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

Two former top NATO military commanders are calling on the alliance to develop a new strategy for defending the North Atlantic, where they warn Russia is developing a capability edge that could prevent allies from reinforcing the region in a conflict.

The leaders, in a report released Monday by the London-based Royal United Services Institute, also said NATO needs a new command structure to build up the alliance's 300-strong maritime command and establish a more sustained naval presence in North Atlantic waters.

While U.S. forces stationed in Europe serve as a first line of defense, steps must be taken to better ensure those troops can be reinforced in a confrontation, said retired Gen. Philip

Breedlove, former NATO supreme allied commander who retired in 2016.

"The North Atlantic is NATO's lifeblood; it is the trans-Atlantic link," Breedlove wrote in the RUSI report. "After two decades of relative calm, we now see a growing Russian threat to this region. The North Atlantic has become the testing area for Russia's increasingly sophisticated submarines and aircraft."

Retired Adm. James Stavridis, who served as NATO's top officer from 2009 to 2013, also contributed to the report, titled "The North Atlantic: Revitalizing Collective Defense."

Breedlove said Russia has developed "offensive long-range, high-precision capabilities and is building high-end maritime capabilities that could deny NATO members freedom of maneuver at sea."

The RUSI report argues that

NATO has overlooked the North Atlantic maritime area, focusing instead on other areas, including Afghanistan, tensions in Ukraine and an alliance effort during the past 2½ years to build up land forces along its eastern borders with Russia.

The report comes as President Donald Trump touts a plan for increased military investment. Providing few specifics, Trump said he intends to build up the Navy even as he emphasizes a desire to work more closely with Russia.

In recent years, the Russian navy has become more active in the North Atlantic, where it "now operates in areas and at a tempo not seen for almost two decades," according to the report.

"NATO must understand that because the North Atlantic plays an important part in Russian military strategic calculations — as evident in its

growing naval and air force laydown — it is essential that the region become more central to NATO's own planning, deployments and preparations," Stavridis wrote in his contribution to the report.

Besides updating its maritime strategy, NATO needs a command-and-control structure designed to deal with threats to the North Atlantic and fresh intelligence and contingency plans for the region, Stavridis said.

The report, though acknowledging the Russian navy is not equal to that of the former Soviet Union, says recent reforms and defense projects underway could enable Russia to deny allied maritime operations in the strategic waters between Greenland, Iceland, Britain and Norway.

Pentagon blocks LCS cost overrun from GAO report

Bloomberg

The Pentagon office that reviews information to determine whether it's classified has blocked publication of potentially embarrassing data on cost overruns for the first two vessels bought under the Navy's primary littoral combat ship contracts, according to a new congressional audit.

In a report examining Navy shipbuilding contracts, the U.S. Government Accountability Office deleted overrun information on two of the littoral combat ships launched in late 2014 — the USS Milwaukee, built by Lockheed Martin, and the USS Jackson, built by Austal Ltd. — at the request of the Defense Office of Prepublication and Security Review.

The GAO said the Defense Department "deemed the cost growth" on both vessels "to be sensitive but unclassified information, which is excluded from this public report. However, the percent difference" in cost for each ship "was above target cost." Other types of ships were listed with specific data on cost increases that ranged from 4 to 45 percent.

"This seems to be an overly broad read-

ing of competition-sensitive information," said Mandy Smithberger, a director for the Project On Government Oversight's military reform initiative. "Taxpayers are footing the bill for these overruns. They deserve to know the costs."

The littoral combat ship has been controversial, with two defense secretaries under President Barack Obama questioning whether the light ship intended for shallow, coastal waters could survive in combat and cutting back the numbers planned. While President Donald Trump and his defense secretary, Jim Mattis, haven't taken a stand on the ship, it could be one path toward Trump's pledge to rapidly expand the Navy's fleet to 350 vessels from about 272 today.

The two vessels are the first in a block of 10 that each contractor is building at regular intervals at what the Navy says are stable prices. The Navy plans to ask this year for authorization to build the final 12 of 40 ships as well as equipment for missions. Those final ships are described as "frigates" that will be better armed than the existing designs.

The LCS deletions were mentioned in a table that listed cost growth.

"Decisions about what information is sensitive are made strictly by the agencies, though we do ask them to present what we would consider as a valid rationale," Michele Mackin, a GAO director and the report's author, said in an email.

"In this case, DOD's Defense Office of Prepublication and Security Review provided us" in a Nov. 2 letter "with sensitivity markings indicating what information was considered official use only, or competition sensitive," Mackin said. "The discussions of LCS cost overruns were marked as such and they provided legitimate information about how such details could impact ongoing competition."

The Pentagon office that sought the deletions is best known for reviewing manuscripts by current and former military personnel for sensitive information.

The letter to the GAO asking for the deletions was signed by an assistant on behalf of Mark Langerman, chief of the Security Review Office. Langerman didn't respond to an email asking for comment.

US-backed fighters cut road to Raqqa

Associated Press

BEIRUT — U.S.-backed Syrian fighters on Monday cut the main road between the northern Syrian city of Raqqa, which is controlled by the Islamic State group, and the eastern city of Deir el-Zour, which is partially held by the Islamic State group, as they press into the extremists' territory in Syria.

Despite the fresh blockade on the Raqqa-Deir el-Zour road, the Islamic State group still controls swaths of ground south of Raqqa, and the extremists should be able to use smaller roads through open desert to move between the cities.

Fighters from the U.S.-backed and Kurdish-led Syria Democratic Forces have been on the offensive under the cover of U.S.-led coalition airstrikes since November. Operation Euphrates Wrath aims to surround and capture Raqqa, the de facto capital of the Islamic State group's self-declared caliphate.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said SDF fighters cut the road linking the two cities in the area of Jazra near Raqqa early Monday. The group said it is now difficult for people to leave and enter Raqqa.

SDF spokesman Talal Sillo

told The Associated Press, "Our forces have cut the main supply line between Raqqa and Deir el-Zour." He added that it is still too early to impose a siege on Raqqa.

The blockade of the main road comes amid an ongoing SDF march toward Raqqa. Its fighters are now stationed 5 miles north of the Euphrates River city and supported by both coalition airstrikes and a deployment of some 500 U.S. special forces operators. The Pentagon has said its soldiers are working in an advisory capacity.

Turkey, a U.S. ally through NATO, views the Kurdish mi-

litia known as the YPG — the main component of the SDF — as an extension of the Kurdish insurgency inside its own borders and has classified the party as a terrorist organization. It has objected strongly to the SDF offensive and also vowed to repel the Kurdish-led forces in the town of Manbij back over the banks of the Euphrates, a move that would disrupt the Raqqa campaign.

There are Turkish forces stationed in al-Bab, 25 miles southwest of Manbij. The Turkish threats prompted the SDF to ask Russia and the Syrian army to establish a buffer between them and the Turkish forces.

Trump signs new travel-ban executive order

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump on Monday signed a new version of his controversial travel ban, aiming to withstand court challenges while still barring new visas for citizens from six Muslim-majority countries and shutting down the U.S. refugee program.

The revised travel order leaves Iraq off the list of banned countries but still affects would-be visitors from Iran, Syria, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen and Libya.

White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer was not scheduled to hold an on-camera briefing Monday, leading to the appearance that the president was distancing himself from the order. The order also risks being overshadowed by unsubstantiated accusations the president made over the weekend that former President Barack Obama had ordered the wiretapping of his phone during the campaign.

The original travel ban caused immediate panic and chaos at airports around the country as Homeland Security officials scrambled to interpret how it was to be implemented, and travelers were detained before being sent back overseas or blocked from getting on airplanes abroad. The order was

Iraq welcomes removal from US travel ban list

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Iraq welcomed its removal from a revised U.S. travel ban on Monday, calling it a "positive message."

Iraq was among seven Muslim-majority countries whose nationals were temporarily banned from traveling to the United States in an earlier order issued by President Donald Trump in January, which was blocked by the courts.

The original order angered many Iraqis, and prompted parliament to call for a reciprocal ban on Americans entering Iraq. Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declined to impose such a measure.

ultimately put on hold by a federal judge in Washington state. That ruling was upheld by a federal appeals court.

The revised order is narrower and specifies that a 90-day ban on people from the six countries does not apply to those who al-

Thousands of American forces are in Iraq providing air support and logistical help for a massive operation to drive Islamic State militants from Mosul.

Iraqi troops on the front lines welcomed the revision to the travel ban while still expressing anger over the original order.

"To be honest, (the original ban) made me upset, and that will not change," said Sgt. Maj. Asad al-Asadi of Iraq's special forces, who has been away from home battling the Islamic State group for nearly three years. "I've lost three friends fighting terrorists and Trump calls me a terrorist."

ready have valid visas or people with U.S. green cards.

In a call with reporters Monday morning, senior officials from the Homeland Security and Justice departments said the travel ban was necessary to allow the government to review

what more can be done to vet would-be visitors and refugees.

The officials said 300 people who arrived in the United States as refugees were currently under investigation as part of terrorism-related cases. The officials pointed to those cases as evidence of the need for the travel order but refused repeated requests to address how many of those people were from the six banned countries or how long they have been in the U.S.

According to the fact sheet, the DHS will conduct a review of the information the six targeted nations provide to the U.S. for visa and immigration decisions. Those countries will then have 50 days to comply with U.S. government requests to update or improve that information.

Additionally, Trump's order suspends the entire U.S. refugee program for 120 days, though refugees already formally scheduled for travel by the State Department will be allowed entry. The number of refugees allowed into the U.S. will be capped at 50,000 for fiscal 2017.

The new version also removes language that would give priority to religious minorities. Critics had accused the administration of adding such language to help Christians get into the U.S. while excluding Muslims.

Supreme Court won't hear transgender case

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court is returning a transgender teen's case to a lower court without reaching a decision, leaving in limbo the issue of transgender rights in school settings.

Monday's action comes after the Trump administration pulled back federal guidance advising schools to let students use the bathroom of their chosen gender, not biological birth.

The justices said in a brief order that they have opted not

to decide whether federal anti-discrimination law gives high school senior Gavin Grimm the right to use the boys' bathroom in his Virginia school.

The case had been scheduled for argument in late March. Instead, a lower court in Virginia will be tasked with evaluating the federal law known as Title IX and the extent to which it applies to transgender students.

For Grimm, the order means that he probably will graduate with the issue unresolved and his ability to use the boys' bathroom blocked by a policy of the Gloucester County school

board. Although he won a court order allowing him to use the boys' bathroom, the Supreme Court put it on hold last August, before the school year began.

"This is disappointing for trans kids across the country and for Gavin, who are now going to be held in limbo for another year or two," said Joshua Block, the American Civil Liberties Union attorney who represents Grimm. "But Title IX means the same thing today as it meant yesterday. Lower courts already have held that it protects trans kids."

Kyle Duncan, the lawyer for

the school board, had no immediate comment on the order.

The high court action follows the administration's recent decision to withdraw a directive issued during Barack Obama's presidency that said which bathroom to use should be based on students' gender identity, not biological birth.

Both sides in Grimm's case had asked for the high court to go ahead with the case, even after the administration withdrew the Obama-era directive, although the school board said the case should be delayed.

TSA warns police about new airport pat-downs

Bloomberg

The Transportation Security Administration has declined to say exactly where — and how — employees will be touching air travelers as part of the more invasive physical pat-down procedure it recently ordered.

The agency does expect some passengers to consider the examination unusual. In fact, the TSA decided to inform local police just in case anyone calls to report an "abnormal" federal frisking, according to a memo from an airport trade association obtained by Bloomberg News. The physical search, for those selected to have one, is what the agency described as a more "comprehensive" screening, replacing five separate kinds of pat-downs it previously used.

The decision to alert local and airport police raises a question of just how intimate the agency's employees may get. On its website, the TSA says employees "use the back of the hands for pat-downs over sensitive areas of the body. In limited cases, additional screening involving a sensitive area pat-down with the front of the hand may be needed to determine that a threat does not exist."

Now, security screeners will use the front of their hands on a passenger in a private screening area if one of the prior screening methods indicates the presence of explosives, according to a "security notice" Airports Council International-North America sent its U.S. members following a March 1 conference call with TSA officials.

"Due to this change, TSA asked FSDs [field security directors] to contact airport law enforcement and brief them on the procedures in case they are notified that a passenger believes a [TSA employee] has subjected them to an abnormal screening practice," ACI wrote.

The TSA won't reveal specific procedures on how its pat-downs are conducted beyond the general information on its website.

Germany uneasily ratchets up military might in Europe

The Washington Post

SESTOKAI, Lithuania — A vermilion-colored locomotive slowed to a halt, its freight cars obscured in the blinding snow. A German captain ordered his troops to unload the train's cargo. "Jawohl!" — "Yes, sir!" — a soldier said, before directing out the first of 20 tanks bearing the Iron Cross of the Bundeswehr, Germany's army.

Evocative of old war films, the scene is nevertheless a sign of new times. Seven and a half decades after the Nazis invaded this Baltic nation, the Germans are back in Lithuania — this time as one of the allies.

As the Trump administration ratchets up the pressure on allied nations to shoulder more of their own defense, no country is more in the crosshairs than Germany. If it meets the goals Washington is pushing for, Germany would be on the fast track to become again Western Europe's biggest military power.

Since the November election in the U.S., the Germans — caught between President Donald Trump's America and Vladimir Putin's Russia — are feeling less and less secure. Coupled with Trump's push to have allies step up, the Germans are debating a military buildup in a manner rarely witnessed since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Perhaps nowhere is the prospect of a new future playing out more than here in Lithuania, where nearly 500 German troops, including a Bavarian

combat battalion, arrived in recent weeks for an open-ended deployment near the Russian frontier. The NATO deployment marks what analysts describe as Germany's most ambitious military operation near the Russian border since the end of the Cold War. It arrived with a formidable show of German force — including 20 Marder armored infantry fighting vehicles, six Leopard battle tanks and 12 Fuchs and Boxer armored personnel carriers.

As Germany grows bolder, outdated imagery is roaring back to life through Russian propaganda. Last week, the Russian Defense Ministry announced the building of a reproduction of the old German Reichstag at a military theme park near Moscow, offering young Russians a chance to re-enact the 1945 storming of the structure during the fall of Berlin.

Yet in Lithuania, a former Soviet republic now living in the shadow of Russia's maw, the Nazi legacy is seen as ancient history. To many here, modern Germany is a bastion of democratic principles and one of the globe's strongest advocates of human rights, free determination and measured diplomacy. Facing a Russian threat in times of uncertain NATO allegiances, the Lithuanians are clamoring for a more powerful Germany by its side.

"I think U.S. leadership should be maintained, but also, we need leadership in Europe," Lithuanian Defense Minister Raimundas Karoblis said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Officer rescues driver, realizes he's a neighbor

NY COMMACK — When an off-duty police officer on New York's Long Island made a hospital visit to a driver he'd rescued from a highway crash, the two realized their paths had crossed before.

It turns out Suffolk County Police Officer James Brucculeri and motorist Robert Malinowski live about two blocks from each other in Kings Park.

Brucculeri said at a news conference Friday that he was driving home from National Guard duty Wednesday when he saw a car wrecked on the Sagtikos Parkway in Commack.

Malinowski, 59, had gone into cardiac arrest while driving, and he was turning blue. Brucculeri pulled him from the car with help from other passers-by, including Central Islip-Hauppauge Volunteer Ambulance Corps EMT Alexa Bracco.

Charge dismissed over killing of celebrity elk

WA SEATTLE — Charges have been dismissed against a Lewis County man following the killing of a trophy bull elk that had become something of a celebrity in the Ellensburg area and was called Bullwinkle by locals.

The Seattle Times reported that the case against Tod Reichert, 77, of Saikum, was dismissed Thursday in Lower Kittitas County District Court.

Reichert had been charged with unlawful hunt of big game in the second degree after the December 2015 killing of Bullwinkle, the largest of five bull elk that lived in a hayfield and didn't mind if people stopped to take photos. Reichert had a raffle permit that allowed him some additional hunting opportunities.

Judge James Hurson, in dismissing the case, ruled that state regulations outlining hunting restrictions were too vague.

Court: State can't be sued for selling home

ME ROCKLAND — Maine's highest court has upheld a ruling that found the state isn't liable for selling waterfront property below its value for a man in its care.

William Dean's attorney said the value of his client's estate fell from \$654,000 to \$20,000 in less than a year after the state Department of Health and Human Services became his conservator in 2012.

Dean, who died in October at 71, had Asperger's syndrome, an autism spectrum disorder. The state said he wasn't competent to manage his properties and that his bills weren't paid.

The Portland Press Herald reported the state Supreme Judicial Court ruled Thursday that the state is immune from liability even when it's someone's conservator.

3 teens arrested in 'Geisha Doll' robberies

CA SAN JOSE — San Jose police have arrested three teens they suspect of being the so-called "Geisha Doll" crew that robbed more than a dozen minimarts and gas stations.

The San Jose Mercury News reported that two 17-year-old boys and a 16-year-old were taken into custody earlier this year. Their names aren't being released because they are minors.

Police believe they are responsible for at least a dozen holdups in San Jose and Milpitas since October. In some cases, the robbers donned distinctive, geisha doll-style masks.

Police said store clerks were

threatened with a gun or a knife and some were pistol-whipped.

Woman, 71, charged in stabbing after dispute

DE FELTON — Delaware State Police said a 71-year-old Philadelphia woman was arrested and charged in a stabbing that followed a possible road rage incident.

Police said in a statement that an investigation linked Mary M. Craig to the stabbing in November. The attack came after authorities say women in two cars exchanged profanities while stopped at a red light in the Felton area. The victim was stabbed in the upper torso and was taken to a hospital.

Craig was arrested Friday at her home and charged with first-degree assault, possession of a deadly weapon during the commission of a felony and first-degree reckless endangering. Police said she was arraigned and released on \$46,000 bond.

University officials vote to ban tobacco

VT MONTPELIER — Castleton University in Vermont is banning tobacco.

Castleton officials announced the change Thursday.

The Vermont State Colleges Board of Trustees voted unanimously in November to ban tobacco from all its campuses by July 1, 2019. Castleton will be the first campus to implement the change.

The University of Vermont and St. Michaels College in Colchester banned tobacco in 2015 and 2016, respectively. Nationwide, almost 2,000 colleges and universities have gone tobacco-free. State health officials have been campaigning since 2013 to push tobacco-free policies on all Vermont campuses.

The school hopes to become

tobacco-free by Aug. 1.

Men sentenced for killing endangered bear

MS MERIDIAN — Three men have pleaded guilty to violating the Endangered Species Act after killing a Louisiana black bear in January 2014.

U.S. Attorney Gregory K. Davis and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Special Agent in Charge Luis Santiago said Friday that Travis Butler, of Meridian, was sentenced Feb. 28 to five years of probation, with five months of home confinement for violating the act and obstructing a federal investigation.

Authorities also sentenced David Wimberly, of Quitman, and Chester Williams, of Toomsboro, for assisting in the killing.

Wimberly and Williams each received one year of probation, a \$1,000 fine and a one-year prohibition from hunting. Williams also was sentenced to four months of home confinement.

City clerk retires amid anti-Muslim controversy

MI PLYMOUTH — A city official in suburban Detroit has retired over anti-Muslim remarks on social media.

Linda Langmesser retired Friday after more than 25 years as Plymouth city clerk. City Manager Paul Sincock declined further comment.

Activists had accused Langmesser of writing Muslims "don't tell the whole truth" in response to a recent story about a Muslim woman who resigned from President Donald Trump's National Security Council.

Langmesser denied writing the online post and said her Facebook account was hacked.

From wire reports

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Shockers roll in MVC title game

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Wichita State left no doubt as to whom the top team in the Missouri Valley Conference was.

Conner Frankamp scored a career-high 19 points and Markis McDuffie added 16 as No. 21 Wichita State beat Illinois State 71-51 in the MVC Tournament championship game Sunday, earning an automatic NCAA Tournament berth.

"I thought we played very well against a very good team," Wichita State coach Gregg Marshall said. "I thought it was a very thorough performance. We defended well. We made our free throws. We got the ball inside. We rebounded well. We shot it well. So that results in a 20-point win and that's hard to do against that team."

The teams had split their regular-season series and shared the conference championship, with Illinois State earning the top seed over Wichita State based on RPI.

The Shockers (30-4) have won 15 straight games since losing at Illinois State on Jan. 14. The Redbirds (27-6) had won eight straight games since losing at Wichita State on Feb. 4.

"Our loss at Illinois State really woke us up," said Frankamp, who was named the tournament's most outstanding player after scoring 37 points in the final two games. "We got right back to work after that and changed a few things and it's really helped us. We'll continue to work and hopefully make a run in the tournament."

Landry Shamet added 14 points for Wichita State. Paris Lee, the MVC's player of the year, led Illinois State with 18 points on 7-of-21 shooting, while MiKyle McIntosh scored 16.

Illinois State shot a season-low 29.3 percent from the field (17 of 58).

"We picked a bad day to have a bad day, especially shooting the ball," Illinois State coach

Dan Muller said. "Certainly part of it was their defense, but part of it was us. We just got beat by a good team today. They played better than us."

Bucknell 70, Navy 65: At Lewisburg, Pa., Zach Thomas scored 22 points and Nana Foulland added 18, including two free throws that proved to be the winning points, and Bucknell edged Navy 70-65 on Sunday to advance to the Patriot League Tournament championship game.

The top-seeded Bison (25-8) host third-seeded Lehigh on Wednesday for an NCAA berth.

Shawn Anderson scored 21 points and Bryce Dulin 15 for Navy (16-16).

No. 16 Purdue 69, Northwestern 65: Vincent Edwards scored 16 of his 25 points in the second half and Caleb Swani-gan added 20 points and 14 rebounds for the visiting Boilermakers (25-6, 14-4 Big Ten).

Bryant McIntosh had 25 points and six assists for Northwestern (21-10, 10-8), which has lost six of nine.

No. 18 Cincinnati 67, Connecticut 47: Gary Clark had 17 points and 14 rebounds, leading visiting Cincinnati past short-handed Connecticut in the regular-season finale for both teams.

Jarron Cumberland added 15 points for the Bearcats (27-4, 16-2 American Athletic Conference).

Siena 89, Monmouth 85: At Albany, N.Y., Nico Clareth scored all of his 27 points, including a career-high tying seven three-pointers, in the second half as Siena rallied from a 17-point deficit to beat top-seeded Monmouth in the semifinals of the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference Tournament.

Justin Robinson led five Monmouth (27-6) players in double figures with 22 points.

Dunk Dynasty: FGCU back in the big dance

Associated Press

FORT MYERS, Fla. — The "Dunk City" moniker is on their shirts, on the doors to their arena, on every press release they send out about men's basketball at Florida Gulf Coast.

And yes, those highlight-reel dunks are still happening.

But defense — not dunks — got FGCU back into the NCAA Tournament.

Brandon Goodwin scored 19 points and FGCU dominated the second half to earn its third NCAA berth in the past five seasons with a 77-61 win over North Florida in the Atlantic Sun Conference championship game on Sunday. The Eagles trailed by six at the half, then outscored the Ospreys 44-22 and held them to 19 percent shooting in the final 20 minutes.

"We sort of figured it out at halftime," FGCU coach Joe Dooley said.

Demetris Morant and Marc-Eddy Norelia each scored 14

for the Eagles (26-7).

Morant's first dunk of the game was FGCU's 149th of the season — one more than the original team with the "Dunk City" label had in 2012-13. The Eagles finished with nine on Sunday.

"I definitely feel like we can compete with anyone in the country," Goodwin said. "We know what we're capable of and if we do all that coach asks of us, we can definitely win."

The school best known for its "Dunk City" run to the Sweet Sixteen in 2013 also went to the NCAAs last season, winning a First Four game before falling to eventual national finalist North Carolina. And when the bracket comes out on Sunday, someone is going to surely be reminded that the NCAA stage tends to bring out FGCU's best.

"They're going to be a tough out for anybody who has to play them," North Florida coach Matthew Driscoll said. "That's for sure."

Winthrop earns first NCAA bid since 2010

Associated Press

ROCK HILL, S.C. — Once a March regular, Winthrop is back in the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2010.

Point guard Keon Johnson set the tone before and during the Eagles' 76-59 win over Campbell on their home floor in Sunday's Big South Conference Tournament final.

Winthrop coach Pat Kelsey was about to address his team in the locker room prior to tip-off when Johnson spoke up. He had something to say.

"Keon's a man of very, very few words," Kelsey said. "He's been that way since he got here. When he talks, the room stands still, and guys lean forward. I didn't have to say another word."

Johnson talked to his teammates about battling for each other, then went out and scored 26 points. After two straight 31-point games, the 5-foot-7 Johnson won the MVP award for the tournament. The senior opened the second half with back-to-back threes, and scored 15 of Winthrop's first 19 points in the second half.

The Eagles (26-6) snapped their streak of three straight losses in the conference final.

Winthrop went to the NCAA Tournament nine times from 1999-2010. Their lone win came in 2007 against Notre Dame.

The Eagles lost to Coastal Carolina in the 2014 and 2015 finals and UNC Asheville last season. Now Winthrop is tournament bound once again.

Keselowski snatches victory in Atlanta

Associated Press

HAMPTON, Ga. — Kevin Harvick was faster than everyone at Atlanta Motor Speedway.

Too fast, it turned out.

Harvick ruined a dominating performance by speeding on his final pit stop, allowing Brad Keselowski to steal a NASCAR Monster Energy Cup victory Sunday.

"I'm just snake-bit here," Harvick said. "But it's my own doing."

Harvick won the first two stages under NASCAR's new race format and led a staggering 293 out of 325 laps overall. But, after a late yellow came out when Austin Dillon lost power, the No. 4 Stewart-Haas Racing Ford eclipsed the 45 mph speed limit going into the pits.

"I thought I was being conservative," Harvick said. "I guess I wasn't. I was just pushing it too hard."

The ensuing drive-thru penalty pushed Kyle Larson to the lead but he couldn't hold

off Keselowski, who surged ahead on the backstretch with six laps to go and cruised to a 0.564-second victory.

Keselowski, who had his own misfortune at Atlanta in 2013 that cost him a shot at making the Chase, wasn't about to turn down Harvick's gift.

"We've had races where we led a bunch of laps and things just fall apart at the end," Keselowski said. "That's just how this sport works. You take advantage of the opportunities when they come. We certainly caught an opportunity."

Harvick seemed poised to win at the 1.54-mile trioval for the first time since his initial Cup victory in 2001, just three races after he got his chance following the death of Dale Earnhardt.

Instead, it was another bitter disappointment.

Harvick also led more laps than anyone each of the last three years, a total of 442 in all, but was never ahead when it mattered.

This mistake cost Stewart-Haas its sec-

ond straight victory to start the season after Kurt Busch won the Daytona 500.

"I didn't think I was pushing it," Harvick told his crew over the radio. "I'm so sorry guys."

He clearly had the fastest car all weekend. After starting from the pole, he took the first 85-lap stage by more than 2.5 seconds and was ahead by a staggering 5.4 seconds at the end of the second stage — turning the new format into a total snoozer.

"Would we have caught the 4?" said Roger Penske, Keselowski's car owner. "Probably not."

The speeding penalty on pit road — an issue that plagued a bunch of drivers, including two-time defending race winner Jimmie Johnson — knocked Harvick to the end of the lead pack with 11 laps remaining.

He didn't have enough laps to make up for the mistake, forcing him to settle for a ninth-place showing that should've been so much better.

World Baseball Classic still in growth mode

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The World Baseball Classic returned Monday for its fourth edition, growing slowly yet still far from rising to the prominence of soccer's World Cup or the Olympics.

South Korea lost 2-1 to Israel in the opener of the 16-nation tournament in Seoul, and the Dominican Republic starts its title defense March 9 against Canada in Miami.

"The tournament remains very much in the early innings of its development," Chris Park, Major League Baseball's senior vice president of growth, strategy and international, said Thursday at a Yankee Stadium news conference. "Our ultimate ambition is to watch and supervise this tournament as it matures into a truly global platform for our game and a real competitor with the top international tournaments around the world."

First-round games also are being played at Tokyo and Guadalajara, Mexico; and second-round games at San Diego

and Tokyo. The championship round is at Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles from March 20-22.

The United States, which failed to finish better than fourth under managers Buck Martinez, Davey Johnson and Joe Torre, is led this year by Jim Leyland and starts play March 10 versus Colombia in Miami.

The 2013 championship on the MLB Network averaged 843,000 viewers; it was the most-watched sporting event in the Dominican Republic in at least a decade, averaging an 11.2 rating on CDN. And in Puerto Rico, there was a combined 39.0 rating for telecasts on Telemundo, MLB Network and ESPN Deportes.

"Let's see if their success will translate to more people watching," said broadcaster Al Leiter, a pitcher on the 2006 U.S. team.

The tournament is run by MLB and the players' association. In total, 171 countries will receive WBC broadcasts, and more than 50 sponsors have reached agreements.

Revenue is forecast to top \$100 million for the first time. Still, that is less than 2 percent of the \$5.5 billion projected by FIFA for next year's World Cup in Russia.

While the World Cup is soccer's ultimate event, many players decline to participate in the WBC, which is played while their clubs are at spring training ahead of season openers that start April 2.

Japan won the initial tournament in 2006 and repeated as champion in 2009, but Houston Astros outfielder Norichika Aoki will be the only Japanese player in MLB who will be at the WBC this time.

"It comes down to a personal decision, and they have all of these competing interests that they have to contend with in terms of their own preparation and length of the season," players' union senior labor counsel Ian Penny said.

Major leaguers on 25-man rosters were not allowed at the last Olympic baseball tournament in 2008 and they aren't likely to be at the 2020 Tokyo Games, given MLB's unwill-

ingness to interrupt its season. That leaves the WBC as the sport's international showcase.

Soccer's World Cup usually is played at the end of most European club seasons — the 2022 tournament in Qatar will be an anomaly, shifted to Nov. 21-Dec. 18 because of the summer heat.

Baseball prefers preseason, even though it means pitch limits in the WBC because arm strength is still building.

"Every time you start to drill down into a particular time of year and look at the logistics and look at the pros and cons, what sounds like an easy fix suddenly becomes a lot more complicated," Penny said.

A postseason tournament that starts in early-to-mid November would leave pitchers from eliminated clubs waiting around to resume competition.

"You don't make the playoffs and your last game is Oct. 1 — you have to wait around for five weeks to keep throwing to get ready for a WBC that you're not going to want to embarrass yourself," Leiter said. "Impossible."

Parise, Staal lead Wild over Sharks

Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Zach Parise and Jason Pominville returned from the mumps, Eric Staal found his scoring touch and the Minnesota Wild were finally able to put their new-look lineup together.

Staal scored twice and Devan Dubnyk made 20 saves as Minnesota held on for a 3-1 win over the San Jose Sharks on Sunday.

Pominville assisted on Parise's 15th goal to open the scoring as the Wild won for the third time in four games. Parise and Pominville each returned after missing three games, and Minnesota had its full lineup on the ice for the first time since trading for Martin Hanzal and Ryan White.

"Big, strong guys, tough to play against," Staal said of the retooled lineup. "When we have that going over the boards every shift, four lines that can play solid defensively, it's going to make us difficult to beat. Good win for us to stay with it tonight. We've just got to keep improving, getting better, grabbing roles and being excited about winning like this."

The Wild (90 points) moved back ahead of idle Chicago (89 points) for first place in the Central Division and Western Conference.

Penguins 4, Sabres 3: Jake Guentzel and Conor Sheary scored 50 seconds apart late in the third period to cap a furious rally by host Pittsburgh.

Buffalo led by three after the first period, but the Penguins ramped up the pressure to win their second straight and move into sole possession of second place in the Metropolitan Division.

Evgeni Malkin had a goal and an assist for the Penguins. Justin Schultz added a goal and two assists. Marc-Andre Fleury stopped all 28 shots he faced after replacing Matt Murray to start the second period.

"I've seen this team do it [come back] many times," said Fleury after the Penguins took over second place in the crowded Metropolitan Division. "I was just thinking to try to keep the team in the game and I was confident we could come back."

Blue Jackets 3, Devils 0: Sergei Bobrovsky made 20 saves in posting his second straight shutout and franchise-record 34th win of the season, and visiting Columbus beat reeling New Jersey.

Boone Jenner, Oliver Bjorkstrand and Sam Gagner scored as the Blue Jackets won for the fourth time in six games (4-1-1) and sent the Devils to their seventh straight loss (0-5-2).

Flames 5, Islanders 2: Sean Monahan had a goal and an assist and host Calgary beat New York for its seventh straight victory.

Brian Elliott made 33 saves for his sixth straight win. Elliott is 7-0-1 since his last

regulation loss on Feb. 5 when he made 28 saves during a 4-3 loss in New York to the Rangers.

Canucks 2, Ducks 1: Richard Bachman made 43 saves, Bo Horvat and Markus Granlund each scored for Vancouver.

Anaheim's three-game winning streak at home ended, and the Ducks find themselves tied with Calgary for third place in the Pacific Division after the Flames won their seventh straight game earlier in the day.

Blues 3, Avalanche 0: Paul Stastny scored his first goal against his former team, Jake Allen stopped 27 shots and visiting St. Louis ended a five-game skid by beating Colorado.

Kyle Brodziak and Patrik Berglund also scored for the Blues, who moved into the second wild-card spot in the Western Conference.

Hurricanes 2, Coyotes 1: Eddie Lack stopped 24 shots two days after being called out by his coach, and Derek Ryan scored on a strange bounce in the third period to lift visiting Carolina over Arizona.

Lack was criticized by coach Bill Peters on Friday following a poor performance against Tampa Bay. The goalie was sharp in his ninth start of the season Sunday, helping the Hurricanes end a four-game losing streak with their second victory in 11 games.

Curry finds touch as Warriors top Knicks

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Stephen Curry broke out of a shooting slump with 31 points and moved into the top 10 on the NBA's career three-point list as the Golden State Warriors recovered from consecutive losses to beat the New York Knicks 112-105 on Sunday.

Klay Thompson added 29 points to help the Warriors end their first regular-season losing streak in nearly two years.

The Splash Brothers had dried up as Golden State dropped two in a row following Kevin Durant's knee injury, but they regained their touch Sunday. Curry hit five three-pointers, passing Chauncey Billups for 10th place, and added eight rebounds and six assists.

Thompson had a three-point-er and two other baskets dur-

ing a late surge that allowed Golden State to pull away after leading by one midway through the fourth quarter.

"We're surviving to this point," coach Steve Kerr said. "We obviously lost our first two games without him, so it's good to get a win without him tonight. This is how it's going to be for a while, so we have to get used to it."

Suns 109, Celtics 106: Rookie Tyler Ulis threw in a three-pointer at the buzzer after a Boston turnover and host Phoenix came away with a wild victory.

The Suns' Eric Bledsoe tied it at 106 with a reverse layup with four seconds to play.

Isaiah Thomas, who scored 35 points but missed a free throw with 11.9 seconds left, took the inbound pass and the Suns' Marquese Chriss knocked

the ball away. Ulis grabbed it and tossed it up as the buzzer sounded. Ulis scored a career-best 20 points.

Jazz 110, Kings 109 (OT): Rudy Gobert tipped in George Hill's missed jumper as time expired in overtime on a play that was initially ruled goaltending, lifting visiting Utah to a thrilling victory over Sacramento.

After Willie Cauley-Stein made two free throws to give the Kings a 109-108 lead with 8.9 seconds remaining, Hill took an off-balance jumper from just outside the key. Gobert, positioned underneath the hoop, reached up and tipped the ball in as the buzzer sounded.

One official called goaltending on Gobert. The referees went to the scorer's table to review the play and counted the basket.

Mavericks 104, Thunder 89: Seth Curry scored 22 points and Dirk Nowitzki had 18 points and 12 rebounds as host Dallas beat Oklahoma City.

Pacers 97, Hawks 96: Glenn Robinson III hit a three-pointer with 0.6 seconds left and Paul George scored 34 points as visiting Indiana rallied to beat Atlanta.

Wizards 115, Magic 114: Bojan Bogdanovic scored 15 of his 27 points in the fourth quarter and made a career-high eight three-pointers as host Washington came back from 17 down to beat Orlando.

Pelicans 105, Lakers 97: DeMarcus Cousins had 26 points and 15 rebounds as visiting New Orleans won for the first time with him in the lineup, beating spiraling Los Angeles.