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Mattis predicts partnership with Bolton

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Jim Mattis acknowledged on Tuesday that he and President Donald Trump's incoming national security adviser, John Bolton, have different world views but predicted they will develop a working partnership.

"I look forward to working with him — no reservations, no concerns at all," Mattis told reporters at an impromptu news conference. "Last time I checked he's an American. I'm not in the least bit concerned."

Mattis said he has never met Bolton, a former ambassador to the United Nations and conservation firebrand. He said he expects Bolton to pay a visit to the Pentagon soon, perhaps this week, to begin developing a relationship.

"I'll tell you right up front: it's going to be a partnership,"

he said. When a reporter mentioned that people see his world view as significantly different than that of Bolton, Mattis replied, "That's the normal thing you want, unless you want group-think."

Bolton, who will replace Army Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster on April 9, has publicly advocated for overthrowing the North Korean government, possibly by force. Mattis, a retired Marine general who knows intimately the costs of war, favors diplomacy to rid the North of its nuclear weapons and has said war on the Korean peninsula would be "catastrophic." On Iran, too, Mattis would seem at odds with Bolton, who has argued for abandoning the Obama-era nuclear deal.

These and other matters of war and peace will test Mattis' influence with Trump as his national security team is

overhauled.

Mattis was sometimes at odds with McMaster, but the arrival of the hawkish Bolton, combined with the firing of Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and the uncertain status of John Kelly as White House chief of staff, appears to leave Mattis more isolated than at any time since he took over the Pentagon 15 months ago.

The North Korea issue is front-and-center: Trump has agreed to meet with North Korean President Kim Jong Un by May to discuss the North's nuclear disarmament. The unprecedented summit could be a turning point in a decades-old U.S.-North Korean standoff that Trump himself has said could end in "fire and fury" — an American nuclear attack — to stop the North from gaining the ability to strike the U.S. with a nuclear missile.

"This is buckle-up time," retired Navy Adm. James Stavridis, dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, said last week on MSNBC. "For the military I have three words: Sharpen your swords. He (Bolton) is someone who is going to reach for the military instrument."

Mattis also has the ability to forge a workable relationship with Trump despite differences on some issues such as the Iran nuclear deal, which Mattis says is flawed but worth honoring as long as the Iranians do. Mattis also has differed with the president over Trump's wish to bar all transgender people from serving in the military, and he helped sway Trump from his inclination last year to end U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan.

Western democracies must stand against Russia, Mattis says

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said Tuesday that he advised President Donald Trump to expel Kremlin officials from the United States over Russia's apparent use of a nerve-agent against a former spy in Britain, saying there is no room for Western democracies to work with Russia.

"The NATO alliance tried to create a partnership — a Russia-NATO partnership council as a mechanism to keep us working together," Mattis told reporters at the Pentagon. "That, regrettably, is by Russia's choice a thing of the past ... because Russia has chosen to be a strategic competitor even to

the point of reckless activity."

The White House on Monday evicted 60 Russian officials — including 12 identified as intelligence agents — and ordered the closure of Moscow's consulate in Seattle. Twenty-four additional countries and NATO also expelled Russian envoys this week in a show of solidarity with the United Kingdom. The expulsions followed the poisoning of Sergei Skripal, a former Russian spy, and his daughter, Yulia, March 4 in Salisbury, England. British investigators have said a Russian-made, military-grade nerve agent was used to poison them. Both victims remain in critical condition.

The removal of the Russian officials should reduce

the Kremlin's ability to spy on Americans, the White House wrote Monday in a prepared statement. The White House also wrote it chose to close the Seattle consulate because of concerns about its proximity to Naval Base Kitsap-Bangor, which houses highly sensitive nuclear submarines.

Russia has denied any involvement in the poisoning, an assertion Mattis and other Western officials have rejected.

On Tuesday, Mattis called the attack an "attempted murder," placing the blame on Russian President Vladimir Putin's shoulders, though the defense secretary stopped short of indicating the Russian leader ordered the hit. He told reporters that the attack was a "pretty ob-

vious use of a weapon of mass destruction, a chemical agent, for the first time in Europe since World War II."

Mattis and other Pentagon leadership have warned Russia and other near-peer competitors — including China, North Korea and Iran — pose the most significant threat to the United States in the coming years. Under its most recent military strategy adopted in recent months by the Trump administration, the Pentagon has shifted its training approach to preparing to fight a war against an adversary such as Russia instead of the insurgencies that it has fought for nearly two decades in places including Afghanistan and Iraq.

Spies have long posed as foreign diplomats

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In ordering the largest mass expulsion of Russian diplomats ever, the U.S. and its allies have upped the ante in an East-West spy game that dates to the Cold War and cast light on an unspoken but widespread practice in the cloak-and-dagger world: sending operatives abroad under diplomatic cover.

The tallies offered Monday by senior U.S. officials were striking: Far more than 100 Russian spies are on American soil masquerading as diplomats.

The U.S. said it was kicking out 60, so even after they're gone, at least 40 will ostensibly remain, free to roam Washington and other major U.S. cities under the official imprimatur of their nation's foreign ministry.

So if they're truly spies and the United States knows it, why not expel them all?

The answer, experts say, is that espionage, while murky, potentially distasteful and

often illegal, is an accepted international practice.

All countries spy and most if not all send spies overseas disguised as diplomats — including the U.S.

"Embassies and diplomatic mission for hundreds and hundreds of years have been used to spy in adversaries' lands," said retired Army Col. Christopher Costa, executive director of the International Spy Museum in Washington.

He said even when spies are discovered, it's often more fruitful to follow them discreetly than to expel them.

"The cat-and-mouse game of counterespionage is about understanding who that officer is in touch with."

There's another reason for the U.S. not to go overboard in kicking out known Russian intelligence operatives posted to diplomatic missions: America is in the game, too.

When one country expels another country's representatives, it's both expected and accepted that the country

being punished takes reciprocal steps.

In 2016, when the Obama administration expelled 35 Russian diplomats, Moscow quickly booted 35 Americans. A similar tit-for-tat played out this month after Britain ousted 23 Russians and the Kremlin ordered out 23 Brits.

That means that the more Russian spies the U.S. kicks out, the more of its own spies are likely to be forced out of Russia, Costa said.

Every new Russian diplomat assigned to a mission in the United States, such as the embassy in Washington, or the Seattle consulate that the U.S. has ordered closed, is assessed by the FBI and other U.S. counterintelligence officials, said John Schindler, a former counterintelligence official and National Security Agency analyst.

Some can be quickly identified based on where they've worked previously and in what positions — historical information that's far easier to track

in the modern age of Google, LinkedIn and LexisNexis.

Certain positions in embassies are notorious for being filled by spies, such as security officials, political officers and communications specialists, who often are secretly engaged in technical collection of what's known as signals intelligence: intercepting phone calls or electronic communications.

"If you still can't tell, you wait until they get to this country, and you watch what they do," Schindler said.

The U.S. has long claimed that as a rule, it does not use certain jobs as cover for intelligence operatives, such as U.S. Agency for International Development workers and Peace Corps volunteers.

The theory is that any perception that those staffers might be spies would create serious safety risks for actual humanitarian workers.

Said Schindler: "There are gentleman's rules about this, and there have been for a long time."

NATO expels 7 Russian diplomats over ex-spy poisoning

BY JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — NATO will expel seven Russian diplomats and reduce the maximum size of Moscow's permanent mission to the alliance in response to the nerve agent attack this month in the United Kingdom, the alliance announced Tuesday.

"It sends a very clear message that it has costs," NATO's Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

The move comes one day after the United States announced that it will expel 60 Russian diplomats suspected of espionage.

Washington also ordered the closure of the Russian Consulate in Seattle in connection with suspicions that it was used as a hub for spying on a nearby nuclear submarine base.

In all, about 140 Russian diplomats have been expelled from more than 25 coun-

tries since the March 4 attack in Salisbury, where a military grade nerve agent was used in an attack on former Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter.

They remain in critical condition.

Russia has denied involvement and has vowed countermeasures in response to the various diplomatic expulsions, which Moscow has largely blamed on Washington.

"This is the result of colossal pressure, colossal blackmail which is the main instrument of Washington on the international arena," Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Tuesday.

"We'll respond, have no doubt."

NATO reached its decision after intensive deliberations at alliance headquarters, where leaders have convened on several occasions with representatives from the U.K.

In addition to the expulsion of seven Russian diplomats, NATO has withdrawn three pending accreditation requests and has reduced the overall size of the Russian mission to NATO from 30 to 20.

"This sends a clear message to Russia that there are costs and consequences for its unacceptable and dangerous pattern of behavior," Stoltenberg said.

For the West, Russia's alleged involvement in the attack in Britain has unified allies, analysts say.

At a time when Europe has been wary about the Trump administration and the U.S. commitment to NATO, the alliance and the European Union appear to be in unison regarding the need for a tougher stance against Moscow in connection with the nerve agent attack.

"It appears Moscow misjudged the strong international condemnation to its attempt to murder a former Russian intelligence officer and his daughter," wrote the Soufan Group security firm Tuesday.

"In fact, NATO and the EU publicly moved closer on this issue than on any other in recent years."

US Navy's F-35C a step closer to operational status

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

The F-35C Lightning II has completed fleet carrier qualifications — a step that brings the Navy's variant of the joint strike fighter closer to operational status.

Pilots from Strike Fighter Squadrons 125 and 101 ran day and night qualifications with 140 arrested landings aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln March 17-21 in the Atlantic Ocean.

Three F-35 variants cater to the needs of each service branch. The Air Force's F-35As — designed for traditional takeoffs and landings — are lighter and can carry more fuel, while the Marine Corps' F-35Bs are capable of short takeoffs and vertical landings that make them compatible with amphibious assault ships such as the USS Wasp.

The F-35C can land on ships using arrest cables and take off with catapults found on carriers. It also has foldable wings,

which the Navy said is "critical" for their use on aircraft carriers that can hold more than 70 aircraft, including 18C Hornets, 18G Growlers and 18E/F Super Hornets, E-2D Hawkeyes and C-2A Greyhounds.

The fighter can land in all weather conditions using its joint approach and landing system, which a squadron aboard the Abraham Lincoln first used with F-35Cs in December. The GPS-based system provides pilots with more information for approaches so they can land in rain or shine.

The F-35C will undergo operational testing later this year, said the Navy, which aims to equip all carrier air wings with F-35Cs by 2025.

The F-35C program has drawn scrutiny over its cost, estimated at more than \$1 trillion for operations in its expected 60-year life span. That price makes the aircraft most expensive weapons system the Defense Department has ever had.

USS Wasp and Marines welcome F-35B fighters

BY JAMES BOLINGER
Stars and Stripes

ABOARD THE USS WASP, Philippine Sea — Marines aboard the region's newest amphibious assault ship are excited about the boost in combat power provided by the nation's most advanced stealth fighter.

More than 4,000 servicemembers are embarked with the USS Wasp and its strike group during its first patrol since arriving at its new homeport at Sasebo Naval Base earlier this year. The group includes several F-35Bs — the Marine Corps' most high-tech aircraft that's capable of short takeoffs and vertical landings.

Members of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit on the Wasp are excited about the help they're getting from the jets, which landed on the 844-foot vessel for the first time earlier this month.

"Air support is our lifeline," said Marine 1st Lt. Taylor Kitasato, commander of a light armored reconnaissance detachment embarked with the strike group.

The F-35Bs can provide close air support and reconnaissance to the detachment, which would be first ashore in a beach assault, he said.

The F-35B gives the Marines

more flexibility than the AV-8B II Harrier it replaces. It can go into more dangerous places and help the Navy confront threats at sea, 31st MEU commander Col. Tye Wallace said.

And an F-35B is a lot easier to fly than a Harrier, said Lt. Col. Richard Rusnok, commander of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 121, the Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni-based unit flying the new fighters off the Wasp.

The former Harrier pilot said F-35Bs don't require as much focus to keep in the air and allow pilots — who conduct close-air-support, electronic war fare and reconnaissance — to devote more attention to managing their role in battle.

While the Marines are happy to have the joint strike fighter at their fingertips, there are a few issues with having it aboard the Wasp.

"The most unique challenge we face is the amount of security required when traveling to different locations," Marine Sgt. Cassidy Cleinmark, a maintenance controller with VMFA-121, said.

Moving with the F-35B requires Marines to conduct regular site surveys and mission planning to ensure operational security, he said.

Bill seeks prosecution of on-base juvenile assaults

Austin (Texas) American-Statesman

U.S. Rep. John Carter, the Republican from Round Rock, Texas, who represents Fort Hood, has filed legislation that would order military installations around the country to enter into agreements with local prosecutors to prosecute sexual assaults committed by juveniles on base.

The bill is based on an agreement reached recently by Fort Hood officials, the U.S. Attorney's Office in Waco, Texas, and juvenile prosecutors in Bell and Coryell counties to ensure that sexual assaults and other crimes committed by juveniles on Fort Hood get legal attention.

"It is unacceptable that countless juvenile sexual assault cases that are occurring on

base are falling through the cracks because federal prosecutors are ill-equipped to take action," Carter said in a statement Monday afternoon. "This is an important first step to ensure justice, and it is imperative that it is implemented at all American military installations."

The problem starts with a jurisdictional black hole in which there is no clear authority for prosecuting juvenile crime on military installations. The military justice system — a separate legal construct that governs active-duty soldiers on military installations like Fort Hood — cannot prosecute civilians, a job left to federal prosecutors. But the federal system is ill-equipped and sometimes little disposed to

pick up juvenile cases.

After the report, local lawmakers, including Carter and U.S. Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, called for action, and Fort Hood officials began a series of meetings with the U.S. attorney's office in Waco and prosecutors in surrounding Bell and Coryell counties to create a system to fix the situation.

Earlier this month, The Associated Press published an investigation that confirmed sexual assaults by juveniles were going unprosecuted throughout the military.

The agreement reached by Fort Hood and local prosecutors does leave one potential problem, however: Local governments won't receive any additional funding from Fort Hood or the federal government.

Theodore Roosevelt back in Pac

BY TYLER HLAVAC
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The USS Theodore Roosevelt aircraft carrier is back in the Pacific after four months in the Arabian Gulf launching strikes against Islamic State and the Taliban.

The carrier and its support ships have rejoined the Yokosuka, Japan-based 7th Fleet on a temporary basis to conduct maritime security operations and build relationships with partner navies and allies, the Navy said in a statement this week.

The carrier's strike group, which includes the USS Bunker Hill, USS Halsey, USS Sampson, USS Preble and Carrier Air Wing 17, deployed from San Diego in October. On its way to Bahrain, home of the 5th Fleet, the ships drilled for four days alongside two other carriers — the USS Ronald Reagan and USS Nimitz — near the Korean Peninsula.

In December, aircraft from the Theodore Roosevelt launched dozens of sorties from the Arabian Gulf against ISIS in the Middle East and the Taliban in Afghanistan.

"It is unusual for an air wing to fly sorties on the same day in support of two different operations in different geographical locations," Capt. Chris Ford, commander of Carrier Air Wing 17, said in a statement. "The squadrons and air crew are able to do this dynamic combat support because they have maintained a high level of readiness, both in training and maintenance."

The Theodore Roosevelt is one of two 3rd Fleet carriers operating in the Western Pacific. The USS Carl Vinson has been patrolling here since deploying from San Diego in January under the Third Fleet Forward initiative, which allows ships to remain in the 3rd Fleet chain of command while operating in 7th Fleet waters. The two carriers are filling in for the Yokosuka-based Ronald Reagan, which is undergoing maintenance.

With 'CCU 2.0,' Marines revive penal institution on Okinawa

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The Marine Corps is calling on an old friend to help rehabilitate Marines guilty of minor behavioral infractions.

A new and improved version of the Correctional Custody Unit — dubbed "CCU 2.0" — is set to open May 2 at Camp Hansen, Okinawa. It is a penal institution and program that provides intensive training — such as combat fitness, educational coursework, formal uniform inspections, values-based relapse prevention and hard labor — to give commanders an alternative to discharging undeveloped or immature servicemembers who get in trouble.

While Marine officials were careful to say that the program

does not include manual labor, part of the fitness requirements will see flak jacket-clad Marines pulverizing rocks with sledge hammers in the Okinawa heat.

The correctional units last operated in the United States and on Okinawa in 2004 when they were de-established due to "operational commitments" in support of operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. Marine officials hope bringing back the revamped CCUs will cut down on administrative separations and help Marines finish their enlistments honorably.

"The program has historically been an option to assist commanders with managing minor military offences for salvageable service members,"

Marine spokesman 1st Lt. Edward Pingel, deputy director of Marine Corps Installations Pacific's Communication Strategy and Operations, wrote in a statement to Stars and Stripes. "All military branches have utilized this program in the past as a preventative measure for administrative separation and understanding that mistakes young service members make do not define what they are capable of accomplishing in the future."

The decision to bring the CCUs back was made by Marine Corps leadership and staff who recognized that the maturation process, or "transformation" to becoming a Marine, does not end with the completion of boot camp, Marine officials on Okinawa said.

Civilian base officers who were overpaid must return thousands to US government

The Orange County (Calif.) Register

CAMP PENDLETON, Calif. — Matt Hughes served as an infantryman in the Marine Corps for a decade. He wanted to continue his service to the community and hoped to find a job as a police officer.

After applying to multiple law enforcement agencies in Orange and Los Angeles counties and being told budget cuts had stalled job opportunities, Hughes learned Camp Pendleton in California was hiring civilian police to provide security alongside Marines and federal officers.

In 2009, he got the job. Now, nine years later, he's being told to pay back nearly \$40,000 in overpayment for his services.

Hughes, 38, of Mission Viejo, Calif., is a patrol sergeant and one of 60 civilian police officers at the Provost Marshal's Office at Camp Pendleton who Friday were told they will have

to pay back tens of thousands of dollars each to the government due to a glitch.

Due to an accounting error, federal officials say, the officers were paid on the wrong pay scale from 2008 to 2016. Another 33 civilian police officers at Naval Station Fallbrook, Calif., also are affected.

Individual debts range from \$12,000 to \$80,000. The average overpayment was \$3,500 annually, according to Robert Richey, president of the police officers union, the National Federation of Federal Employees.

In April 2017, the police officers were notified by the Department of Defense's Finance and Accounting Services — charged with processing payroll for civilians working for the Department of the Navy — that the error had been discovered. They were told they would be required to pay back some amount, but it was un-

determined until an audit was conducted.

Friday's debt letters, which also went to former employees, some now retired and who were never formally notified of the error a year ago, detailed the amounts owed.

The Navy Office of Civilian Human Resources found an erroneous locality-based pay rate had been used to set pay for some employees for a period of time, said Steve Burghardt, spokesman for Defense Finance and Accounting Services.

At Camp Pendleton, officials held town halls to help police officers understand what happened and how to move forward. Officers have been told they have three options: Pay the money back now, request a payment plan or submit a waiver request for the entire amount. They were told there is no guarantee a waiver will be granted.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police warn walkers about ornery hawks

CT FAIRFIELD — Police in one Connecticut town warned residents about aggressive hawks that have attacked their human neighbors.

Fairfield police said Sunday on Facebook they have asked state and federal wildlife experts to come in and remove the hawk or hawks in question from one neighborhood following the most recent incident last week, when a woman was attacked in her yard.

Police say the attacks follow a pattern and involve “hawks flying in undetected from behind a single person walking” and targeting the head area.

Swimmer critical after trying to save 2 kids

FL NAVARRE BEACH — Authorities said a good Samaritan is in critical condition after helping to save two children from drowning in the Gulf of Mexico.

The Pensacola News Journal reported the children started having trouble swimming just before 7 p.m. Saturday off Navarre Beach in Florida’s Panhandle.

Santa Rosa County Sheriff’s officials said two nearby surfers saw the children struggling and pulled them to safety. Another swimmer who was trying to assist in the rescue was caught in the rough surf. A rescue team from the sheriff’s office pulled him from the water and deputies began CPR.

Museum hosts traveling costume exhibition

MI DETROIT — The Detroit Institute of Arts is preparing to host a traveling exhibition of “Star Wars” costumes that explores the artistry

behind their creation.

The exhibit, “Star Wars and the Power of Costume,” features more than 60 costumes including Darth Vader, Chewbacca, droids and others. It’s scheduled to run May 20 through Sept. 30.

More than 150 pieces and sketches documenting the creative process also are part of the display.

Machete-wielding man tried to kidnap kids

LA KENNER — Police in Louisiana say a stranger with a machete tried to snatch two children from their mothers inside a Walmart.

Kenner police described the case in a Facebook post. They said Billy Yoe Budier-Herrera, 33, tried to take a 2-year-old boy from his mother’s grocery cart, at one point both of them pulling the child. She prevailed but the man then ran through the store, swinging the machete at employees who tried to intervene.

Police said he then spotted another mother with a baby strapped into the child seat of a grocery cart, and was trying to remove the infant when store employees tackled him.

Big-rig crash scatters McDonald’s fries

CA IRVINE — All that was missing was the ketchup after a crashed big-rig truck scattered thousands of french fries bound for a McDonald’s restaurant across a Southern California freeway embankment.

KNBC-TV reported the big rig went over the southbound side of the Interstate 5 freeway near Irvine on Sunday.

The California Highway Patrol says the driver, who wasn’t hurt, might have fallen asleep.

TV video shows fries scat-

tered across the bottom of the freeway embankment.

Crews replace split, duct-taped pole

RI PROVIDENCE — Crews replaced a telephone pole in Providence that was being held together by duct tape.

WJAR-TV reported the pole was split in two several weeks ago when it was struck by a truck. A crew with National Grid used tape to hold the pole together, and a supervisor with the utility deemed it safe for the short term.

A permanent repair was scheduled for this week, but the pole was replaced Friday after a resident expressed concern about its safety.

Woman ‘marries’ tree, hoping to save it

FL FORT MYERS — Karen Cooper was ready to go out on a limb to save her beloved, so she got married — to a tree.

Specifically, a giant ficus that’s shaded Snell Family Park in Fort Myers for more than a century.

The tree became the center of a neighborhood controversy when city staff began discussing cutting it down last year. Cooper, who lives nearby, began mobilizing to save it.

Though rooted on city property, some of the Indian laurel’s 8,000-square-foot canopy and root system extends to a neighboring lot, which is for sale for \$1 million.

Man aims for fastest marathon — backward

MA BOSTON — A Los Angeles lawyer has embarked on a singular, if odd, quest: At next month’s Bos-

ton Marathon, he’ll attempt to break the world record for running the distance backward.

Loren Zitomersky is trying to raise money and awareness for a cure for epilepsy, which killed a brother he never had a chance to meet.

A runner from China has held the backward marathon record since 2004.

Couple, baby horse rescued by boat

AZ MESA — A couple and a baby horse they were trying to protect had to be rescued from the Salt River.

Ryan and Bren Schultz, who volunteer with Salt River Wild Horse Management Group, were in Mesa trying to save the foal from drowning when all three got stuck.

Maricopa County Sheriff’s deputies were called and conducted a boat rescue. They were able to pull all three into a boat and speed off to safety.

Wildlife warning issued after javelina attacks

AZ SEDONA — Arizona wildlife officials are warning people not to feed wildlife following two javelina attacks near Sedona.

The state Game and Fish Department said that there were two instances last month where the animals bit people feeding them. In both cases, the department had to kill the wild boars.

A 79-year-old woman suffered severe bite wounds to her leg Feb. 5 attempting to stop a javelina from attacking her dogs. A wildlife officer said she had been feeding a herd of javelina.

Officials said an elderly man was also bitten in the leg by a javelina on Feb. 25.

The man was feeding a herd in his backyard when one of

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Ohtani leads list of MLB rookies to watch

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Aaron Judge. Cody Bellinger. Andrew Benintendi. Paul DeJong. The list goes on and on.

Last year's rookie class was one of the best in baseball history. Topping that group of sluggers will be quite a chore, but here is a closer look at some touted prospects hoping to make a name for themselves this year:

■ **RHP/DH Shohei Ohtani, Los Angeles Angels:** The 23-year-old Ohtani is trying to become the first player in nearly 100 years to play regularly as a pitcher and hitter, but he had mixed results during spring training. Ohtani spent the previous five seasons with the Nippon Ham Fighters, showing off a big fastball and a powerful bat.

■ **OF Ronald Acuna, Atlanta Braves:** The future is now for the crown jewel of Atlanta's loaded farm system after Matt Kemp was traded to the Dodgers in December. The 20-year-old Acuna will begin the season at Triple-A Gwinnett, pushing back his eligibility for arbitration, but it's only a matter of time before he is up with the Braves after he hit .325 with 21 homers,

82 RBIs and 44 steals over three minor league stops last year.

■ **OF Victor Robles, Washington Nationals:** Robles, another athletic 20-year-old outfielder in the NL East, made his major league debut last September and got into two playoff games in the first round against the Cubs. The Nationals have Bryce Harper, Adam Eaton and Michael A. Taylor in the outfield, but Robles could get into the mix if there are any injuries.

■ **OF Eloy Jimenez, Chicago White Sox:** Jimenez, who was slowed this spring by left knee tendinitis, is widely regarded as baseball's top hitting prospect. He was acquired in last summer's Jose Quintana trade with the crosstown Cubs — destined to be a barroom debate in Chicago for years to come — and batted .312 with 19 homers and 65 RBIs for three minor league teams in 2017.

■ **C Francisco Mejia, Cleveland Indians:** Cleveland loves Mejia's bat so much it is trying the catcher in a couple of different spots to help carve out a place for him in the majors. He played third base in the Arizona Fall League and will begin this year with Triple-A Columbus

so he can spend time in the outfield. The Indians have a strong catching tandem with Roberto Perez and Yan Gomes, but Mejia could be back in the majors this summer if he shows the ability to play multiple positions.

■ **RHP Alex Reyes, St. Louis Cardinals:** The 23-year-old Reyes could return in May after he hurt his elbow in spring training a year ago, leading to Tommy John surgery. Whether he works as a starter or reliever, he could provide a big lift for St. Louis after he went 4-1 with a 1.57 ERA and 52 strikeouts in 46 innings in his first major league action in 2016.

■ **INFs Gleyber Torres and Miguel Andujar, New York Yankees:** Not a lot of room in New York's infield after the Yankees traded for Brandon Drury and signed Neil Walker, but Torres and Andujar could help at some point this summer. Torres hit .309 in 23 games with Triple-A Scranton/Wilkes-Barre last year before he was shelved by a season-ending elbow injury, and Andujar looked great this spring.

■ **RHP Walker Buehler and OF Alex Verdugo, Los Angeles Dodgers:** The hard-throwing

Buehler and Verdugo will begin the year with Triple-A Oklahoma City, but they could play a role as Los Angeles tries for its sixth straight NL West title. Buehler had a 7.71 ERA in eight relief appearances as a September call-up for the Dodgers, and Verdugo also made his major league debut last year.

■ **OF Jesse Winker, Cincinnati Reds:** The 24-year-old Winker hit .298 with seven homers and 15 RBIs in 47 games in his first major league action last summer. The rebuilding Reds have a bit of a crowd in the outfield with Adam Duvall, Scott Schebler and Billy Hamilton, but they are going to want to see if Winker can deliver on his potential.

■ **OF Austin Hays, Baltimore Orioles:** Hays, who was hampered by a shoulder injury this spring, was promoted to the majors for the first time last September and hit .217 with a homer and eight RBIs in 20 games. The 22-year-old Hays, a third-round pick in the 2016 draft out of Jacksonville University, has big-time power, belting 32 homers in the minors last season.

Mets' Wright only captain left in majors

Associated Press

MESA, Ariz. — Anthony Rizzo is a three-time All-Star and the 2017 winner of the Roberto Clemente Award, baseball's biggest honor for sportsmanship and community involvement. Jon Lester is a three-time World Series champion, and Jason Heyward organized the most important meeting in franchise history.

Plenty of leaders with the Chicago Cubs. No captain.

One of the most revered titles in sports is hanging by a thread in baseball, which treats its history with hallowed tones in almost every case, but doesn't seem the slightest bit concerned about the absence of the iconic C on the front of its uniforms. New York Mets third baseman David Wright is the majors' only captain on the eve of the season, and it's unclear if he will ever play again.

"Leadership is a taken role and people want to follow you just based on how you

are, how you treat them, how well you listen, how well you interact daily, how much you really are into them as opposed to yourself," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said, "and that becomes obvious. Leadership is taken, man. It's hard to just place that out there."

The 35-year-old Wright was named the fourth captain in Mets history in 2013, joining Keith Hernandez, Gary Carter and John Franco. He made the last of his seven NL All-Star teams that same year before he was hampered by a series of injuries. He hasn't appeared in a major league game since 2016.

Wright declared right away that he wouldn't wear the C on the front of his jersey, so that special touch has been missing from baseball for a couple of years.

"I'm not sure if there's a benefit to having a title and I've never been one to like come in here and say you have to listen to me because I'm the captain," Wright said. "I would hope that if I have something to

say that somebody would listen to me because of, you know, because of what I've hopefully displayed in the clubhouse and be considered kind of a leader in here."

But Wright made no attempt to hide the significance of the title to him.

"I'll say it again, that to this day it's probably the biggest honor away from the field of my career," he said.

A variety of factors have contributed to the decline of captains. Many of the captains across sports spend most of their careers with a single team, but that has become a rarity in baseball. There also are no real responsibilities for the title.

But the list of baseball captains still includes some of the biggest names in the history of the sport. Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Thurman Munson and Derek Jeter are on the list of 11 Yankees captains. Pee Wee Reese and Duke Snider with the Dodgers. Jimmie Foxx and Carl Yastrzemski for the Boston Red Sox. Willie Stargell, Barry Larkin and other Hall of Famers.

NCAA Women's Tournament roundup

UConn, Notre Dame fill up Final Four

Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. — UConn coach Geno Auriemma and the Huskies are headed back to a familiar spot — the Final Four.

Crystal Dangerfield led the way as top-seeded UConn routed No. 2 South Carolina 94-65 on Monday night to reach the national semifinals for a record 11th consecutive year.

The Huskies broke a tie with John Wooden and the UCLA men's team for the Division I record for consecutive Final Four appearances. UConn is headed to the national semifinals for the 19th time, breaking a tie with Tennessee for the most in women's basketball history.

While the Huskies are regular participants in the Final Four, they are not the defending champions this time around. Their 111-game winning streak and run of four straight national championships were stopped by a last-second overtime loss to Mississippi State in last

year's semifinals.

UConn will face former Big East rival Notre Dame on Friday night in Columbus, Ohio.

"Every team starts the season saying that's our goal to go to the Final Four. For us, it's an opportunity to go back to where we felt like we didn't really give our best effort," Auriemma said. "We lost to a really good team. Happened in a way that was really, really disappointing. I know that we were anxious to go back and put ourselves in that same situation and see how much we've changed since last year."

The Albany Regional final featured the past two NCAA champions in a rare occurrence for the women's tournament. The Huskies (36-0) quickly turned it into a mismatch with stellar three-point shooting.

Dangerfield scored 19 of her 21 points in the first half. Gabby Williams had 23 points as UConn scored the most points in school history for this round of the NCAA Tournament.

UConn went right at South Carolina in the first half, connecting on 9 of 10 three-pointers — including a perfect 5-for-5 by Dangerfield. Her last three of the second quarter made it 52-31 and delighted a crowd that included former UConn greats Tina Charles and Breanna Stewart, who helped the Huskies to four consecutive national championships. Stewart grew up 2 hours west of Albany.

Katie Lou Samuelson scored 17 points and Napheesa Collier had 16 as UConn shot 59 percent (37-for-63) from the field. Williams was named most outstanding player of the region.

Notre Dame 84, Oregon 74: At Spokane, Wash., Kathryn Westbeld scored 20 points, Jessica Shepard added 18 and the Fighting Irish reached the Final Four for the eighth time in school history by beating the Ducks.

Westbeld came up with the biggest game of her Notre Dame career despite being

slowed by an ankle injury from the first round of the NCAA Tournament. Westbeld had scored a combined 12 points in the previous four games, but she teamed with Shepard for an inside attack that hurt the Ducks.

Westbeld made 9 of 12 shots. Notre Dame (33-3) outscored Oregon 52-38 in the paint and outrebounded the Ducks 51-29 in the Spokane Regional final.

Arike Ogunbowale added 19 points and Marina Mabrey had 15 for the Irish.

Despite a handful of costly injuries along the way, the Irish are back in a familiar spot in the national semifinals. It's the sixth Final Four for Notre Dame since 2011 and old friend UConn awaits in the semis.

First-team all-American Sabrina Ionescu led Oregon (33-5) with 26 points, but the Ducks struggled offensively over the final 20 minutes. Oregon shot 8-for-31 in the second half and Ionescu had just seven points after the break.

Bowyer ends long drought by winning at Martinsville

Associated Press

MARTINSVILLE, Va. — When snow at Martinsville Speedway gave NASCAR a rare day off, Clint Bowyer loaded his car with kids and drove them to North Carolina for a day at the Hall of Fame.

As Bowyer returned to the track for Monday's rescheduled race, he told his 3-year-old son he wanted to take a picture with him in victory lane.

Cash Bowyer told his father he wanted a checkered flag.

Both father and son got their wish.

Bowyer snapped a 190-race losing streak dating to 2012 with a dominating victory at Martinsville Speedway. Monday's win continued the strong start to the NASCAR season for Stewart-Haas Racing, which

has won four of the first six races.

"For whatever reason, it felt right driving up here. It's such a cool place to be able to drive up through the countryside on a two-lane road and think about the race," Bowyer said. "I told [Cash] this morning, I was like, 'Dammit, we've got to get our picture in Victory Lane.' He told me he wanted a checkered flag."

"He's really proud of that checkered flag!" Clint Bowyer said as the toddler waived the flag, and then leaned his head on his father's shoulder.

Bowyer then went into the stands to greet the fans who returned to Martinsville two days after a snowstorm pushed all track activity to Monday.

Bowyer's victory was his first driving for SHR, the team

he joined as Tony Stewart's replacement last year. The move to SHR was supposed to turn Bowyer's fortunes around, but his struggles continued through his first year in the No. 14 Ford.

He finally figured it out on the short track in Virginia and won for the first time since his victory at Charlotte in October 2012.

Bowyer had led just 145 combined laps the last four years and bettered that Monday with 215 laps led and his first career Martinsville victory.

It was the ninth career victory for Bowyer, but first since he was a legitimate title contender in 2012 before the bottom fell out. He was snared in a cheating scandal with Michael Waltrip Racing, that team never recovered and folded, and

Bowyer has been trying to find his footing since.

Bowyer began his celebratory burnout before he completed a cool-down lap, and then climbed on the hood of his cars with his arms raised in victory. He jumped into the arms of his SHR crew, and then was met by his son, who had never before seen his father win a Cup race.

Cash Bowyer exchanged high-fives with the SHR crew then sat on top of the winning car. Later, in Victory Lane, Clint Bowyer hugged the Martinsville signature trophy grandfather clock, chugged several beers, and let his son soak in his first post-race celebration.

"I wanted that damn clock," Bowyer said. "How are we going to get it home? What do you do? I'm going to ratchet strap it to my wife's SUV."

NBA roundup

Fultz returns to Sixers, nets 10 points

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Markelle Fultz heard 20,000 fans chanting “Fultz! Fultz! Fultz!” and for a fleeting moment he thought they were serenading Philly’s most popular athlete.

“I thought they were saying ‘Nick Foles,’” Fultz said of the Super Bowl MVP for the champion Philadelphia Eagles.

“Then I realized it, and it was pretty dope. These fans are great, and I love them.”

The Sixers and their fans wanted the No. 1 pick to play and — after five often-confusing months — they got him.

Fultz scored 10 points and had eight assists in his first game since October, helping the Philadelphia 76ers beat the Denver Nuggets 123-104 on Monday night.

The first selection of the 2017 draft shot an airball, had three shots blocked and artfully attacked the lane, flashing glimpses of what has made him both a mystery project and prominent

prospect.

With Philadelphia having clinched a playoff berth for the first time since 2012, Fultz decided the time was right to return from the injured shoulder and busted confidence that had cost him all but four games of his rookie season.

Fultz was on a media blackout in his absence and said nothing in his public return to clarify his situation.

He basically ignored the first two questions about his shoulder, and instead thanked teammates and coaches for their support during rehab.

Why was today the day to play?

“Just woke up and it was that day,” he said.

His next two answers were as empty as his stat line since October.

Did he do something to hurt his shoulder or just feel soreness?

Fultz rubbed his face and stared straight without talking and grabbed a towel someone

tossed him. He wiped his face during a few more seconds of awkward silence.

Why not talk about the injury?

Blank stare.

Fultz sparked the 76ers at times in actions, certainly not words, in a reserve role.

“He looked confident,” coach Brett Brown said. “I thought it was a real, sort of bold, gutsy effort that he made given where he was — now, where he is.”

The 19-year-old Fultz played the 76ers’ first four games of the season before he was ruled out indefinitely in October with soreness and a scapular muscle imbalance in the shoulder.

Grizzlies 101, Timberwolves 93: Wayne Selden scored 23 points, Marc Gasol had 20 points, 10 rebounds and six assists, and Memphis snapped a 17-game road losing streak.

Selden and Gasol each hit four three-pointers as Memphis went 15-for-31 from beyond the arc while dealing a blow to Minnesota’s playoff hopes.

Hornets 137, Knicks 128 (OT): Kemba Walker had 11 points of his 31 points and three assists in overtime, and host Charlotte earned its fourth straight victory.

Walker hit a late three-pointer to help send the game into overtime and then took over.

Celtics 102, Suns 94: Jayson Tatum scored 23 points, Marcus Morris added 20 in three quarters before leaving with an injury and Boston beat host Phoenix.

Tatum surpassed 1,000 points for the season, and Boston won its fourth straight to move to three games behind the Toronto Raptors for first place in the Eastern Conference.

Pistons 112, Lakers 106: Reggie Jackson scored 20 points and Reggie Bullock had 16, leading host Detroit past Los Angeles.

Detroit (34-40) won for the fourth time in five games, but trails idle Miami by five games for the final Eastern Conference playoff spot.

NHL roundup

Expansion Golden Knights wrap up postseason berth

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — The Vegas Golden Knights chose to celebrate a monumental moment for the franchise by thinking back to how its inaugural season began — hoping the new hockey team could bring smiles to a city reeling from tragedy.

Shortly after Vegas became the first expansion team to clinch a playoff berth with a 4-1 win over the Colorado Avalanche on Monday night, the mantra in the locker room was the same as the one adopted shortly before the team’s home opener:

“Vegas Strong.”

Team owner Bill Foley, veteran goalie Marc-Andre Fleu-

ry and leading scorer William Karlsson were among those who thought back Monday to the Oct. 1 mass shooting that killed 58 and injured hundreds more on the Las Vegas Strip.

No expansion team had ever made the playoffs since the league expanded for the 1967-68 season.

Alex Tuch, Jonathan Marchessault, Shea Theodore and Karlsson each scored, while Fleury improved to 28-11-4 after stopping 28 shots.

It was also the 200th career victory for coach Gerard Gallant.

Capitals 4, Rangers 2: Alex Ovechkin scored his NHL-leading 45th goal and visiting Washington extended its win-

ning streak to four games with a victory over New York.

Kings 3, Flames 0: Anze Kopitar tied a career high with his 34th goal, Jonathan Quick made 23 saves and host Los Angeles moved back into playoff position by shutting out Calgary.

Sharks 4, Blackhawks 3 (SO): Kevin Labanc scored the deciding goal in the fourth round of a shootout and visiting San Jose beat Chicago for its eighth straight victory.

Panthers 3, Islanders 0: Evgenii Dadonov had a goal and an assist, and James Reimer stopped 32 shots for his fourth shutout of the season as visiting Florida moved closer to a playoff spot by blanking New York.

Coyotes 4, Lightning 1: Clayton Keller had a goal and an assist to lead visiting Arizona over Tampa Bay.

Canadiens 4, Red Wings 2: Brendan Gallagher scored twice, including his 30th goal of the season, and Carey Price snapped a seven-game losing streak as host Montreal defeated skidding Detroit.

Hurricanes 4, Senators 1: Warren Foegele had a goal and an assist in his NHL debut, and host Carolina beat Ottawa.

Sabres 3, Maple Leafs 2: Jack Eichel scored his second goal of the game midway through the third period to help last-place Buffalo end Toronto’s club-record home winning streak at 13 games.