

STARS AND STRIPES®

Saturday, March 2, 2019

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Syrian fighters advance against ISIS

Associated Press

OUTSIDE BAGHOUZ, Syria — Fighters with the U.S.-backed force battling Islamic State in eastern Syria advanced on two fronts Saturday as the extremists used snipers and booby traps to slow the push on the last area they control, a spokesman for the group said.

Mustafa Bali of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces tweeted that “heavy clashes” were taking place in the area on the east bank of the Euphrates River.

Zana Amedi, an SDF commander, told The Associated Press that “an active ground force” is advancing into IS-held territories as the extremists resort to sniper fire and booby-traps.

Two helicopters for the U.S.-led coalition were seen circling the area of fighting around noon Saturday. A loud explosion later was heard from a distance and thick black smoke billowed into the sky, apparently a coalition airstrike.

The SDF on Friday evening resumed military operations to liberate the last piece of territory held by IS in the province of Deir el-Zour after evacuating thousands of civilians and hostages who had been besieged inside.

‘We expect it to be over soon.’

Mustafa Bali

Syrian Democratic Forces commander

The military campaign to uproot the militants from the eastern banks of the Euphrates River began in September, pushing them down toward this last corner in the village of Baghouz, near the Iraqi border. The military operation was halted on Feb. 12 as the SDF said a large number of civilians and hostages were holed up in the territory, which sits atop caves and tunnels where they had been hiding.

By Friday, more than 10,000 civilians had left the ISIS held area and the extremists released some SDF fighters they had taken prisoner in earlier battles.

“We expect it to be over soon,” Bali said.

Another SDF commander, Adnan Afrin, said “there are fierce battles” with IS fighters firing thermal missiles at advancing troops and using drones. Afrin said

eight SDF fighters were wounded, some critically.

Afrin said the buffer area between ISIS and SDF had been closed after the SDF’s advance. He said there have been no suicide attacks but that some land mines went off.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a war monitor, said 10 ISIS gunmen were killed in fighting in the Baghouz area.

It added that Syrian government forces and their allies clashed with IS gunmen who tried to cross to the west bank of the Euphrates river leaving seven ISIS members dead.

Amedi, the SDF commander, said the Kurdish-led force cannot rely on airstrikes by the U.S.-led coalition because ISIS gunmen are trapped everywhere “so if you just rely on airstrikes and then advance on the ground that will cause heavy casualties.”

“At least now, we are trying to advance on the ground with rare airstrikes,” he said.

“Now it’s mostly clashes. There are almost no airstrikes this morning. There were few airstrikes in the morning and nothing else after that.”

At least 23 Afghan soldiers killed in Taliban attack

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Taliban insurgents targeted an Afghan army corps at their camp in southern Helmand province, killing at least 23, officials said Saturday.

Omar Zwak, spokesman for the provincial governor, said 16 other troops were wounded in the attack that began Friday and continued into Saturday in Wahser district.

Qari Yusouf Ahmadi, a Taliban spokesman, said in a statement the insurgent group was responsible for the attack, which came even as Taliban negotiators met for talks with a

U.S. peace envoy in the Middle Eastern state of Qatar.

He said Taliban fighters engaged both Afghan and foreign forces inside the camp and killed “scores.”

Zwak said U.S. advisers were present at the base but in a separate area. “The foreign forces present at the base were all safe, as the Taliban could not reach that part of the compound,” he said.

Zwak said the attack began when a suicide bomber detonated his explosives at Camp Shorab. He said three other suicide bombers blew themselves up as gunmen followed

behind them. Zwak said 16 Taliban gunmen were killed in the fighting.

In recent years, the Taliban and Islamic State have carried out near-daily attacks in Afghanistan, mainly targeting the government and its security forces.

The Taliban control several district centers in Helmand, which is a major source of the world’s illegal opium supply.

Camp Shorab was previously a British air base known as Camp Bastion.

In northern Sari Pul province, Taliban ambushed a convoy of Afghan security forces,

killing nine, said Zabihullah Amani, spokesman for the provincial governor.

Amani said 12 other forces were wounded during the battle with insurgents, which lasted seven hours Friday in Sangcharak district.

“Four security forces are missing and believe to be taken alive by the insurgents,” he said.

The forces were just returning from an operation in the district when they came under heavy fire, Amani said.

Zabiullah Mujahid, a spokesman for the Taliban, claimed responsibility for the attack.

Acting DOD chief plans to back wall

Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON — It's an anxious loyalty test for acting Defense Secretary Pat Shanahan, whose future at the Pentagon is anything but certain.

Sometime in the next few days, Shanahan plans to endorse President Donald Trump's declaration of a national emergency along the southern border, according to people familiar with his thinking. That will free up \$3.6 billion in the Pentagon budget for building new sections of border wall and other projects.

It likely will also prove costly to Shanahan, a former Boeing executive who hopes Trump will nominate him as a permanent replacement for former Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, who quit in December.

Failing to go along with Trump could lead the president to nominate someone else. At the same time, Senate Democrats — and even some Republicans — oppose Trump's efforts to go around Congress to secure money for border barriers.

Defense hawks are particularly incensed that he wants to raid military construction money to do so. That could jeopardize Shanahan's hopes of taking over the Pentagon permanently.

"He's in a tough position," said Sen. James M. Inhofe, R-Okla., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, which handles Pentagon nominations.

Some Democrats say Shanahan's willingness to go along with the emergency funding could determine whether they will support him if Trump nominates him for the job.

"How he approaches this should be very much a part of whether he becomes permanent in that role," said Sen. Martin Heinrich, D-N.M., one of two Armed Services members representing a southern border state. "Whether he is

'How he approaches this should be very much a part of whether he becomes permanent in that role.'

Sen. Martin Heinrich
D-N.M.

going to be a down-the-line professional secretary of defense, or if he sees his job to get the president re-elected and appeal to his base."

Several key senators have said they're uncomfortable with the precedent Trump is setting by bypassing Congress' constitutional power of the purse — and using the military to do it.

Inhofe, for example, says the situation at the border is a crisis requiring the military, but he doesn't agree that expanding the wall is for the military's benefit.

Few qualms

Shanahan has few qualms about using Pentagon funds along the border, viewing it as a legitimate national security mission, according to a person familiar with his thinking who agreed to speak about Shanahan's view in return for anonymity.

On a visit to the border last Friday, Shanahan tried out a gun used by Border Patrol agents that shoots nonlethal pepper balls — an eyebrow-raising display of firepower by a civilian official.

He later deployed an additional 1,000 troops to the border, bringing the total, including active-duty and National Guard, to roughly 6,000.

Trump called Shanahan "a pleasure" to work with during a Cabinet meeting last month, noting that he had "done a really fantastic job" on the border. But Trump has also been considering other candidates for the defense secretary job.

Shanahan has taken his time in announcing that the Penta-

gon intends to tap military construction funds designated for other projects in order to build the border wall.

The deliberate process is meant to reassure lawmakers and head off lawsuits challenging the administration plan.

Trump hopes to tap about \$6.7 billion for border construction by diverting money from other government accounts. Of that, as much as \$3.6 billion would come from military construction, with much of the rest coming from Defense Department counterdrug funds.

Pentagon officials have put together an extensive list of planned military construction projects that could be delayed. Most are routine renovations and upgrades to military installations that could be put off without harming military readiness — and without upsetting Congress, an official familiar with the list said.

The only legal requirement to shift the money is that it must improve troops' effectiveness, leaving that call entirely to Shanahan's discretion. Pentagon officials have said that a lengthened wall would make troops at the border more effective at halting illegal border crossings and drug smuggling.

But some current and former Pentagon and Department of Homeland Security officials say the president and his acting defense secretary are on questionable legal ground.

"The lawyers realize they're on thin ice here," said Brian McKeon, a Pentagon and National Security Council official under President Barack Obama and previously a Senate counsel.

"They're using the armed forces and (have) already sent them out there as the predicate to say, 'See, we need to use this authority,'" he said. "It's not for the purpose of building this wall to protect the soldiers."

Delaying challenges

To delay legal challenges, the White House is planning to exhaust \$2.5 billion in Pentagon funds appropriated for counterdrug operations before spending military construction dollars.

Military construction projects will not be canceled, only delayed, and the construction funds will be replenished, administration officials say — but that, of course, requires Congress to vote for additional funds.

On Tuesday, the Democratic-controlled House passed a resolution, 245-182, to override Trump's emergency declaration. The vote in the Senate, which is required next month, is likely to be close. Three Republican senators — Lisa Murkowski, of Alaska, Susan Collins, of Maine, and Thom Tillis, of North Carolina — have said they'll back the resolution. If all of the Senate's Democrats vote for it, as expected, only one more GOP defection would send the measure to Trump's desk. Trump, however, has said he would veto the measure if it passes Congress, and the 182 Republicans in the House who already voted against the measure would be more than enough to sustain his veto.

Shanahan is planning to brief lawmakers in the coming days about what military construction projects would have to be delayed and how the money would be spent. He has reminded aides and Pentagon officials in private meetings that it is their job to carry out Trump's orders at the border — a pointed contrast with Mattis, who seemed unenthusiastic about the operation and many other Trump priorities.

GOP attacks Dems' 'socialism' policies

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — As the White House gears up for the 2020 campaign, it's pressing the case that Democrats are rallying behind what it's calling the policies of "socialism."

Trying to portray Democrats as out of step with ordinary Americans, Vice President Mike Pence said in a speech Friday at the Conservative Political Action Conference that the choice in the next election is "between freedom and socialism, between personal responsibility and government dependence."

It was the latest step in a coordinated effort by President Donald Trump and his allies to drive up enthusiasm among the GOP base by sowing fears about the policies pushed by Democrats.

"The moment America becomes a socialist country is the moment America ceases to be America," Pence told the crowd

of conservative activists.

Pence also took aim at "Medicare-for-all" and the Green New Deal, policy proposals prominent in the crowded Democratic contest for the presidential nomination.

The Medicare proposal really means "quality health care for none," Pence said. And "the only thing green" about the Democrats' environmental framework to combat climate change, the vice president said, "is how much green it's going to cost taxpayers if we do it: \$90 trillion."

The American Action Forum, a Republican-linked think tank, has estimated that the Green New Deal could cost \$51 trillion to \$93 trillion over 10 years. Democrats have not specified a price tag, though Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, of New York, who introduced the plan along with Massachusetts Sen. Ed Markey, said it would be

"the same way we paid for the original New Deal, World War II, the bank bailouts, tax cuts for the rich and decades of war — with public money appropriated by Congress."

The health care and climate proposals have become litmus tests in the race for the Democratic nomination, with many liberals embracing the ideas even as some pragmatists raise questions about cost and feasibility.

White House economic adviser Larry Kudlow said at the conference Thursday that Americans should "put socialism on trial and then convict it." Trump was expected to deliver a similar message when he addresses the conference on Saturday.

A Trump campaign official said the campaign was exploring ways to use the "socialism" message to drive a wedge between Democratic voters and

independents. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe internal planning.

The campaign also believes that the attacks will activate Trump's base, which may have lost some motivation because the president has run into congressional opposition as he tries to fulfill his U.S.-Mexico border wall promise.

The head of the Republican National Committee, Ronna McDaniel, told the conference on Thursday that the GOP would look to "go out and educate" voters about socialism.

Responding to Pence's socialism accusation, Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren said: "This is no surprise. It's nonsense, but Donald Trump and Donald Trump's minions will do whatever they think helps Donald Trump. That's all that's going on here."

Sanders holds 1st rally, predicts White House win

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., on Saturday returned to Brooklyn, his birthplace, for the first rally of his second presidential campaign and sought to tie his working-class background to his populist views that are helping reshape the Democratic Party.

He predicted he would win the nomination in a field of now-double-digit rivals and then de-

feat President Donald Trump, "the most dangerous president in modern American history."

After falling short in 2016 against Hillary Clinton, the Vermont independent told supporters at a rally at Brooklyn College, which he once attended, that his campaign is saying "loudly and clearly that the underlying principles of our government will not be greed, hatred and lies. It will not be racism, sexism, xenophobia, ho-

mophobia and religious bigotry. That is going to end." Sanders pledged to fight for "economic justice, social justice, racial justice and environmental justice."

He had begun his 2016 campaign in Vermont, which he has represented in the Senate for nearly two decades. But this time, as he tries to showcase more of his personal story, Sanders kicked off his 2020 bid in the New York City borough where he grew up as the son of a

Jewish immigrant and lived in a rent-controlled apartment.

Campaign priorities include "Medicare for all," a \$15-an-hour minimum wage and addressing climate change. And Sanders is focusing on his working-class roots and how his family's financial struggles have shaped his views. In those reflections is an implicit contrast to another New Yorker, Trump, a billionaire who hails from Queens.

Lawmaker again decried for remarks about Israelis

Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Rep. Ilhan Omar, D-Minn., came under a fresh round of criticism Friday for remarks about Israel that critics decried as anti-Semitic.

Speaking Wednesday night at a forum at a Washington bookstore with fellow freshman Rep. Rashida Tlaib, of Michigan,

Omar said she fears everything they say about Israel is construed as anti-Semitic because they're Muslim. She said that prevents a "broader debate" about Israel's treatment of Palestinians.

Omar and Tlaib won their seats in November, becoming the first Muslim women elected to Congress.

The comments, which Omar made when the questions turned to her previous criticism of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, were first reported by the website Jewish Insider.

Some Jewish leaders said she then revived an old trope about divided loyalties among Jewish-Americans when she said, "I want to talk about the po-

litical influence in this country that says it is OK for people to push for allegiance to a foreign country." She added, "I want to ask, 'Why is it OK for me to talk about the influence of the [National Rifle Association], or fossil fuel industries or Big Pharma, and not talk about a powerful lobbying group that is influencing policy?'"

Evacuated Californians returning

Associated Press

GUERNEVILLE, Calif. — Jason Flint prepared for flooding in Northern California by putting his deli's valuable equipment on pallets and milk crates stacked several feet above the ground.

It wasn't enough, as he found out Friday when he returned to Guerneville after two days of flooding in Sonoma County's famed wine country. Mud-covered refrigerators, display cases and food crates were strewn about by 6-foot-high murky water.

"My entire deli is wiped out," Flint said. "It's crazy. It's too much to get my head around this."

Evacuation orders were lifted and all roads into Guerneville and neighboring Monte Rio were opened Friday, almost three days after being cut off by the rain-swollen Russian River.

Days of heavy rain had left

the towns reachable only by boat Wednesday. About 2,600 homes, businesses and other structures in the popular tourist destination were flooded by water up to 8 feet deep, and about 3,700 people were ordered to evacuate.

No one was injured or killed, and the river receded below the 32-foot flood level. However, more than 200 miles north, a man drowned while trying to reach his Humboldt County home by walking through about 5 feet of water.

Along the main road in Guerneville, business owners inspected the damage caused by floodwaters that rose about 46 feet Wednesday night, the river's highest level in 24 years.

Chris Reid, a manager of True Value Hardware, said they were able to salvage cash registers, computers, chain saws and other expensive equipment by putting them on the second floor of the two-story building.

But on the ground level, all the shelves were covered in chest-high mud. He and employees washed down rubber boots, brooms, shovels, buckets and other salvaged cleaning supplies and brought them to the sidewalk to sell at a discounted rate.

"The store has gone through all the floods, but this is a lot more than we expected," Reid said.

Sonoma County spokesman Hannah Euser said even though evacuation orders were lifted for Guerneville and Monte Rio, residents were encouraged to wait to enter their homes until they are inspected. Damage assessment crews planned to mark green, yellow and red tags to indicate whether they are safe for re-entry.

"We have a lot of buildings that have taken in water and we will be inspecting them to determine if they are safe," she said.

US military: Airstrike in Somalia killed 26 militants

Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya — The United States military on Friday said it had killed 26 fighters with the al-Shabab extremist group with an airstrike in central Somalia, after a pair of strikes earlier last week killed 55.

The U.S. has carried out 24 such strikes this year, more than half the number in all of 2018. Several have had death tolls in the double digits, including one in mid-January that killed 52 fighters and one in late January that killed 24.

A U.S. Africa Command statement said the attack occurred Thursday in the Hiran region, where the earlier ones took place. When asked why recent strikes have been deadlier, a spokeswoman said Somali and "partner forces continue to make incursions into territory formerly controlled by al-Shabab," giving them chances to collect more intelligence and develop targets.

The airstrike was announced shortly after Somali authorities said a deadly overnight siege by al-Shabab had ended in the capital, Mogadishu, with all attackers killed. At least 24 people were killed and more than 50 others wounded.

The attack, which began with a pair of car bombs Thursday night as Somalis relaxed in a neighborhood of restaurants and bars, was one of the most serious in months and was quickly claimed by the al-Qaida-linked al-Shabab.

While the U.S. statement said the airstrikes are meant to degrade al-Shabab's ability to coordinate attacks against the Somali people, the carnage showed that Africa's deadliest Islamic extremist group still has the ability to strike in the heart of the capital.

The U.S. has dramatically increased airstrikes against al-Shabab since President Donald Trump took office. Authorities and experts acknowledge that it will take more than airstrikes to defeat the extremist group, which holds large parts of rural central and southern Somalia.

Dragon capsule rockets toward space station

Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — America's newest capsule for astronauts rocketed Saturday toward the International Space Station on a high-stakes test flight by SpaceX.

The only passenger was a life-size test dummy named Ripley, after the lead character in the "Alien" movies. SpaceX needs to nail the debut of its crew Dragon capsule before putting people on board later this year.

This latest, flashiest Dragon was on a fast track to reach the space station Sunday morning, just 27 hours after liftoff.

It will spend five days docked to the orbiting outpost before making a retro-style splashdown in the Atlantic next Friday — all vital training for the next space demo, possibly this summer, when two astronauts strap in.

SpaceX founder and Chief Executive Elon Musk said the launch was "superstressful"

to watch, but he's hopeful the capsule will be ready to carry people later this year.

"To be frank, I'm a little emotionally exhausted," Musk told reporters barely an hour after liftoff. "We have to dock to the station. We have to come back, but so far it's worked. ... We've passed the riskiest items."

NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine called it "a big night for the United States of America."

"We're on the precipice of launching American astronauts on American rockets from American soil again for the first time since the retirement of the space shuttles in 2011," said Bridenstine, who got a special tour by Musk of the launch pad on the eve of launch.

An estimated 5,000 NASA and contractor employees, tourists and journalists gathered in the wee hours at Kennedy Space Center with the SpaceX launch team, as the Falcon 9 rocket blasted off before dawn from the same spot where

Apollo moon rockets and space shuttles once soared. Across the country at SpaceX Mission Control in Hawthorne, Calif., company employees went wild, cheering every step of the way until the capsule successfully reached orbit.

Looking on from Kennedy's Launch Control were the two NASA astronauts who will strap in as early as July for the second space demo, Doug Hurley and Bob Behnken. Shortly after liftoff, Musk asked them, "How do you feel about flying on it?"

SpaceX already has made 16 trips to the space station using cargo Dragons. The white crew Dragon is slightly bigger — 27 feet tip to tip — and considerably fancier and safer. Musk said the redesigned capsule has "hardly a part in common" with its predecessor.

"It's an incredibly sleek-looking vehicle from the inside and it's very easy to operate," Hurley told reporters just hours before liftoff.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Bill to ban political, ideological speech fails

ME AUGUSTA — A Maine Republican's bill that sought to ban teachers from discussing political or ideological advocacy with students was unanimously rejected by a state legislative committee.

State Rep. Lawrence Lockman's bill sought to limit the types of classroom discussions teachers can facilitate and would have barred teachers from "endorsing, supporting, or opposing" court cases and presidential actions. The Bangor Daily News reported the bill faced strong opposition and was rejected Thursday by members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee.

Teen assaults elderly man over MAGA hat

NJ FRANKLIN TOWNSHIP — Authorities say a young man at a New Jersey supermarket assaulted an 81-year-old who was wearing a "Make America Great Again" hat.

Somerset County prosecutors charged Ryan Salvagno, 19, with assault and harassment.

Officials said Salvagno exchanged words with the older man about the hat as the man exited the store with his groceries Monday. Authorities said as the man turned to walk away, Salvagno grabbed the hat and a tug-of-war followed. Prosecutors said Salvagno threw the man to the ground, tipped over his shopping cart and tossed the cap to the side.

Man pistol-whipped with own airsoft gun

OH CLEVELAND — Police said a Cleveland man attempted to threaten cus-

tomers at a Taco Bell with an airsoft gun, and the customers took the gun from him and pistol-whipped him.

According to court records, the 37-year-old man has not yet been charged in the Tuesday event. Cleveland.com reported Taco Bell employees said the man came into the restaurant about 10 p.m. and started yelling at a customer, then spit at several more customers.

Police said the customers confronted the man who pulled out the airsoft gun. The customers then overpowered the man, taking the gun away and using it to pistol-whip him several times in the head.

Sinkhole eats half of road, costing \$100K

TN KNOXVILLE — A sinkhole 30-feet deep and nearly as broad swallowed half a roadway in Knox County and a county official said repairs could cost more than \$100,000.

The Knoxville News Sentinel reported crews Wednesday were attempting to plug the sinkhole with concrete, but then more rain hit the area. The county director of public works and engineering, Jim Snowden, said the road may be reopened by this week.

Dead fish drops from sky in baseball game

FL JACKSONVILLE — It wasn't a pop-fly that landed in shallow right field during the eighth inning of a college baseball game.

It was a dead fish.

An osprey being chased by an eagle dropped the fish last weekend near the second baseman as Florida's Jacksonville University hosted Alabama's Jacksonville State University at John Sessions Stadium.

A video shared by NCAA baseball on Twitter shows a Dolphins staffer removing the fish in a towel as the bald eagle circles overhead.

The Dolphins went on to beat the visiting Gamecocks, 5-2.

General store's cat ordered to leave

AK HOMER — A furry fixture of an Alaska general store must leave after the owners were notified the black cat's presence violates food safety standards.

The Homer News reported the Fritz Creek General Store near Homer has been home to the female, slightly overweight cat named Stormy since 2012.

Jeremy Ayers, section manager for the state Food Safety and Sanitation Program, said the agency received a complaint about the cat, and an environmental health officer also observed her.

Stormy will be sent to live with family of store owner Sean Maryott.

Gila monsters could become a state reptile

UT SALT LAKE CITY — Utah lawmakers are considering a bill to designate the Gila monster as the state reptile.

The Salt Lake Tribune reported that Republican state Rep. Bill Lowry sponsored the legislation after prompting by students at Lava Ridge Intermediate School in Santa Clara, who conducted a science project on the large lizard.

The bill unanimously passed a vote taken in a legislative hearing Monday.

Utah already has a large number of reptiles designated among different state animal categories, including a state dinosaur and fossil.

The lizard is named for Arizona's Gila River, but it has a strong connection to the American Indian tribes of Utah.

Man tried to blow up mom with propane

AL SCOTTSBORO — An Alabama man was jailed on charges of trying to blow up his mother using a propane tank in a booby-trapped storage shed.

Chief Deputy Rocky Harnen of the Jackson County Sheriff's Office told news outlets a woman called police saying she was worried her son was on drugs and storing propane in a shed.

Harnen said an officer went to the home and a small explosion occurred when the officer and the man's mother entered the building. Harnen said a small device was supposed to explode and ignite the propane, but the gas wasn't turned on.

Records show Roger Dale Johnson, 45, of Woodville was charged with attempted assault and possession of a destructive device.

School bans limos, luxury cars from prom

NJ WANAQUE — Some students at a New Jersey high school are upset that they won't be able to take limousines and luxury cars to their prom.

Lakeland Regional High School administrators sent a letter to parents this week stating that prom attendees must take school-provided and chaperoned coach buses to and from the venue in June.

Schools Superintendent Hugh Beattie said it's a matter of safety and equity for all students. He says it will cost \$15 to ride the buses.

From wire reports

Your objective source for military news
updated 24/7 from bases
around the world.
Now online at www.stripes.com.

STARS AND STRIPES®

Shurmurs: Combine a father-son affair

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — There's one quarterback at the NFL scouting combine that New York Giants coach Pat Shurmur has absolutely fallen in love with, and it's not Kyler Murray, Dwayne Haskins, Drew Lock, Daniel Jones or Ryan Finley.

It's Kyle Shurmur, his 22-year-old son who threw 50 touchdowns over the last two seasons for Vanderbilt.

"Well, I'm extremely proud of him," the Giants coach said. "He's made great decisions. He did an excellent job in high school giving himself the opportunity to go to a place like Vanderbilt. He graduated in 3½ years, helped them win games. He's a good player."

Kyle Shurmur isn't quite in the same league as the top-flight QBs, but at 6-foot-4 and 225 pounds, a degree in economics and a background that includes a near equal split between under center and shotgun formations over four years in the SEC, he projects as a bona fide pro prospect.

Chances are good he'll be on somebody's depth chart come fall. Maybe even the Giants' roster.

"I'd be grateful for any opportunity I get," Kyle said.

Even if that means facing his father instead of playing for him.

"Any opportunity I get I'll be really appreciative," Kyle said.

He already has an advantage the other QBs don't. In preparing for the combine, he received tips not only from his agent, Tom Condon, but he also got plenty of fatherly advice about what to expect.

"Growing up I always watched the combine on TV and you only see maybe the bench press, but then you see the on-field drills," Kyle said, noting it's so much more than that. "It's a five-day process. He mentally prepared me for that. My agent and him sort of gave me the scoop of what to expect, five days as opposed to one day."

Of course, Pat Shurmur has been doling out direction all of

Kyle's life.

"Everyone thinks he wants me to be a great quarterback," Kyle said. "I think he wants me to be a great person first and foremost. And I think that's a foundation for a great quarterback."

An All-Big 10 center at Michigan State, Pat Shurmur never pushed his son to play in the trenches.

"No, in fact he said growing up, 'make sure you play a position where your hand is not in the ground,'" Kyle said.

Rarely did he talk technique with his son.

"I had great coaches at Vanderbilt," Kyle said. "They coached me hard, coached me well, and he sort of stayed out of it."

While he shares his father's passion for football, Kyle wants to follow him into the NFL but not into coaching.

"My dad was always going into work super early, coming back really late at night. My mom was sort of on her own a whole lot, so I don't know if I'd

love the coaching style," Kyle said. "But being the player, I got a great opportunity right now and obviously being a player would be amazing. It's been my dream my whole life."

Kyle had something else the rest of this year's QB class didn't: access to the likes of Donovan McNabb, Sam Bradford, Colt McCoy and Brandon Weeden while growing up; he'd help out at training camps in Philadelphia, St. Louis and Cleveland.

And he's met Eli Manning, of course.

"I saw him at the Manning camp two years in a row and then I saw him the last game of the season after my bowl game," Kyle said. "I went home to see my family and I actually saw Eli on the field before the game. He's a great guy."

While both father and son are together in Indianapolis this week, they've only spent a few precious moments with each other.

"He's got a job to do and I got a job to do," Kyle said.

Murray follows heart, chooses football over baseball

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — When Kyler Murray joined the Heisman Trophy club in December, Charlie Ward thought about his initiation in 1993.

Back then, the Florida State quarterback was the shiny new star, ready to embark on a world full of options.

Everyone wanted to know if the promising dual-sport phenom could become the next Deion Sanders, the next Bo Jackson or perhaps an even bigger celebrity. His talent was off-the-chart good, and he seemed destined to be a winner wherever he went.

A few weeks later, Ward sealed his fate by working harder on basketball than preparing for the NFL Draft.

The former NBA player never regretted that decision and doesn't believe Murray should, either, after choosing

football over baseball.

"It was calculated and a risk, but it's what I wanted to do," Ward told The Associated Press earlier this week. "It's the same thing I shared with Kyler at the Heisman dinner — when you make your decision, take your time and know there are consequences. I knew I wasn't probably going to end up getting drafted (by the NFL) because I wasn't 100 percent committed."

Murray insisted again Friday at the NFL's annual scouting combine that he's all-in on football, assuring Ward he'll still be the last Heisman Trophy winner to never play a down in the NFL.

If everything goes right this week in Indianapolis, at Oklahoma's pro day in mid-March and during the first day of the April draft, Murray will have one of the rarest résumé lines

in sports: First-round draft pick by the NFL and Major League Baseball.

Not even Ward can boast about being a two-time first-round pick — though he did start for the 1998-99 NBA runner-up New York Knicks.

For Murray, it was an easy call.

"Yes, it's my final decision," he told a throng of reporters Friday. "I'm here. I'm ready to go. There's no turning back."

For others, the choice wasn't so simple.

Ward, now a high school basketball coach in Tallahassee, Fla., made up his mind when NFL scouts knocked him for his size and projected him as a mid-round pick. Murray heard similar questions before measuring in at 5-foot-10 1/8 in Indy.

Tim Tebow, the 2007 Heisman winner, bounced around

the NFL for several years, then began pursuing a baseball career.

Some, such as San Francisco Giants pitcher Jeff Samardzija, even have second thoughts.

Smaradzija made up his mind after reporting to Notre Dame for football in 2006 after a six-week, minor-league stint. The side-by-side comparison helped the talented receiver select the sport that made him happier. But after working his way from the minors to the major-league level, Samardzija wondered if he made the wrong choice when he was sent down in 2009.

"I called up my agent and said, 'All right, start lining up tryouts.'" he said. "We talked a day or two later and let the senses cool. I thought that looked chintzy to just quit right then and there. I wanted to give it a little more (time). It's a learning process."

Everything's going right for IndyCar

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — IndyCar heads into 2019 with everything going in the right direction.

The series has a new long-term sponsor in Japanese communications giant NTT. Tire manufacturer Firestone has extended its supplier deal for five more years. A new broadcast deal with NBC is set to launch.

On the track, an already deep driver pool keeps adding veteran and rookie talent. And the series has added a new stop in Texas while bringing back an old favorite in California. IndyCar has even been exploring a return to Australia and possibly adding another international event to the American open-wheel series.

For longtime driver and 2004 series champion Tony Kanaan of A.J. Foyt Racing, all signs point to a spectacular season that will open with Scott Dixon defending his fifth championship.

"Since I've been around ... this is the best year I've ever seen," Kanaan said Monday. "By a long shot."

The 17-race season starts March 10 in St. Petersburg,

Fla., before making its debut two weeks later at the Circuit of the Americas. The series was in Austin, Texas, for its pre-season media day Feb. 11, and for two days of testing on the 3.4 mile road course that was built for Formula One and has been hosting that series' U.S. Grand Prix since 2012.

The contract with NTT settles the title sponsorship after two years of trying to replace Verizon, which pulled out after a five-year partnership. The new broadcast rights deal moves the crown jewel of the season, the Indianapolis 500, away from ABC for the first time in 53 years and puts the entire series on one network with a promise of more consistent and broader exposure.

The new deal puts eight races on NBC and the other nine on its cable sports network, NBCSN.

"I was climbing the ladder when this thing was falling apart," said 2012 champion Ryan Hunter-Reay of Andretti Autosport. "[Now] there's so much momentum in this sport: the class of competition, the caliber of teams, the support of sponsors. It's pretty awesome to see this sport where it should be."

The new race in Texas and the return to Laguna Seca in Monterey, Calif., for the season finale gives IndyCar a taste for new fans and old. The Texas track had long coveted hosting IndyCar but had been frozen out by a geographic exclusivity clause the series had for years with Texas Motor Speedway in Fort Worth.

Circuit of the Americas President Bobby Epstein has vowed that his track will make a splashy debut for the March 24 race and has said he wants it to have the second-largest purse behind the Indianapolis 500, including a \$100,000 bonus if the pole winner also wins the race.

This year's Indianapolis 500 will be the 50th anniversary of Mario Andretti's sole victory there. And it will see former Formula One champion Fernando Alonso return in his quest to claim auto racing's Triple Crown of winning the Monaco Grand Prix, the 24 Hours of Le Mans and the Indy 500. Alonso made a strong bid to win in 2017 before a late-race engine failure.

Andretti's son, Michael, failed to win in Indy, and grandson Marco Andretti said Fri-

day a victory this year would be the perfect way to mark the anniversary.

"I want to win any Indy 500, but if there was one to pick, it would be this one," Marco Andretti said. "I would cry."

IndyCar has a handful of drivers with Formula One experience and is adding more. Sweden's Marcus Ericsson, who lost his seat at his old F1 Sauber team, joined Arrow Schmidt Peterson Motorsports. Ericsson is already eyeing his first start at the Indy 500.

"I spoke with Alonso about it. He said, 'You will love it, it's an amazing experience,'" Ericsson said.

Carlin's Max Chilton, who made the switch from F1 in 2015, predicted Ericsson will be fine on the road courses but will have to adjust to the ovals.

"It's very daunting. F1 cornering speed is quicker. IndyCar (on ovals) is crazy fast and the walls are right there," Chilton said. "He'll be fine."

Notes: Reigning Indy Lights champion Patricio O'Ward of Mexico said he had left new team Harding-Steinbrenner Racing and will be looking for a new seat for 2019.

No. 21 Buffalo clinches share of Mid-American title

Associated Press

OXFORD, Ohio — Buffalo was up by 18 points before the first media timeout, getting baskets as easy as they come. The rest of the night was a slog as the 21st-ranked Bulls clinched a share of the Mid-American Conference title.

Given their high expectations, they left the court with more relief than celebration.

CJ Massinburg shook off an ankle injury and scored 20 points Friday night, leading Buffalo to a 77-69 victory that showed what the Bulls can be when they're locked in — and how much they can struggle when they're not.

The Bulls (26-3, 14-2) were

denied a chance to win the regular-season championship outright when second-place Bowling Green beat Kent State 77-72 earlier Friday.

"Obviously our goal is to win the league, but we've got much bigger goals than that," coach Nate Oats said. "We need to be playing at a high level come the NCAA Tournament. In order to do that, we've got to get on a roll here."

"We've got to be playing our best basketball over these next two, three weeks. I don't think over 40 minutes we did that today."

Buffalo opened the game with an 18-point run and never trailed while winning its seventh straight overall. Miami

(15-14, 7-9) got the lead down to 70-67 with 2:30 left on Dalonte Brown's free throws, but Dontay Caruthers' three-point play and Nick Perkins' three-pointer blunted the comeback.

"I don't think anybody panics when the game gets close," Massinburg said. "Nobody tries to play hero ball."

The Bulls' opening run featured a pair of threes by Jayvon Graves. The RedHawks were still scoreless at the first media timeout, missing five shots and turning it over three times.

"I just felt like we weren't together," said Bam Bowman, who led Miami with 13 points and 13 rebounds. "The crowd being here got our adrenaline flowing, and we weren't our-

selves. Once we picked it up, we were able to get back in the game."

Nike Sibande led a 14-0 run that helped Miami cut it to 37-33 at halftime. Massinburg scored seven straight points as Buffalo rebuilt the lead to 15 points and withstood Miami's closing surge.

The Bulls got a scare during their opening run when Massinburg, their leading scorer at 18.7 points per game, aggravated a sore left ankle on a reverse layup and hit the floor. He limped off but returned a few minutes later. Bowman has been playing through shoulder and ankle injuries.

"It's been a little frustrating," Massinburg said.

NBA roundup

Bulls outlast Hawks in four overtimes

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Lauri Markkanen made three free throws to give Chicago the lead for good, Zach LaVine scored a career-high 47 points and the Bulls overcame Trae Young's career-high 49 points to beat the Atlanta Hawks 168-161 in four overtimes Friday night.

Markkanen finished with 31 points with 17 rebounds. He snapped a 159-all tie by making the three free throws after he was fouled by Alex Len.

Young, the rookie who played almost 56 minutes, had his third straight game of setting or matching his career scoring high after back-to-back games with 36 points. He had 16 assists, eight rebounds and nine

turnovers.

The Bulls have won five of six.

Celtics 107, Wizards 96: Kyrie Irving had 13 points and 12 assists, Al Horford scored 18 points and Boston beat visiting Washington to snap a four-game losing streak.

Marcus Morris added 17 points and nine rebounds, Marcus Smart scored 16 points, and Jaylen Brown added 13. The Celtics won for the first time since the All-Star break to avoid their first five-game skid in more than four years.

Bradley Beal had 29 points and 11 rebounds for the Wizards, and Tomas Satoransky and Jeff Green each had 15 points.

Bucks 131, Lakers 120:

Eric Bledsoe scored 31 points, Malcolm Brogdon added 21 points, and Milwaukee held off Los Angeles for its eighth consecutive victory and 10th in a row on the road.

Raptors 119, Trail Blazers 117: Kawhi Leonard scored the go-ahead basket with 3 seconds remaining and host Toronto beat Portland.

Hornets 123, Nets 112: Kemba Walker scored 25 points, Jeremy Lamb added 22 and visiting Charlotte beat Brooklyn to snap a three-game skid.

The Hornets inched back ahead of Orlando for eighth place in the Eastern Conference and evened the season se-

ries with the sixth-place Nets to avoid giving Brooklyn the head-to-head tiebreaker if the teams finish with the same record.

Pelicans 130, Suns 116: Julius Randle scored 16 of his 22 points in the third quarter in New Orleans' victory over host Phoenix.

Clippers 116, Kings 109: Landry Shamet scored eight of his 20 points in the fourth quarter, Lou Williams made two free throws with 7.9 seconds left and visiting Los Angeles held off Sacramento.

Los Angeles moved a half-game ahead of San Antonio for seventh place in the West. Sacramento remains two games behind the Spurs for the final playoff spot in the conference.

NHL roundup

Aho, red-hot Hurricanes win showdown with Blues

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Sebastian Aho had a short-handed goal and an assist, and the Carolina Hurricanes beat the St. Louis Blues 5-2 on Friday night in a matchup between two of the NHL's hottest teams.

Justin Faulk also had a goal and an assist, Justin Williams and Jordan Staal scored, and Andrei Svechnikov added an empty-netter for Carolina. Nino Niederreiter and Teuvo Teravainen each had two assists.

Curtis McElhinney stopped 21 shots for the Hurricanes, who have vaulted into playoff contention by earning 41 points since Dec. 30. They have won four straight and improved to 13-3-1 in their last 17 games.

Vince Dunn had a goal and an assist, with Oskar Sundqvist deflecting in one of his shots, and Robert Thomas had two assists for the Blues — who have been just as hot, with 40 points since Jan. 1. St. Louis entered 13-1-1 in its previous 15.

Capitals 3, Islanders 1: Alex Ovechkin became the first player in NHL history with 10 seasons of 45 goals or more, scoring in his team's three-goal third period as visiting Washington rallied past New York.

Jakub Vrana and T.J. Oshie also had goals, Braden Holtby stopped 20 shots and the Capitals extended their winning streak to three while tying the Islanders for first place in the Metropolitan Division.

Sabres 4, Penguins 3 (OT): Conor Sheary scored his second goal of the game with 49 seconds on the clock in overtime to lift host Buffalo over Pittsburgh.

Sheary, acquired from Pittsburgh in a trade last June, also assisted on Brandon Montour's goal that tied the game with 2:32 left in regulation. Jack Eichel scored and Linus Ullmark stopped 41 shots for the Sabres, who improved to 2-5-1 in their past eight.

Jets 5, Predators 3: Kevin Hayes scored his first goal with his new team and added

two assists as host Winnipeg erased a two-goal deficit to beat Nashville.

Blake Wheeler and Mark Scheifele also had a goal and two assists apiece, and Kyle Connor and Tyler Myers had the other goals for Winnipeg. The Jets moved ahead of Nashville atop the Central Division standings with the victory.

Sharks 4, Avalanche 3: Marcus Sorensen scored two goals in his return from injury and Joe Pavelski added his 36th of the season to lead host San Jose over Colorado.

Sorensen missed the final two games of San Jose's road trip after taking a puck to the face last Saturday at Columbus, but thrived on a line with newly acquired Gustav Nyquist and Joe Thornton during the first multigoal game of his career.

Golden Knights 3, Ducks 0: Marc-Andre Fleury made 34 saves for his NHL-leading seventh shutout and visiting Vegas swept the season series from Anaheim.

It was Fleury's 11th shutout for the Golden Knights and the 55th of his career. Two have come against the Ducks.

Canadiens 4, Rangers 2: Joel Armia had three goals for his first NHL hat trick and visiting Montreal beat New York.

Brendan Gallagher also scored and Carey Price stopped 28 shots for Montreal, which has won four of six. The Canadiens, who hold the first wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference playoff race, pulled five points behind Toronto for third place in the Atlantic Division.

Flyers 6, Devils 3: Travis Konecny and Sean Couturier scored in a 57-second span bridging the second and third periods, and visiting Philadelphia continued its playoff push with a victory over New Jersey.

Konecny and James van Riemsdyk scored twice, and Cam Talbot made 30 saves in becoming the NHL record-setting eighth goaltender for the Flyers this season.