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DOD: Cyberattacks against US escalating

WASHINGTON — Cyberattacks from Russia, China, North Korea and Iran are increasingly sophisticated and, until recently, were done with little concern for the consequences, the top Pentagon cyber leaders told a congressional committee on Wednesday.

Army Gen. Paul Nakasone, head of U.S. Cyber Command, laid out the escalating threats following a Navy review released this week that described significant breaches of naval systems and concluded that the service is losing the cyber war.

Speaking during a subcommittee hearing, Nakasone said the U.S. is now prepared to use cyberoperations more aggressively to strike back, as the nation faces growing cyberattacks and threats of interference in the 2020 presidential elections.

He said the military learned a lot working with other government agencies to thwart Russian interference in the 2018 midterm elections, and the focus now has turned to the next election cycle.

The Navy underscored cyber threats from Russia and China that have plagued the U.S. government and its contractors for more than a decade.

From The Associated Press

Consolidation of commissaries, exchanges gains DOD support

BY JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

A key Defense Department office is recommending that the military's exchange stores and commissary system be consolidated into one entity, and merger planning is underway.

Lisa Hershman, acting chief management officer for the Pentagon, said the business case for combining Army, Air Force, Marine and Navy exchanges with the Defense Commissary Agency has been approved.

In a March 1 memorandum, Hershman recommended that the Defense Department authorize a new agency or expand the mission of an existing component to "assume jurisdiction" over the DeCA and exchange systems.

The measure requires congressional backing since it would have to repeal a law that prohibits the consolidation of the military's commissary and exchange systems.

"The Department's intent is to improve community ser-

vices for our Service members and their families, improve support to commanders, and fulfill its fiduciary responsibility concerning appropriated and nonappropriated funds," Hershman wrote in the memo. A portion of exchange revenues is returned to DOD each year to subsidize quality-of-life programs.

Hershman also recommended that Marine Corps Community Services, which integrates functions such as Warfighter and Family Services and its Morale, Welfare and Recreation Program, be included under the newly formed authority.

Military reporter Tom Philpott reported in February that commissaries and exchanges would stay separate stores on base under the plan. A new central governance structure is the focus of plans with an aim at finding efficiencies. AAFES, Navy Exchange and Marine Corps Exchange storefronts would remain unchanged.

The recommendation comes following a special task force's

earlier call to replace the four current retail systems with one. Last May, DOD set up the task force to develop a business case for consolidation. Hershman directed the task force to continue organizational and operational planning to effect the recommended merger, according to the March 1 memorandum.

While the task force found an estimated \$700 million to \$1.3 billion in savings could be achieved over the first five years, exchange services warned of risks to the shopping benefit if estimated merger efficiencies turned out wrong, Philpott reported.

The on-post stores have faced declining numbers of active-duty servicemembers eligible to shop the exchanges and increased competition from online retailers. In November 2017, exchanges began allowing honorably discharged veterans to shop its online store tax-free, which AAFES expected to bolster its \$8.3 billion in annual sales by about \$200 million.

Shanahan: US won't do 'cost plus 50 percent' proposal

BY JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

Acting Defense Secretary Pat Shanahan said Thursday that the United States will not charge countries the cost of hosting American troops, rejecting an idea reportedly under consideration by the White House.

"We won't do 'cost plus 50 percent,'" Shanahan told lawmakers during a Senate Armed Services Committee budget

hearing.

Last week, reports emerged that President Donald Trump was interested in charging allies such as Japan, South Korea and Germany the full cost of basing troops in their respective countries. In addition, a 50 percent premium could be tacked on for the privilege of American protection, Bloomberg reported.

Since then, numerous lawmakers have blasted the idea amid concerns it would drive

away allies. Critics also accused Trump of misunderstanding the role of U.S. bases in places such as Germany, where assets such as Ramstein Air Base help project Europe, but also regions beyond the continent.

However, Shanahan said reports of charging allies were false.

"We are not going to run a business," he said. "We're not going to run a charity."

For Trump, getting allies to pay more money for defense

has been a long-standing priority. In particular, he has blasted NATO member states for falling short of an alliance pledge to dedicate 2 percent of their Gross Domestic Product to military matters.

"The important part is that people pay their fair share, and payment comes in lots of different forms," Shanahan said. "But, at the end of the day, people need to carry their fair share. ... but it is not about cost plus 50 percent."

Lawmakers debate future of damaged Tyndall and Lejeune

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — House lawmakers on Wednesday questioned whether Tyndall Air Force Base and Camp Lejeune should be rebuilt after both military bases were devastated last year by hurricanes.

“It is in harm’s way now. It has been in the past and it will be in the future,” Rep. John Garamendi, D-Calif., chairman of the House Armed Services Committee subpanel on readiness, said about Tyndall. “And the question that this committee is asking — and we will expect an answer from the Air Force — does it make any sense to rebuild at that place?”

The congressman acknowledged there are important reasons why Tyndall, which was severely damaged by Hurricane Michael in October, is located along the northwestern coast of Florida about 9 miles outside of Panama City. Those reasons include an offshore exercise testing range.

“But we’re going to ask the very, very hard question about just how much is going to be

done at that base. And similarly with Camp Lejeune,” Garamendi said during a hearing to discuss the resiliency of military bases to climate change as well as severe weather such as hurricanes, tornadoes and wildfires. “Are there other places that certain parts of the mission or all of the mission should be conducted?”

Camp Lejeune, a Marine Corps base located on the North Carolina coast, along with Marine Corps Air Stations New River and Cherry Point were devastated by severe flooding after Hurricane Florence hit the region in September.

Last month, Lt. Gen. Michael Rocco, the Marine Corps’ deputy commandant for manpower and reserve affairs, told the Senate Armed Services Committee subpanel on personnel that almost 500 buildings on the base cannot be occupied due to damage from the storm.

If the bases need to be rebuilt where they are, Garamendi said, “The requirement will be that [they] be built to maximum resiliency given the threats that exist there.”

That requirement would

also apply for all new military construction or improvement projects around the world, he added.

Rep. Chrissy Houlahan, D-Pa., said she did some field training at Tyndall when she was in the Air Force. She questioned whether the climate in Florida was conducive to training given that servicemembers often lose training days due to the heat.

“Should we be more proactive in the sense of not maybe placing training bases in the Panhandle of Florida?” Houlahan asked. “And maybe putting them somewhere where the weather may be more temperate and more realistic. More days available for training.”

“I think we are going to have to look at that,” replied David Titley, a retired Navy rear admiral who was one of three witnesses speaking at the hearing. “And I know this becomes incredibly contentious, right? Because that sounds like a four-letter word starting with ‘B,’” referring to the process of Base Realignment and Closure, or BRAC.

Destroyer rescues migrants near Fla.

The Virginian-Pilot

NORFOLK, Va. — A Norfolk-based destroyer rescued 26 Cubans who were attempting to illegally immigrate to the United States last week when their sailboat became distressed about 48 miles south of the Florida Keys, according to the military.

The USS James E. Williams was conducting routine operations March 8 when it received a distress signal from a good Samaritan boater who spotted the 30-foot wooden sailboat having problems, the Coast Guard said.

Once the destroyer arrived, a small crew was sent over to the vessel. The Navy said some of the passengers reported not feeling well and were provided bottled water before they were transferred to a Coast Guard vessel.

The Coast Guard said 25 of the Cubans were repatriated to Cuba on Tuesday, while one was transferred to U.S. Customs and Border Patrol for further investigation and possible prosecution.

Senators query costs, logistics of Space Force

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Two key senators questioned top Air Force officials Wednesday about the need for a Space Force, expressing skepticism about the use of \$2 billion during the next five years to build a sixth military service.

Creating the Space Force would just add red tape to an already bloated Pentagon bureaucracy, Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., said during a hearing on Capitol Hill to examine the Air

Force’s proposed fiscal year 2020 budget. The Air Force budget includes \$72.4 million to establish a Space Force headquarters within the Air Force Department, including a new four-star general who would lead the organization and sit on the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

“We ought to be asking ourselves, are we just dazzled by this concept of a Space Force?” asked Durbin, the ranking member on the Senate subcommittee on defense appropriations. “Is this going to make us safer? Would \$2 billion spent on

new equipment, better equipment, new training for those who actually operate the equipment, be a better investment in national defense than a Space Force? We have the responsibility, along with the Armed Services Committee, to ask those questions.”

The subcommittee’s chairman, Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Ala., signaled he too had questions about the need to build the new service that President Donald Trump has championed.

Space Force funding is just a fraction of the Pentagon’s proposal for 2020 space funding. The Defense Department requested \$14 billion for space functions, a 17 percent boost from 2019 space funding enacted by Congress. That money would pay for the development of improved space-based communications and missile-detection systems and also would fund four space launches for national security purposes next year and the emplacement of an advanced GPS III satellite.

Guardman facing new accusations after trip

New York Daily News

A soldier accused of driving an armored military vehicle off a Virginia National Guard base recently took an unauthorized trip to Iraq and researched how to make bombs, according to a report.

Joshua Yabut was able to shed a monitoring device during a series of flights that led him to Iraq on Jan. 26, according to court records obtained by TV station WTVR.

With the help of his military ID, Yabut flew from Norfolk to Florida a few days earlier, according to the station. He then allegedly made stops in Charlotte, Toronto, Iceland, Berlin and Istanbul before arriving in the Middle Eastern country.

He would return to Norfolk two days later, according to authorities.

His ankle monitor was still on his body when he left for Florida, according to WTVR, but later apparently vanished.

"It's both amazing and concerning," Blackstone Mayor Billy Coleburn told the station. "Not only did he fly, but he took a military flight.... you would think in the military alone you should be on a no-fly list."

Additionally, Yabut is accused of attempting to learn how to produce bombs, according to a Virginia prosecutor. Nottoway County Commonwealth's Attorney Terry Royall said in a motion that Yabut's "recent online activity reveals research into bomb-making," according to WTVR.

Court documents obtained by the station found photos that "indicated" Yabut had been looking to have Denatonium Benzoate, a bitter chemical compound, shipped from China.

"I don't think there's any question to that he presents a level of threat," Col. Matt Bristol, a retired Staff Judge Advocate for the United States Air Force, told the station.

Biggest USMC Exchange in Japan

By JAMES BOLINGER

Stars and Stripes

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION IWAKUNI, Japan — The largest Marine Corps Exchange in the world opened its doors here Thursday.

The project cost nearly \$70 million and was designed to give the approximately 15,000 Americans living at the remote base in southern Japan a little taste of home.

Planning for the Iwakuni exchange began in 2011, and it is twice the size of the original store, which was built in the late 1980s. It boasts 89,000 square feet of retail space and will stock 65,000 products, according to a statement posted on the MCAS Iwakuni Marine Community Services website.

"Having the largest exchange in the entire Marine Corps represents an exciting new era of modernization and transformation for the community here at MCAS Iwakuni," base commander Col. Rich-

ard Fuerst said in a statement emailed Wednesday to Stars and Stripes. "I'm proud of all the hard work, coordination and synergy that went into the planning and building processes, and, now that it's finished, I hope that our base community enjoys all of the new amenities and brands that we couldn't offer at the old exchange."

The government of Japan picked up most of the cost to build the new exchange, Fuerst said.

The new exchange includes an expanded military clothing sales department with uniform items for Marines and sailors. Additionally, the civilian clothing, cosmetics, fitness, outdoor and electronics departments have been greatly expanded. It also includes an extra-large Marine Mart, which is similar to a stateside convenience store.

"It reminds me of stores back home," said Lance Cpl. Christopher Clapham, of Marine Aerial Refueler Transport

Squadron 152. "I really like the increased variety of different products. It's like visiting a Walmart or Target stateside."

The state-of-the-art facility is centrally located on the installation. It is within walking distance of the commissary and other support facilities, such as the food court, theater, club and library, which means residents can easily get all their shopping done in a single trip.

"The positivity and approving feedback we've both received and are receiving are proof positive for these new products and services," Fuerst said. "I'm elated that after all the hard work and effort we are able to do this for our Marines, Sailors, civilians and their families."

Iwakuni, one of the largest air bases in the Pacific, is home to Marine Aircraft Group 12, the Navy's Carrier Air Wing 5 and the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force Fleet Air Wing 31.

Officer with Special Operations Group charged with multiple counts of rape

(Fort Walton Beach)
Northwest Florida Daily News

EGLIN Air Force Base, Fla. — An officer with the 919th Special Operations Group, an Air Force Reserve unit headquartered at Duke Field near Crestview, has been charged with multiple counts of sexually assaulting a female senior airman while deployed to Uganda two years ago, according to a "charge sheet" provided by Eglin Air Force Base's public affairs unit and online reporting in the Air Force Times newspaper.

Air Force Reserve Lt. Col. Michael B. Black, a C-145A Skytruck pilot, is alleged to have raped the female senior airman on two occasions, once on or around April 28 or 29,

2017, and a second time between May 1 and 3, 2017, according to the charge sheet.

Additionally, Black is charged with digitally penetrating the senior airman without her consent sometime between April 28 and 29, 2017. In each instance, Black penetrated the victim without her consent, according to the charge sheet.

A court-martial on the charges is scheduled May 6-10 at Eglin.

"Any allegations of sexual assault are taken seriously by leaders at all levels in our unit," Lt. Col. James Wilson, a spokesman for the 919th Special Operations Wing, said in a Wednesday statement to Air Force Times. "As with any case that is pending trial, the member is considered innocent until

proven guilty."

The alleged acts by Black are a violation of Article 120 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, which covers a range of sex crimes. Sanctions for violating Article 120 can include dishonorable discharge, mandatory registration as a sex offender and some number of years in prison.

According to the Air Force Times report, Black was working as a combat aviation adviser, who assists in special operations activities in coordination with foreign aviation forces, in Uganda.

He will continue working with the unit until court-martial proceedings begin, the 919th SOW told Air Force Times.

'Bomb cyclone' storm barrels into Midwest

Associated Press

LONGMONT, Colo. — National Guard troops used specialized vehicles with tank-like treads to rescue stranded drivers in Colorado in the wake of a massive late winter storm that unleashed heavy rain and snow on parts of the Midwest plains early Thursday.

South Dakota's governor closed all state offices Thursday as the blizzard conditions moved in, while wind, blowing snow and snow-packed roadways also made travel treacherous in western Nebraska. Heavy rain caused flooding in eastern parts of both states and in Iowa.

Wednesday's blizzard in Colorado caused widespread power outages, forced the cancellation of hundreds of flights and wreaked

havoc on roadways as drivers became overwhelmed by blinding snow. A wind gust clocked in at 97 mph in Colorado Springs.

The storm also contributed to the death of Cpl. Daniel Groves, a Colorado State Patrol officer who was hit and killed by a car as he helped another driver who had slid off Interstate 76 near Denver.

"It is a tragic reminder that people's lives are at stake," said Shoshana Lew, head of the Colorado Department of Transportation. "The best place to be is at home and off the roads."

About 200 vehicles were disabled on Interstate 25 near Colorado Springs, and many more drivers were being rescued on secondary roads, said Kyle Lester with the transportation department's Division of Highway Maintenance.

The window-rattling storm brought blizzards, floods and a tornado across more than 25 states Wednesday, stretching from the northern Rocky Mountains to Texas and beyond.

"This is a very epic cyclone," said Greg Carbin, chief of forecast operations for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Weather Prediction Center. "We're looking at something that will go down in the history books."

Scores of motorists took refuge at truck stops in eastern Wyoming while blowing snow forced portions of major highways to close in Colorado, Nebraska and South Dakota. Meanwhile, hundreds of flights were canceled at Denver International Airport, and nearly 40 were grounded in Colorado Springs.

GOP senators poised to block border declaration

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Republican-led Senate is set to deal President Donald Trump a rebuke on his declaration of a national emergency at the Mexican border, with the only remaining question how many GOP senators will join Democrats in defying him.

Republicans were predicting that Thursday's showdown vote would result in Congress sending Trump a resolution blocking the border emergency he proclaimed last month to steer an extra \$3.6 billion to building border barriers.

Since the Democratic-controlled House approved the measure last month, the Senate vote would force Trump to use a veto to

protect his presidential campaign's "Build the Wall" mantra over objections from his own party.

"It was called 'Turn out the lights, the party's over,'" said Sen. John Kennedy, R-La., recalling a favorite refrain of "Monday Night Football" announcers when a game was out of reach. "Well, that's appropriate right now."

Trump tweeted early Thursday about "the big National Emergency vote today" in the Senate, saying, "I am prepared to veto, if necessary," and called the situation at the border "a National Security and Humanitarian Nightmare."

Senate passage of the resolution was all but ordained Wednesday after the collapse of efforts by the White House and GOP

senators to reach compromise on separate legislation by Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, limiting presidents' powers to declare emergencies in the future.

Republican lawmakers had hoped a deal on that measure would have helped more of them to back Trump's border emergency in Thursday's vote. Instead, several Republicans are being boxed into a thorny dilemma: Defy Trump and the conservative voters who back him passionately, or assent to what many lawmakers from both parties consider a dubious and dangerous expansion of presidential authority.

With Republicans controlling the Senate 53-47, just four GOP defections would be enough to approve the resolution canceling Trump's border emergency.

Senate votes to defy Trump on Yemen; veto threatened

Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — The Senate voted to withdraw U.S. support for the Saudi-led conflict in Yemen as some Republicans joined Democrats in a rebuke of President Donald Trump over his response to the killing of columnist Jamal Khashoggi. The administration has threatened a veto.

The resolution, approved 54-46 on Wednesday, would direct the president to remove U.S. armed forces from hostilities in or affecting that country within 30 days unless authorized by Congress. The House, which adopted a slightly different version in February, is expected to take up the Senate version in the coming weeks.

The action came a day before Thursday's scheduled Senate vote on a House-passed resolution to block Trump's national emergency declaration to pay for a wall on the border with Mexico. That resolution is likely to receive enough Republican votes to pass, and Trump has said he will also veto it.

These would be the first vetoes of Trump's presidency, as Republicans in Congress have generally been reluctant to oppose the president. Yet neither measure appears to have enough Republican support to override a veto, in part because the president remains popular with GOP voters.

Yemen resolution co-sponsor Bernie Sanders, of Vermont, noted that the Senate

also approved the measure in December, but the House — then controlled by Republicans — didn't take it up.

"Yemen is now experiencing the worst humanitarian disaster on the planet" as a result of the war, Sanders, who is seeking the Democratic presidential nomination, said on the Senate floor shortly before the vote. "And today, equally important, we can finally begin the process of reasserting Congress' responsibility over war-making."

The Pentagon in November yielded to criticism and stopped providing midair refueling for planes in the Saudi-led coalition, but it continues to offer targeting intelligence.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man makes sandwich before swiping \$20

MI TRAVERSE CITY — Authorities are looking for a man who made his own sandwich at a Subway shop in northern Michigan, rang up orders for customers and swiped \$20 from the cash register.

The Grand Traverse County Sheriff's Office said the man told workers Saturday at the Subway inside a Walmart in Traverse City that he was an employee at another area Subway and asked to make his own sandwich.

The workers told him no, but he allegedly walked behind the counter and made the sandwich anyway.

The sheriff's office said the man rang up several customers' orders and took \$20 before leaving.

Judge scolds man for laughing at violation

TN MARYVILLE — A man accused of dipping his testicles in salsa that a customer ordered online nearly derailed his plea deal with prosecutors when he laughed in court.

The Knoxville News Sentinel reported Howard Matthew Webb, 31, pleaded guilty Tuesday to an amended charge of misdemeanor assault/offensive touching.

He apparently chuckled after entering his plea and was scolded by Blount County General Sessions Court Judge Robert Headrick.

The judge told Webb the situation is abhorrent and that he found nothing about it cute or funny.

Webb was arrested last month and initially charged with felony adulteration of food.

A delivery driver allegedly recorded it and posted a video online, saying it was retribution for an 89-cent tip for an almost 30-minute drive.

Helo rescues 3 men trapped on ice floe

AK NOME — Three men were rescued from an ice floe that broke loose from shore ice outside Nome.

Alaska State Troopers said John Culp Jr., 43; James Gibson, 33; and Phillip Rode, 45, were plucked off the ice by helicopter.

The ice broke off the main ice shelf along a beach and drifted slowly into the Bering Sea.

Nome Search and Rescue at the time was responding to a person injured on a snowmobile but coordinated the rescue of the men on the ice.

No one was injured.

Police department dealing with mold

NH PORTSMOUTH — A New Hampshire police department is dealing with mold and leaks, and recently lost a lobby door in 70 mph wind.

Consultants have been studying problems at the Portsmouth Police Department since last year. The department has also been dealing with rats since 2014.

The Portsmouth Herald reported Police Commissioner Stefany Shaheen said "there's a lot of work to be done" to improve their headquarters, located in an old hospital.

Officials said ceiling tiles, carpet, windows and wallpaper were removed and replaced in a captain's office due to mold.

A draft report also recommends that ceiling tile on the first floor should be replaced

because it has been the "rat run" for the majority of rats caught."

After 3 weeks, blind dog found in pasture

IL ALEDO — A blind dog named Callie was found more than three weeks after she dashed from her western Illinois home.

Callie survived snow, freezing rain and extremely cold temperatures since Feb. 13. She lost 15 pounds but otherwise appears OK.

Her owner, Jan Pearson, of Aledo, said she didn't believe she'd see the dog again.

A teenager on his way to school spotted Callie on March 8 in a pasture, just 2 miles from Pearson's home in Mercer County.

Eli Trimble told the Quad-City Times that he caught the dog and then passed her to his mother. Robin Trimble contacted the owner, and they both had a good cry.

Agency spends \$18K defending \$200 fine

MS JACKSON — A state agency in Mississippi has spent nearly \$18,000 challenging a \$200 fine by another agency in a public document dispute.

The Clarion Ledger of Jackson reported the dispute involves Rep. Joel Bomgar and the Department of Public Safety.

Bomgar asked John Dowdy, with the Mississippi Bureau of narcotics, some questions about the state's drug policy.

Dowdy sent his answers to Public Safety Commissioner Marshall Fisher, who told Dowdy not to send the letter.

Bomgar complained to the Mississippi Ethics Commission, which fined two Public Safety

Department's attorneys \$100 each.

The agency is fighting the fines in court.

Man crashes stolen truck into naval base

WA PORT ORCHARD — Police said a Washington state man crashed a stolen truck at the entrance of a naval base where he was seeking refuge from bombs he believed were in the truck and at his home.

The Kitsap Sun reported that Joshua John Johannessen, 40, was charged with one count of first-degree robbery following the accident at Naval Base Kitsap-Bangor.

Police said Johannessen resisted arrest and appeared to be under the influence of a stimulant and suffering mental distress.

Stolen Disney goods found in traffic stop

CA BAKERSFIELD — The California Highway Patrol said an officer conducting a routine traffic stop found \$13,000 worth of stolen Disney merchandise.

The CHP said a Nissan Sentra was pulled over March 8 in Kern County after the driver failed to stop when approaching a school bus.

The officer learned the driver's license was suspended and then discovered hundreds of pins and other merchandise allegedly stolen from Disneyland.

Officials didn't immediately identify the motorist.

Authorities said the CHP has contacted Disneyland security and made arrangements to return the property.

From wire reports

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Reds' reliever tries outfield in experiment

Associated Press

GOODYEAR, Ariz. — Reliever Michael Lorenzen has begun the Cincinnati Reds' mound-to-outfield experiment, pitching one inning and then moving to center field Monday in a game against the Cleveland Indians.

It didn't take long for the ball to find him.

Lorenzen chased Jose Ramirez's leadoff double in the bottom of the sixth inning of a 5-5 tie, his biggest test during his first time in the outfield.

"It was fun," Lorenzen said. "I didn't necessarily get any fly balls but I had a couple hit to me.

"Hopefully, next time I get to

run one down."

The Reds are exploring options for replacing center fielder Billy Hamilton, who signed with the Royals. Lorenzen was a center fielder at Cal State Fullerton who also closed games on occasion. The Reds drafted him as a pitcher in 2013, and he has lobbied for a dual role in the majors.

He finally got his chance Monday.

Lorenzen came on to pitch the bottom of the fifth inning and retired all three Indians, two by strikeout.

Instead of heading off to ice his shoulder, he looked for his batting helmet. He faced Mike Clevinger and struck out

swinging, then replaced Nick Senzel in center field.

He started shading Ramirez, the first batter, toward right field, then moved back the other way. Ramirez hit the ball to the gap in right for a double.

"The game knows," Lorenzen said. "It was funny because I was actually shaded to right center. I ended up moving into left center."

In the seventh inning, Cleveland's Eric Stamets went from first to third on a single to center. Lorenzen fielded the ball and threw to third too late.

"I'd rather err on the side of overdoing it, that's my personality," Lorenzen said.

Lorenzen left after his two

innings in the outfield.

First-year manager David Bell likes the option of using Lorenzen in center. After getting him ready to pitch during the first part of camp, Bell finally gave him a chance to play center.

Lorenzen's success as a hitter has inspired Bell to try the unusual, two-position arrangement.

Last season, Lorenzen went 4-2 with a 3.11 ERA and one save in 42 relief appearances and three starts.

He also batted .290 and led major league pitchers with four homers — including one grand slam — and 10 RBIs in 31 at-bats.

Alonso's status gets union's attention

Associated Press

PORT ST. LUCIE, Fla. — Pete Alonso is hitting .406 at spring training and leads the Mets with three home runs. Yet, if New York keeps him in the minor leagues for the first 15 days of the season, his eligibility for free agency would be pushed back a year until after the 2025 season.

"Seeing what players are going through where their service time is being manipulated, on the front end and/or in the middle, is a concern, has been a concern and will continue to be a concern," union head Tony Clark said after meeting with the Mets.

Alonso nearly homered again Wednesday, but wind knocked down his fourth-inning drive off Houston's Gerrit Cole. Alonso had 36 homers and 119 RBIs at Double-A and Triple-A last season.

"What I wanted to do at the beginning of camp was just force their hands," the Tampa native said. "I wanted to work as hard as I could every single day and play as well as I possibly could. I want them to be

able to make that decision easily based off my performance. With my expectations of myself, I'm happy with how I'm playing right now."

Clark, a former All-Star first baseman and a former Met, hopes Alonso starts the season in the major leagues.

"I hope that Pete continues to do what Pete has always done, and I hope that he does have opportunity to break [with] the squad as a result of the production that he's authored in spring training," Clark said.

Kris Bryant was brought up by the Chicago Cubs in 2015 when he was left one day short of being eligible for free agency after the 2020 season. The players' association filed a grievance but the case has not been tried.

Teams say they have a complete right to decide when players are ready for the major leagues.

"We believe it's hurting the industry," Clark said. "Being able to say that you have the best players on the field at all times is something you'd like to be able to say. In the current climate, you can't say that."

Japan trip helped Astros land Chirinos

Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — A trip to Japan helped Robinson Chirinos get to Houston.

Texas declined its \$4.5 million option on the catcher shortly before the 34-year-old traveled to Japan last November with a big league all-star team.

He developed a friendship with the squad's pitching coach, Houston's Brent Strom. Less than a month later, the Astros agreed to a \$5.75 million, one-year contract.

"When I signed, he called me and he was saying, 'I told you you were coming here,'" Chirinos said of Strom.

During the Japan trip, Chirinos liked the way Strom worked to improve pitchers who weren't even on his major league team.

"It showed a lot of the kind of person he is," Chirinos said. "He cared about the pitchers."

Meanwhile, Strom relayed information about Chirinos' character to his bosses.

"Just the personality and the presence, not necessarily the catching," Houston manager A.J. Hinch said.

Catchers Brian McCann and Evan Gattis had left the Astros as free agents.

Chirinos impressed against Houston last year, hitting three of his 18 home runs against the Astros.

"He's got a big swing. He likes hitting in our ballpark," Hinch said. "I hope he likes hitting against the opponent in our ballpark as much he liked hitting against us."

Chirinos was 5-for-15 in spring training with one home run entering Tuesday. He has been focused on developing relationships with Houston's pitchers.

"I think his openness to listening is very impressive," said Hinch, a former major league catcher.

"I know it sounds like it should be common, but for someone who's been in the league it's easy to feel like you know everything and he gives off no impression that he knows everything, and I can appreciate that."

Chirinos has altered the way he sets up behind the plate and presents his target.

MLB gets jump on labor deal

Associated Press

NEW YORK—Major League Baseball and its players' union reached an unprecedented agreement to discuss renegotiating their labor contract that has three seasons remaining.

The agreement announced Thursday eliminates all trades from July 31 through the end of the season starting this year, though players who clear outright waivers can still be claimed and will be eligible for the postseason if they are in the organization before Sept. 1.

Mound visits without pitching changes will be cut from six to five. MLB intends to cut half-inning breaks to 2 minutes this year, down from 2:05 for most games and 2:25 for nationally televised games.

Fan voting for the All-Star Game will be divided into two rounds, with the top three vote-getters advancing for all positions except the outfield, for which six will move on. The top three voter-getters at each position will receive bonuses, which will not count against a team's luxury tax payroll. Home Run Derby prize money will be increased to \$2.5 million, including \$1 million for the winner.

Starting in 2020, the active roster limit will increase by one to 26 from opening day through Aug. 31 and will drop from 40 to 28 through the end of the regular season. A joint player-management committee will determine the limit of pitchers. In addition, position players will be prohibited from pitching through the ninth inning unless the player's team is winning or losing by six or more runs when he takes the mound.

The injured list and option recall minimum period for pitchers will increase from 10 days to 15 in 2020.

In addition, starting in 2020 all pitchers must face at least three batters or end a half-inning, unless injured.

Colgate wins Patriot League title

Associated Press

HAMILTON, N.Y. — Colgate survived Hurricane Mackenzie and now the Raiders are in the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 1996.

Jordan Burns had a career-high 35 points and Will Rayman added 18 to lead top-seeded Colgate to a 94-80 victory over No. 2 Bucknell in the championship game of the Patriot League Tournament on Wednesday night.

It was the 11th straight victory for the Raiders (24-10), a school record.

"I'm thrilled to be their coach and to have this win go down in Colgate history," Colgate coach Matt Langel said. "For me it means a lot. Obviously, we don't have a ton of history and tradition. I'm really proud of the program that we've built."

"This isn't a flash in the pan. We lost in the championship game a year ago. A couple of years ago we lost in the semifinals. This culture isn't going away."

Still, it wasn't easy.

Colgate's 43-30 halftime lead had evaporated to a mere two points at 50-48 with just under 16 minutes to go, thanks to an incredible shooting display by Bison senior guard Kimbal Mackenzie. He had 16 of his team's first 18 points after intermission, including 4-for-4 from beyond the arc.

Playing before a frenzied, sold-out, standing-room crowd at tiny Cotterell Court, the Raiders kept their composure.

"Kimbal Mackenzie's as tough of a competitor as there is. You know he's not going to go down without a fight, and he found a way to get his team right back into the game," Langel said. "I have to credit our guys for really staying unflap-

pable. We stuck to our plan of playing tough and playing together and taking what the defense gives you."

The victory avenged Colgate's championship game loss a year ago at Bucknell. The Bison won that matchup 83-54.

"It doesn't feel good when there's a guy that nobody can guard," Burns said. "Our coach, his message is always, 'Weather the storm. When things are bad, stick together.' We weren't really rattled. You get a little disheartened when someone is hitting shots like that, but we knew how hard we worked to get to this moment and we weren't going to give it up."

Rapolas Ivanauskas added 12 points for the Raiders, whose 24 wins also are a school record.

Mackenzie led Bucknell (21-12) with 23 points. Nate Sestina had 21 before fouling out.

"I was just playing in the flow, just taking the opportunities I had, nothing different than any other way I'd approach the game," Mackenzie said. "I just happened to be open a couple of times. You just get into your groove. The net gets a little bigger. It's hard to describe."

Burns hit 6 of 9 from three-point range and 10 of 16 overall. Colgate was 12-for-21 on threes and 30-for-52 from the field for 58 percent.

Burns downplayed his memorable night for Colgate.

"For us it's whoever gets the open shot," he said. "I just happened to be the guy that was knocking down shots. It just happened to be me tonight. It was my team having the confidence in me to take that shot."

"The goal was to get back to this game and have it here and win it."

Top-seeded VCU seeking respect

Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. — VCU coach Mike Rhoades has never had to look far this season for a way to motivate the Rams.

He routinely reminds his players that they were picked to finish in the middle of the Atlantic 10 standings.

The Rams (25-6, 16-2 A-10) not only won the league regular season title, they became first team to win 16 league games since George Washington in 2005-06. They head into this week's conference tournament at the Barclays Center as the top seed, but still with plenty of doubters.

"There are a lot of people still not picking us to win the tournament," said Rhoades, who on Tuesday was voted the

league's coach of the year in just his second season at VCU. "So be it. I think we've had an approach all year long of ... we have to be who we are and one thing we talked about is being the hunters all the time."

The Rams will be the hunted in New York, primarily as the lone A-10 team likely to get selected for the NCAA Tournament without cutting down the championship nets on Sunday. But "the underdog thing," as guard Marcus Evans describes it, is something they will carry with them into their first game Friday.

"We've embraced the fact that people have underestimated us," said Evans, an All A-10 first-team selection who followed Rhoades from Rice when

he was hired at VCU two years ago. "It's allowed us to get back to, like coach Rhoades says, the hunter's mentality that VCU had for so many years."

Along with a return to the defensive style known as 'havoc' that was so integral to the Rams' run from the First Four to the Final Four in 2011, VCU has also vastly improved its half-court defense. The Rams force an average or 16.4 turnovers per game while allowing an average of just 61.2 points.

The Rams have won their last 12 games, and Evans hopes there's more surprises to come before their season is over.

"If we do what we've been doing so far this year," he said, "we put ourselves in a great position to cut down some nets."

NBA roundup

Cousins leads Warriors past Rockets

Associated Press

HOUSTON — In his first season with the Golden State Warriors, DeMarcus Cousins hasn't quite adjusted to the level of scrutiny and interest that comes with playing for the defending back-to-back NBA champions.

And after his best game of the season on Wednesday night in a win over the Houston Rockets, Cousins likened the media frenzy surrounding the team to a soap opera his grandmother watched every day when he was a child.

"I'm sure y'all have heard of it — 'As the World Turns.' She called it her stories. I used to watch it with her and every episode it was something," he said. "That's what this has turned into — 'As the World Turns.'"

So does Cousins, who scored a season-high 27 points to help end Houston's nine-game winning streak with a 106-104 win, want to star in the basketball version of the show?

"No I don't," he said. "I play basketball. I don't look for the drama or stories or anything

like that. I just want to go play basketball."

Some have wondered if Cousins is a good fit with this fast-paced team and there have been some growing pains as he's been worked into the team after missing the first 47 games this season recovering from an Achilles' tendon injury.

But on Wednesday, with Kevin Durant out with an ankle injury, Cousins shined. He added eight rebounds and a season-best seven assists as Houston searched, without success, for ways to stop him. There were times the Rockets switched on defense and left much smaller players attempting to guard the 6-foot-11, 270-pound player. But big or small, Cousins didn't care who was on him.

"I don't think anybody can stop me one-on-one period," he said.

Klay Thompson scored 30 points to allow the Warriors to bounce back after a loss to Phoenix on Sunday, and avoided being swept by Houston after the Rockets won the first three meetings this season.

Thunder 108, Nets 96: Russell Westbrook scored 31 points in his 26th triple-double of the season as host Oklahoma City beat Brooklyn.

Westbrook added 12 rebounds and 11 assists for the 130th triple-double of his career.

Paul George scored 25 points and Jerami Grant added 15 for the Thunder, looking to secure home-court advantage in the first round of the playoffs.

Heat 108, Pistons 74: Justise Winslow scored 16 points and host Miami opened the second half with a 21-0 run on the way to an easy win over Detroit.

It was the biggest spurt and largest victory margin this season for the Heat, who are trying to hang on in the Eastern Conference playoff race. Dion Waiters scored 14 points and Dwyane Wade had 11.

Wizards 100, Magic 90: Bradley Beal scored 23 points, Thomas Bryant had 21 points and 10 rebounds, and host Washington made up a little ground in the Eastern Conference playoff race with a win over Orlando.

Jabari Parker added eight of his 19 points in the fourth quarter to help the 11th-place Wizards move within 1½ games of the ninth-place Magic. Washington improved to 2-0 on its five-game homestand and remained 3½ games behind Miami for the final postseason spot.

Jazz 114, Suns 97: Donovan Mitchell scored 16 of his 26 points in the second half to lead Utah to a win at Phoenix.

Derrick Favors and Rudy Gobert added 18 points apiece for the Jazz. Gobert also grabbed 20 rebounds as Utah ended a two-game skid and pulled into a tie with the Los Angeles Clippers for the seventh playoff seed in the Western Conference.

Hawks 132, Grizzlies 111: John Collins had 27 points and 12 rebounds, Trae Young added 22 points and host Atlanta snapped Memphis' three-game winning streak.

It marked the most points that the Grizzlies, who lead the NBA in scoring defense, have allowed this season.

NHL roundup

Blackhawks take 5-goal lead to hold off Maple Leafs

Associated Press

TORONTO — Brendan Perlini had a goal and two assists, and the Chicago Blackhawks held off a furious Toronto comeback to beat the Maple Leafs 5-4 on Wednesday night.

Brandon Saad had a goal and an assist, and Duncan Keith, Dominik Kahun and Alex DeBrincat also scored as Chicago jumped out to a 5-0 lead before holding on for the win. Dylan Strome added two assists for the Blackhawks, who have won four straight and crept within four points of the Arizona Coyotes for the second wild card in the Western Conference.

Corey Crawford stopped 17 of 18 shots through two periods before leaving the game due to illness. Colin Delia had 26 saves — all in the third.

Auston Matthews, Morgan Rielly and Andreas Johnsson each had a goal and an assist for Toronto.

Devils 6, Oilers 3: Kenny Agostino, Damon Severson and Kevin Rooney each had a goal and an assist as visiting New Jersey snapped a season-high seven-game losing streak.

Travis Zajac, John Quenneville and Blake Coleman also scored for the Devils, and Cory Schneider stopped 36 shots.

Sam Gagner, Alex Chiasson and Matt Benning had goals for the Oilers, who have lost two of their last three games. Mikko Koskinen gave up four goals on 18 shots before he was replaced midway through the third. Anthony Stolarz came on and finished with 15 saves on 17 shots.

Zajac showed some deft hands in front as he tied the score 2-2 with 19 seconds left in the first period.

The Devils then scored the first three goals of the second to take control of the game.

Canucks 4, Rangers 1: Tyler Motte scored two goals 11 seconds apart midway through

the second period, leading host Vancouver past the New York Rangers.

Brock Boeser and Jake Virtanen also scored for the Canucks, and Jacob Markstrom stopped 21 shots.

Pavel Buchnevich had a power-play goal for the Rangers. Henrik Lundqvist finished with 24 saves but was denied his 450th win.

New York became the first team this season to lose two players to misconducts in a game after forwards Chris Kreider and Brendan Lemieux were both ejected in the second period.