

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Suspects in US deaths in Syria captured

Staff and wire reports

BAGHOUZ, Syria — U.S.-backed Syrian forces captured Islamic State fighters believed to have been involved in the January blast that killed four Americans — the deadliest assault on U.S. troops in Syria since American forces entered the country in 2015, a spokesman said.

Navy Chief Petty Officer Shannon M. Kent, 35, of Pine Plains, N.Y.; Army Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jonathan R. Farmer, 37, of Boynton Beach, Fla.; Defense Intelligence Agency civilian Scott A. Wirtz, 42, of St. Louis; and interpreter Ghadir Taher, 27, of East Point, Ga., were among 16 people killed by a suicide bomber at a

restaurant in Manbij in northern Syria.

The suspects were captured Tuesday when U.S.-backed forces took control of an ISIS encampment in the village of Baghouz, the last sliver of territory in Syria held by the extremists, Mustafa Bali, the spokesman for the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, said in a Twitter post. He did not elaborate on the number of suspects.

The servicemembers were at a restaurant near a crowded market for a meeting with local leaders, U.S. Central Command said after the January attack. Members of the Manbij Military Council, which has controlled the city since it was liberated from ISIS in mid-2016, were

also reportedly among the other dozen people killed in the blast.

Kent, who left a husband and two sons, was the first female U.S. servicemember killed in action since December 2015 and the first killed in action in the anti-ISIS campaign. She was a cryptologist and cancer survivor who was slated to start a graduate program this year.

Farmer, whose survivors include his wife and four children, had served in the 5th Special Forces Group for most of his nearly 14-year career and had served five combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Wirtz, a Navy veteran, is the first known Defense Department civilian killed in action in what has been called Operation Inherent Resolve since 2014.

He spent most of his Navy career from 1998 to 2005 assigned to the Coronado, Calif.-based SEAL Team 5, where he specialized as a sniper. He served combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan and also deployed to locations in Africa, the Philippines and South Korea, according to his mother.

Taher was born and raised in the Syrian capital of Damascus and became a naturalized citizen after she immigrated to the United States with her brother in 2001. She joined a company that provides linguists to the U.S. military after studying at Georgia State University.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

DOD releases list of projects at risk in wall funding plan

BY ROSE L. THAYER

Stars and Stripes

A child development center at Joint Base Andrews in Maryland, a middle school at Fort Campbell in Kentucky, and an addition to the ambulatory care center at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina are some of the hundreds of military construction projects at risk of losing funds to help build a wall along the U.S. border with Mexico.

More than a month after President Donald Trump declared a national emergency to contend with migration from Central America, the Pentagon on Monday released a list of projects that could be delayed to divert funding to build a southern border wall.

The 21-page list outlines \$12.9 billion for more than 400 projects approved by Congress dating back to fiscal year 2015 that had not been awarded contracts as of Dec. 31. The proj-

ects span the country, overseas and every branch of military service. A fact sheet provided with the list states no decisions have been made about which projects could lose funding.

The list was created in response to Trump's Feb. 15 declaration of a national emergency, ordering the use of up to \$3.6 billion in military construction funds to build a wall there. Since then, Pentagon officials have said they are working to identify projects that can be delayed to divert funds to the construction of the wall.

The Defense Department will use the following criteria to reduce the list to projects that could be delayed: It will eliminate projects that have contracts awarded and projects related to housing, barracks or dormitories, and it will look only at projects with award dates after Sept. 30, which ends the fiscal year.

Based on that criteria, Mark

Cancian, a senior adviser with the Washington think tank Center for Strategic and International Studies, said only about half the projects listed are at risk, leaving about \$6.5 billion to divert to the wall. Cancian said he doesn't see this sitting well with lawmakers.

"They've now alerted a large number of members of Congress that something in their district is vulnerable — and therefore, built a lot of opposition that's unnecessary," Cancian said Tuesday.

Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., released a statement Tuesday in response to the list because it includes \$55 million for facilities in her state.

"To be clear, Donald Trump is proposing stealing funding that Congress appropriated for critical national defense projects in Illinois and across the country in order to fund a vanity project that he promised Mexico would pay for," she said.

"This is a monumental waste of taxpayer dollars that is downright harmful to our nation."

The list became a heated topic last week during acting Defense Secretary Pat Shanahan's visit to Capitol Hill to discuss the proposed Pentagon budget. During a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing Thursday, senators grilled Shanahan about the list.

At the onset of the hearing, Shanahan said the list was not ready to share, but after further questioning, he promised Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., that he would deliver it by the end of that day. That did not happen.

Later on Thursday, the Senate voted to revoke the national emergency declaration, sending the bill to Trump's desk. Trump vetoed the bill Friday. Congress now plans to vote in each chamber to override the veto.

Stars and Stripes reporter Caitlin Kenney contributed to this report.

Firm to pay active-duty troops \$1.5M for wrongful evictions

BY NIKKI WENTLING
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A property management company in Virginia must pay nearly \$1.5 million to 127 servicemembers who were wrongfully evicted, the Justice Department announced Monday.

The Justice Department discovered PRG Real Estate Management had evicted tenants from 2006 to 2017 without disclosing to state courts that they were active-duty servicemembers, a violation of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act. The federal law protects servicemembers from getting evicted while on active duty and allows them to break rental

contracts when they deploy or are relocated.

Under a settlement reached with the Justice Department, the property management company must also pay \$35,000 to 10 servicemembers who were charged termination fees for breaking their leases early after they were given military orders. An additional \$62,000 will go to the federal government as a civil penalty, bringing the total to about \$1.6 million.

The settlement is the largest that a property management company has had to pay for breaking the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, the Justice Department said.

“The incredible sacrifices our servicemembers make

when they deploy and move frequently should never create financial or legal hardships for them,” G. Zachary Terwilliger, U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, said in a statement.

The servicemembers were tenants at Linkhorn Bay Apartments and The Courtyards of Chanticleer in Virginia Beach, the Hilton Village Townhomes and Heritage Trace Apartments in Newport News and Hyde Park Apartments and Ashton Creek Apartments in Chester.

An independent administrator will be tasked with locating the servicemembers who are eligible to receive portions of the settlement.

US-backed force takes ISIS camp in Syria

Associated Press

BAGHOUZ, Syria — U.S.-backed Syrian forces took control Tuesday of an encampment held by Islamic State in eastern Syria after dozens of militants surrendered overnight, a spokesman said.

The taking of the ISIS encampment was a major advance but not the final defeat of the group in Baghouz, the last village held by the extremists where they have been holding out for weeks under siege, according to Mustafa Bali, the spokesman for the Kurdish-led force known as the Syrian Democratic Forces.

An unknown number of militants still clung to a sliver of land about 650 feet by 650 feet, trapped between the Euphrates River and the encampment now held by the SDF, officials said.

The militants have been putting up a desperate fight, their notorious propaganda machine working even on the brink of collapse. On Monday, ISIS issued a video showing its militants furiously defending the encampment, a junkyard of wrecked cars, motorcycles and tents. In the footage, they shoot nonstop with AK-47s and M-16s. A group of children could be seen at one point amid the fighting.

“My Muslim brothers everywhere, we did our best. The rest is up to God,” a fighter said to the backdrop of black smoke rising from behind him.

The complete fall of Baghouz would mark the end of ISIS’ self-declared territorial “caliphate,” which at its height stretched across much of Syria and Iraq.

In an audio posted online Monday, ISIS spokesman Abu Hassan al-Muhajer issued his first message in six months, calling for revenge attacks by Muslims in Western countries in retaliation for the shooting attack on two New Zealand mosques that killed 50 people. He also ridiculed U.S. declarations of the defeat of ISIS, calling the claim of victory a “hallucination.”

Okinawa Marines compete for service’s top culinary award

BY CARLOS M. VAZQUEZ II
Stars and Stripes

CAMP KINSER, Okinawa — On the strength of a favorite Okinawan dish, members of Combat Logistics Regiment 37 are representing the III Marine Expeditionary Force at a competition for the Marine Corps’ top culinary award.

The Maj. Gen. W.P.T. Hill Memorial Awards for Food Service Excellence were established in 1985 with the aim of improving food service operations and identifying the best expeditionary dining facility in the Marine Corps. The award winners — I MEF and II MEF cooks are also competing — are expected to be named in early April and will be able to attend a ceremony in Chicago in May.

Food specialists of the 37th Regiment presented a “build your own” meal of Okinawa taco rice to judges and patrons on Thursday. It’s an island lunchtime staple of ground beef or chicken, lettuce, cheese and tomatoes served on top of rice.

The competition involved more than a meal; the regiment also had to build a field mess tent fitted with a kitchen, serving line, seating area and physical security. The team dedicated its expeditionary field kitchen, or EFK, to Pvt. Howard P.

Perry, who in 1942 became the first black to enlist in the Marine Corps. Construction started on Feb. 28, and builders overcame strong winds and heavy rains to finish the job.

On competition day, a three-person panel — two senior food-service specialists from Headquarters Marine Corps and a civilian representative from the National Restaurant Association — judged the regiment’s presentation. Servicemembers from various commands were invited to experience the field kitchen and taste the menu items.

Michael Pizzuto, a judge from the National Restaurant Association, said being a part of the judging panel held a special meaning for him. Okinawa was his father’s last duty station while serving in the Army during World War II.

This year’s competitors prepared the taco rice meal to highlight their connection with Okinawa, according to Col. Scott Johnson, commander of CLR 37. The Marines put their own spin on the menu’s side items, with names like “quarterdeck quesadillas,” “fire watch nachos” and “sea bag salad bar.”

Aside from judging the food quality and taste, the judges evaluated the entire process, from site layout, management and sanitation to food preparation, maintenance, storage and financial accounting.

Dutch prosecutors eye extremist motive in deadly tram shooting

Associated Press

UTRECHT, Netherlands — Investigators probing the deadly tram shooting in the Dutch city of Utrecht sharpened their focus Tuesday on a possible extremist motive, as judicial authorities revealed that the main suspect was released from jail this month and faces a rape trial in July.

The nature of the Monday's attack and a note found in a suspected getaway car suggest a possible terror motive, prosecutors said in a statement, but they add that other possible reasons also are being investigated.

"Based on the letter, we think he had a terroristic motive," police spokesman Joost Lanshage told The Associated Press. He declined to elaborate.

Speaking in parliament, anti-

Islam lawmaker Geert Wilders said the note expressed support for the suspect's "Muslim brothers."

Prosecutors also said investigations so far have not established any relationship at all between the main suspect, Gokmen Tanis, and the shooting victims.

Three people died: a 19-year-old woman from the neighboring town of Vianen, and two men aged 28 and 49 from Utrecht. Three others were seriously wounded and four more suffered minor injuries, according to prosecutors.

Tanis, 37, a man of Turkish descent, was being held on suspicion of "manslaughter with terrorist intent." He was arrested Monday evening after an hourslong manhunt that nearly paralyzed the Netherlands'

fourth-largest city and sent shockwaves through the nation. Police recovered a weapon when they arrested him.

In an unusual step, judicial authorities released details of Tanis' criminal past and said he was released from jail on March 1 and faces trial in July on a rape charge. A court had approved his release after he pledged to cooperate with authorities.

In the past, he was acquitted of manslaughter but convicted of illegal possession of a weapon and theft.

Wilders called on Justice Minister Ferd Grapperhaus to resign, saying that Tanis shouldn't have been released from jail. "You are politically responsible for this," Wilders said during a parliamentary debate. "You have to resign, get out of here."

FBI probed Cohen long before raid

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The FBI was investigating President Donald Trump's former personal attorney and fixer for nearly a year before agents raided his home and office, documents released Tuesday show.

The search warrant, while heavily redacted, offered new details about the federal inquiry of Michael Cohen's business dealings and the FBI raids of his Manhattan home and office.

It shows the federal inquiry into Cohen had been going on since July 2017 — far longer than had previously been known.

Lanny Davis, an attorney for Cohen, said the release of the search warrant "furthering his interest in continuing to cooperate and providing information and the truth about Donald Trump and The Trump Organization to law enforcement and Congress."

The FBI raided Cohen's Manhattan home and office last April, marking the first public sign of a criminal investigation that has threatened Trump's presidency and netted Cohen a three-year prison sentence for tax evasion and campaign finance violations. The feds, who also scoured Cohen's hotel room and safe deposit box, seized more than 4 million electronic and paper files in the searches, more than a dozen mobile devices and iPads, 20 external hard drives, flash drives and laptops.

Both Cohen and Trump cried foul over the raids, with Cohen's attorney at the time calling them "completely inappropriate and unnecessary" and the president taking to Twitter to declare that "Attorney-client privilege is dead!" A court-ordered review ultimately found only a fraction of the seized material to be privileged.

The raids on Cohen were triggered in part by a referral from special counsel Robert Mueller, who separately is looking into Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

New Zealand's PM says accused mosque gunman gets no notoriety

Associated Press

CHRISTCHURCH, New Zealand — New Zealand's prime minister declared Tuesday she would do everything in her power to deny the accused mosque gunman a platform for elevating his white supremacist views after the man dismissed his lawyer and opted to represent himself at his trial in the killings of 50 people.

"I agree that it is absolutely something that we need to acknowledge, and do what we can to prevent the notoriety that this individual seeks," Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern told reporters. "He obviously had a range of reasons for committing this atrocious terrorist attack. Lifting his profile was one of them. And that's something that we can absolutely deny him."

She demurred about whether she wanted the trial to occur

behind closed doors, saying that was not her decision to make.

"One thing I can assure you — you won't hear me speak his name," she said.

Later, in a passionate speech to Parliament, she urged the public to follow her lead and to avoid giving the gunman the fame he so obviously craves.

"I implore you: Speak the names of those who were lost, rather than the name of the man who took them," she said. "He may have sought notoriety, but we in New Zealand will give him nothing, not even his name."

The shooter's desire for attention was made clear in a manifesto sent to Ardern's office and others before Friday's massacre and by his livestreamed footage of his attack on the Al Noor mosque.

The video prompted wide-

spread revulsion and condemnation. Facebook said it removed 1.5 million versions of the video during the first 24 hours, but Ardern expressed frustration that the footage remained online four days later.

"We have been in contact with Facebook; they have given us updates on their efforts to have it removed, but as I say, it's our view that it cannot — should not — be distributed, available, able to be viewed," she said. "It is horrendous, and while they've given us those assurances, ultimately the responsibility does sit with them."

Ardern said she had received "some communication" from Facebook Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg on the issue. The prime minister has also spoken with British Prime Minister Theresa May about the importance of a global effort to clamp down on the distribution of such material.

Officials probe development of 737 Max

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. prosecutors are looking into the development of Boeing's 737 Max jets, a person briefed on the matter revealed Monday, the same day French aviation investigators concluded there were "clear similarities" in the crash of an Ethiopian Airlines Max 8 last week and a Lion Air jet in October.

The Justice Department probe will examine the way Boeing was regulated by the Federal Aviation Administration, said the person, who asked not to be identified because the inquiry is not public.

A federal grand jury in Washington sent a subpoena to someone involved in the plane's development seeking emails, mes-

sages and other communications, the person told The Associated Press.

The Transportation Department's inspector general is also looking into the FAA's approval of the Boeing 737 Max, a U.S. official told the AP. The official wasn't authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity. The Wall Street Journal reported on the probe Sunday and said the inspector general was looking into the plane's anti-stall system. It quotes unidentified people familiar with both cases.

The anti-stall system may have been involved in the Oct. 29 crash of a Lion Air jet off of Indonesia that killed 189 people. It's also under scrutiny in the March 10 crash of an Ethiopian Airlines jet that killed 157.

The Transportation Department's FAA regulates Chicago-based Boeing and is responsible for certifying that planes can fly safely.

The grand jury issued its subpoena March 11, one day after the Ethiopian Airlines crash, according to the person who spoke to the AP.

Spokesmen for the Justice Department and the inspector general said Monday they could neither confirm nor deny the existence of any inquiries. The FAA would not comment.

"Boeing does not respond to or comment on questions concerning legal matters, whether internal, litigation, or governmental inquiries," Boeing spokesman Charles Bickers said in an email.

Hawaii weighs plastics ban at restaurants

Associated Press

HONOLULU — Hawaii would be the first state in the U.S. to ban most plastics at restaurants under legislation that aims to cut down on waste that pollutes the ocean.

Dozens of cities across the country have banned plastic foam containers, but Hawaii's measure would make it the first to do so statewide. The liberal state has a history of prioritizing the environment — it has mandated renewable energy use and prohibited sunscreen ingredients that harm coral.

A second, more ambitious proposal would go even farther and prohibit fast-food and full-service restaurants from distributing

and using plastic drink bottles, utensils, stirring sticks, bags and straws.

The Hawaii efforts would be stricter than those in California, which last year became the first state to ban full-service restaurants from automatically giving out plastic straws, and broader than in Seattle, San Francisco and other cities that have banned some single-use plastics.

Activists believe the foam container measure has a better chance of passing in Hawaii.

"We have this reputation of setting the example for the world to follow, and that's what we're trying to do here," state Sen. Mike Gabbard, lead author of the more ambitious measure, said to the Senate. "Our

state can once again take the lead in protecting our environment."

Gabbard, father of Democratic presidential candidate and U.S. Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, said 95 percent of plastic packaging worldwide is thrown out after being used once. In the U.S., 500 million plastic straws are used and thrown out every day, he said.

Eric S.S. Wong, co-owner of two fast-food establishments on Oahu, said not being able to serve food in plastic foam containers would drive up his costs at a time when he faces rising health insurance charges for his employees and a possible minimum wage hike that lawmakers also are considering.

He said he'll have to raise prices.

Fish in Ohio river that caught fire now safe to eat

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Fish in an Ohio river that became synonymous with pollution when it caught fire in 1969 are now safe to eat, federal environmental regulators say.

The easing of fish consumption restrictions on the Cuyahoga River in northeast Ohio was lauded Monday by Republican Gov. Mike DeWine as an important step toward ultimately delisting the river altogether as an area of concern. Seven impairments remain to be addressed before that can happen.

"This is an example of the progress that can be achieved when you collaborate and dedicate resources to improving the qual-

ity of water in our state," DeWine said in a statement. "We need to continue to invest in our water resources so that we can see additional improvements."

The announcement came as DeWine is pushing a state budget that includes nearly \$1 billion for water quality projects aimed at cleaning up toxic algae in Lake Erie and protecting other lakes and rivers throughout the state.

The Cuyahoga River was already one of the most polluted rivers in the country at the time of the fire on June 22, 1969, according to the Ohio History Connection. The fire was neither the first nor the worst the river had experienced.

But the 1969 fire on the river, where in-

dustrial waste and sewage were regularly dumped, drew national media attention that made it an instant poster child for water pollution at a time when the country was becoming more environmentally aware.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, whose creation was inspired by the Cuyahoga River fire, gave the thumbs-up to easing the fish consumption restrictions.

Regional administrator Cathy Stepp called it "a huge step" in the agency's work to improve water quality.

Ohio EPA Director Laurie Stevenson said in a statement, "If you safely can eat the fish, we know that's a great indication that water quality is improving."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

TV station replacing 'Andy Griffith Show'

VA RICHMOND — A Virginia television station is replacing "The Andy Griffith Show" after a successful 35-year syndication run.

The Roanoke Times reported WDBJ-TV is moving the Mayberry-set sitcom to another channel it owns and replacing it with a new local newscast.

The show, which stopped making new episodes in the 1960s, is still the Roanoke area's most watched program at 5:30 p.m. and has bested a number of competing programs over the years.

Exhibit of astronaut's personal papers opens

IN WEST LAFAYETTE — An exhibit of astronaut Neil Armstrong's personal papers opened Monday at Purdue University ahead of the 50th anniversary of his famed walk on the moon.

"Apollo 11 in the Archives: Selections from the Neil A. Armstrong Papers" opened at Purdue's Humanities, Social Science and Education Library and runs until Aug. 16.

The university is home to hundreds of thousands of personal documents, memorabilia and photos from the 1955 Purdue graduate's life. That includes about 70,000 pages of fan mail Armstrong received after he became the first human to walk on the moon on July 20, 1969.

Armstrong died in 2012 at age 82.

Officer dragged in 100-vehicle swarm

TN NASHVILLE — Police in Tennessee's capital said an officer was dragged when a group of off-

road vehicles swarmed a downtown street.

Citing a news release from Metro Nashville police, news outlets reported that a four-wheeler dragged Sgt. John Bourque down the road Saturday. Police said around 100 dirt bikes, motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles and four-wheelers illegally took over Broadway in front of Bridgestone Arena.

Police said the suspects fled the scene. Bourque suffered minor injuries and was treated and released.

Groups of off-road vehicles were again spotted across Davidson County on Sunday.

Man killed outside church after wedding

TX SAN ANTONIO — Police in San Antonio are investigating the fatal shooting of a man in the parking lot of a Catholic parish after a wedding.

KSAT-TV reported that gunfire erupted around 12:30 a.m. Sunday outside the Holy Spirit Catholic Church. According to police, two men left the scene in a white Ford pickup and one man was left wounded.

The man, later identified at Marcos Villegas-Martinez, died at an area hospital.

Police are searching for both men who left in the pickup.

Trooper revived after exposure to drug

VT LEICESTER — A Vermont State Police trooper who collapsed after apparently being exposed to an opioidlike drug during a traffic stop was revived by fellow troopers who administered the overdose-reversal drug Narcan, state police said Saturday.

Detectives launched an investigation and testing was begun to determine what sub-

stance made acting Sgt. Brett Flansburg ill.

Flansburg stopped a vehicle late Friday night for a traffic violation in Leicester. He observed a passenger swallow a small bag he later said contained cocaine.

In searching the car, Flansburg collected as evidence a small quantity of heroin in a baggie, an empty plastic baggie and a syringe. The passenger was taken into custody by other troopers and charged with heroin possession.

While transporting evidence, Flansburg began to feel ill and he collapsed in the parking lot of the barracks, and troopers administered Narcan.

Flansburg responded to the Narcan and was treated at a hospital and released.

Object thought to be grenade causes scare

MD HURLOCK — Maryland State Police said that what appeared to be a grenade left at a vacant home may have been a toy.

Officers were called Friday about a possible grenade near the carport of a vacant home in Dorchester County. Troopers came to the Hurlock home after they were called by an inspector working on the house.

People were asked to remain in their homes until a bomb technician determined the object was inactive and plastic, like a toy.

Disease may be killing desert bighorn sheep

CA RIVERSIDE — A new survey has found a sharp decline in desert bighorn sheep in Southern California, and biologists suspect the cause is a disease contracted from domestic animals.

The California Department

of Fish and Wildlife said a survey earlier this month counted 60 bighorns in the Mount San Gorgonio region east of Los Angeles. That's down two-thirds from a survey conducted in 2016.

Biologist Jeff Villepique said that in the past such die-offs have been triggered by an outbreak of a respiratory disease spread by contact with domestic sheep or goats. The disease killed at least 21 bighorns whose carcasses were found in the area in December.

Authorities said so far sheep in nearby herds haven't been affected.

Warning: Don't take prom pics on tracks

NC RALEIGH — With prom season not too far away, North Carolina Department of Transportation officials are asking people to avoid using railroad tracks as a backdrop for their photos.

The state's transportation agency said in a news release it is working with the state Department of Public Instruction by asking yearbook staff advisers to alert students and photographers about the dangers of taking pictures on or near railroad tracks.

Officials also warn that railroad tracks, trestles, rail yards and rights-of-way are private property, and using them as photo backdrops is trespassing. The department said that with new technology, approaching trains are much quieter and people shouldn't assume they would hear one coming.

Last year, 18 people were killed and 13 others were injured while trespassing on North Carolina railroad tracks.

From wire reports

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Trout, Angels near record \$430M deal

From wire reports

The climax of an offseason spent contemplating and debating the value of some of baseball's biggest stars, as it turns out, was not the record-setting free agent contracts signed last month by Manny Machado and Bryce Harper, but what reportedly came Tuesday: a massive extension for Los Angeles Angels center fielder Mike Trout that zoomed past those other deals like a 600-foot home run.

According to ESPN's Jeff Passan, Trout's extension is worth \$430 million over 12 years — exactly \$100 million more than the 13-year, \$330 million deal Harper signed March 2 with the Philadelphia Phillies, which previously stood as the largest in North American sports history.

Trout's dollar figure, with its echo of Harper's total payout, was either a strange coincidence, or an expert-level troll job, which happened to come just days after Harper made a public pitch for Trout to come join him on the Phillies — the team for whom Trout, a New Jersey native, grew up rooting. Trout, 27, was to have reached

free agency for the first time after the 2020 season.

Trout, a seven-time all-star and two-time American League Most Valuable Player, is already considered the best player of his generation, and at his current trajectory could rank as the best of all-time by the time he is done. And now, it appears, he will finish his career with the only franchise he has ever known; the new contract reportedly has no opt-outs.

The theoretical availability of Trout on the free agent market at the end of 2020 was already shaping long-range strategies at the top of baseball's talent marketplace, possibly helping to explain, for example, the relative absence of such behemoths as the New York Yankees and Los Angeles Dodgers from this winter's high-end market. The Phillies, with more money to spend and a built-in geographical and emotional advantage, would have almost certainly made a major play for his services.

But those possibilities all disappeared on Tuesday. The Angels — who, notably, have made just one playoff appearance in Trout's eight seasons — worked quietly be-

hind the scenes in negotiating with Trout, as word of those discussions failed to leak until Tuesday's blast that a deal was near. For the Angels to retain Trout, it cost owner Arte Moreno more than twice as much as the \$184 million he paid for the entire franchise in 2003.

Trout's deal is believed to have smashed every other worldwide benchmark for an athlete's on-field compensation. Before this winter, Giancarlo Stanton's 13-year, \$325 million extension with the Miami Marlins in 2014 was the record for largest contract, a number that was exceeded by Harper last month. Boxer Canelo Alvarez's deal with sports streaming service DAZN, for 11 fights over five years, was worth a reported \$365 million.

At nearly \$36 million per year in average annual value, Trout's new deal would also make him the highest-paid player in baseball year-to-year, topping Zack Greinke's \$34.4 million AAV with the Arizona Diamondbacks. Harper's Phillies deal, by contrast, is worth just over \$25 million in AAV.

Plenty of intrigue surrounds opening day

Associated Press

TOKYO — This is the Ichiro effect.

Richard Snitzer had never been to Japan. What finally drove the Japanese-American to travel here from his home in Hayward, Calif., was Ichiro Suzuki; not family ties, not pure wanderlust, but a chance to see a player he called “simply the best.”

And get this. He's not even a Mariners fan, which he's advertised by wearing his A's jersey around the Tokyo Dome.

He'll be there Wednesday when Major League Baseball opens the 2019 season with Seattle facing Oakland to start a two-game series. The 45-year-old Ichiro is expected to play in both. What happens next? Ichiro isn't saying.

One thing is sure. It will be great theater.

“I'll have my phone ready to go, and I'll shoot and stand up and applaud when he bats,” Snitzer said. “I just hope he doesn't get the winning hit against the A's. If he hits a

home run that doesn't affect the game, I'll be thrilled.”

A's pitcher Liam Hendriks probably spoke for both teams.

“We're just happy to be along for the ride,” he said. “I can't wait for the opening series when they announce Ichiro and hear that crowd.”

Chances are, most baseball fans in other places will be asleep when A's right-hander Mike Fiers throws the first pitch of the year — around 5:30 a.m. EDT.

That's OK, there will be plenty of time for everyone to catch up before the other 28 teams open on March 28 at Yankee Stadium, Dodger Stadium and points in-between. Plenty to see, too, in a season that will stretch to the end of October — Bryce Harper now batting in Philly, the Boston Red Sox trying to repeat as World Series champions and more talk about changing how the game is played.

Other key parts of the upcoming season:

Roster reshuffling: Bryce Harper was the biggest name to change places since last season,

leaving the Nationals and signing a record \$330 million, 13-year contract with Philadelphia. The Phillies were especially busy, adding J.T. Realmuto, Jean Segura, Andrew McCutchen and David Robertson. Also on the move were Manny Machado (Padres), Paul Goldschmidt (Cardinals), Robinson Cano and Edwin Diaz (Mets), Nelson Cruz (Twins), Patrick Corbin (Nationals) and Josh Donaldson (Braves).

But another slow market for many free agents meant All-Star closer Craig Kimbrel and former Cy Young winner Dallas Keuchel didn't have jobs on the brink of a new season.

Hiya, Skip!: New Toronto manager Charlie Montoyo quickly showed he's all for trying new strategy — he played a four-man outfield defense against Harper in spring training. There are six new skippers in the majors this year: Montoyo, David Bell (Reds), Rocco Baldelli (Twins), Chris Woodward (Rangers) and Brandon Hyde (Orioles) are doing this for the first time in the bigs,

Brad Ausmus (Angels) has experience.

New rules

Despite a lot of discussion, nothing major for this season. No prohibition on shifts, no pitch clocks, and no requirement for pitchers to face at least three batters until next year. No robot umpires for now. One change could affect pennant races this summer — no trades after July 31, so no more deals for an extra player in the postseason.

Repeat after me

It's been quite a while since a team won back-to-back crowns — the Yankees were the last to do it, taking their third straight title in 2000. Now, AL MVP Mookie Betts and the Red Sox will try to stop baseball's longest gap without a repeat champion. Clayton Kershaw and the Dodgers, meanwhile, will try to avoid becoming the first team to lose three straight World Series since the New York Giants did it starting in 1911.

Baylor tops leaked women's bracket

Associated Press

NEW YORK — One of the joys of March Madness is the surprising things that can happen during the NCAA Tournament. For the women, there was an unpleasant surprise before the tournament even began when the field was revealed early thanks to a production error.

The bracket was mistakenly broadcast by ESPN hours before the network had its selection show revealing Baylor, Notre Dame, Mississippi State and Louisville as the No. 1 seeds in the women's NCAA Tournament on Monday. ESPN apologized and scrambled to air an early selection show to release the brackets while screenshots of the picks were shared across social networks.

"In working with the NCAA to prepare for tonight's Women's Selection Special we received the bracket, similar to years past. In the midst of our preparation, the bracket was mistakenly posted on ESPNU," the network said in a statement. "We deeply regret the

error and extend our apology to the NCAA and the women's basketball community. We will conduct a thorough review of our process to ensure it doesn't happen in the future."

In 2016, the men's bracket was leaked during the selection show, reverberating on Twitter and elsewhere as fans wondered if the picks were accurate.

The No. 1 Lady Bears are the top team in the Greensboro Regional while defending champion Notre Dame is the first choice in Chicago. Baylor was the overall top seed in the field and will be trying to reach the Final Four for the first time since 2012. The team has won 23 consecutive games — the longest active streak.

The Irish are looking to repeat as champions and are potentially better than the team that won the school's first championship since 2001 last season. Notre Dame returns most of its team from last year, including Final Four MVP Arike Ogunbowale, who hit game-winning shots in the semifinals and championship game. The team also added talented forward

Brianna Turner, who missed last season with a knee injury.

"I definitely think with Brianna Turner we're a more talented team and we have a couple more people on the bench too," Notre Dame coach Muffet McGraw said.

Mississippi State is the No. 1 seed in the Portland Regional, where Oregon is the second seed. Louisville is the top choice in the Albany Regional, where No. 2 UConn potentially awaits.

"We're thrilled to have the season we've had. We played an outstanding schedule. At the end of the day, I thought we might be going to Albany as 1 or 2," Louisville coach Jeff Walz said. "It's really great to be a 1 seed and we know there's a lot of work in front of us."

Walz won't coach the Cardinals' opening game against Robert Morris as he will be serving a one-game suspension for using profane language toward NCAA officials during the Final Four last year. The veteran coach said he expects to have the support of the UConn fans if his team reaches

the Sweet 16 and plays in upstate New York. Maryland is the No. 3 seed in Albany and Oregon State is the 4.

"If we're fortunate to get that far I'm confident that half of the UConn fans will be wearing Louisville gear and they won't know who to cheer for," Walz said, laughing.

It's the first time since 2006 that the Huskies aren't a No. 1 seed. UConn will try to continue its record Final Four run, looking to advance that far for the 12th consecutive year.

"I don't think it matters one way or another," UConn coach Geno Auriemma said. "We've lost national championships being a No. 1 seed and we've won national championships being a 2 or 3 seed if I'm not mistaken."

Tennessee snuck into the field as an 11. The Lady Vols have been in every NCAA Tournament since the first one in 1982.

On the other end of the spectrum, Abilene Christian, Bethune-Cookman and Towson all are making their first NCAA tournament appearances.

Historically black colleges carry the flag in First Four

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Prairie View A&M made the First Four this year as a representative of a league made up of historically black schools, at least one of which has been in the play-in round every year since the NCAA Tournament field was expanded to 68 teams in 2011.

But coach Byron Smith prefers not to view it that way.

Smith, whose Panthers played Fairleigh Dickinson on Tuesday night, sees them more as representing the school, the conference and college basketball rather than being a flag carrier for the group of schools known as Historically Black College and Universities or HBCUs.

"Obviously, I respect it," Smith said. "And we're repre-

senting the game and the people that came before us. So it's not something I pay a lot of attention to, but I still respect it, that we're an HBCU."

The First Four has become one of the few national showcases for HBCU's — the group of more than 100 schools, mostly in the South, that predate integration and now reside in the lower tier of Division I basketball.

They get a tournament start that won't end against juggernauts Duke or Gonzaga, although the No. 1 seed usually is next if they can make it out of Dayton.

"It gives you a chance to win a tournament game," said Mike Davis, who coached Texas Southern to a win over North Carolina Central in the First

Four last season before taking over at Detroit Mercy.

That game pitted HBCUs against each other for the first time in the First Four, ensuring one of them would advance. Texas Southern got the first tournament win in school history, beating North Carolina Central 64-46 in what was called the "national championship" of HBCU teams.

Texas Southern then was walloped by No. 1 seed Xavier by 19 points.

Prairie View (22-12), a school of about 8,000 students northwest of Houston, won the Southwest Athletic Conference Tournament to get the automatic bid and a trip to Dayton. The Panthers face New Jersey's Fairleigh Dickinson (20-13) for the right to play No. 1 Gonzaga

in a West Regional opener on Thursday.

On Wednesday, N.C. Central, winner of the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference Tournament, is back in Dayton for the third straight year, facing North Dakota State. The winner will move on to play Duke, the No. 1 seed in the East Regional.

If history is any indication, there probably aren't any bracket-busters here.

The NCAA expanded the field to 65 in 2001 with a single play-in game, then went to the current format in 2011. Every year except 2001 an HBCU team from the SWAC or MEAC has been a participant in play-in games. They've won just five times in 17 games, all of those teams going on to lose in their first game of the round of 64.

NBA roundup

Nowitzki passes Wilt on scoring list

Associated Press

DALLAS — For the 7-footer who has built a Hall of Fame career shooting from the outside, it was the perfect way to reach his latest milestone.

Dirk Nowitzki swished a 20-foot jumper with 8:35 left in the first quarter Monday night, passing Wilt Chamberlain for sixth place on the NBA's career scoring list — but it wasn't enough for the Dallas Mavericks.

Elfrid Payton had his fifth straight triple-double and Julius Randle scored 30 points to help the New Orleans Pelicans beat the Mavericks 129-125 in overtime Monday night.

Nowitzki moved past Chamberlain (31,419 points) by making his first two shots of the game. The first was a 20-footer off an assist from Jalen Brunson. Then the 40-year-old German took a feed from Luka Doncic and backed down Ken-

rich Williams before turning and launching from the top of the key.

"I took my time and faced him up like I've done a million times and tried to shoot over him," Nowitzki said. "It was good to get it over with in the first two shots."

Payton had 19 points, 11 assists and 10 rebounds. Dallas rookie Doncic turned in a triple-double of his own with 29 points, 13 boards and 10 assists, including the pass that put Nowitzki higher up in the record book.

"He deserves everything good that happens to him," Doncic said. "It's amazing the things he has accomplished, but this one is really amazing for him."

Nowitzki finished with eight points, giving him 31,424 in his 21 seasons — trailing only Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Karl Malone, Kobe Bryant, LeBron James and Michael Jordan.

The two jumpers were a fitting way for Nowitzki to pass Chamberlain, whose listed height of 7-foot-1 is only an inch taller than Nowitzki.

Nowitzki has made nearly 2,000 three-pointers in his prolific career, establishing the trend of big men with long-range shooting capabilities. He's an 88 percent free-throw shooter, 37 points higher than Chamberlain's mark.

Nuggets 114, Celtics 105: Nikola Jokic had 21 points and 13 rebounds and visiting Denver rallied in the fourth quarter to beat Boston.

Spurs 111, Warriors 105: DeMar DeRozan had 26 points and nine rebounds, LaMarcus Aldridge added 23 points and 13 rebounds and host San Antonio beat Golden State for its ninth straight win.

Trail Blazers 106, Pacers 98: Damian Lillard had 30 points and 15 assists as host Portland beat Indiana without

starting guard CJ McCollum.

Jazz 116, Wizards 95: Rudy Gobert had 14 points and 14 rebounds, Donovan Mitchell scored 19 and visiting Utah won its fourth straight by beating Washington.

Heat 116, Thunder 107: Goran Dragic had 26 points and 11 assists, Dwyane Wade added 25 points and Miami took advantage of Russell Westbrook's absence to beat host Oklahoma City.

Raptors 128, Knicks 92: Jeremy Lin scored 20 points, and Fred VanVleet had 13 points and 12 assists for host Toronto in a rout of New York.

Cavaliers 126, Pistons 119: Collin Sexton scored 27 points, including the go-ahead three-pointer with just under two minutes to play, and host Cleveland defeated Detroit.

Bulls 116, Suns 101: Robin Lopez scored 24 points to help Chicago beat host Phoenix and snap a five-game losing streak.

NHL roundup

Lightning pummel Coyotes, clinch Presidents' Trophy

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Steven Stamkos scored his 36th goal of the season and the Tampa Bay Lightning clinched the Presidents' Trophy with a 4-1 victory over the Arizona Coyotes on Monday night.

The Lightning, who have 116 points, will have home-ice advantage throughout the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Stamkos became the franchise leader in goals with his 384th.

Victor Hedman added his 10th goal of the season and Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 28 shots. Anthony Cirelli scored his fifth short-handed goal of the season while Yanni Gourde notched his 20th goal of the season.

Clayton Keller scored for Arizona, which remains one point ahead of Minnesota for the final wild-card spot in the Western Conference.

Darcy Kuemper finished with 20 saves.

Stamkos' record-breaking goal was scored at 6:54 of the first period as Stamkos, battling in front of the Arizona net, got his stick on Ryan McDonagh's shot and deflected the puck past Kuemper.

The goal came in the 737th game for Stamkos and broke the tie with former captain Vinny Lecavalier, who set the record in 1,037 games with Tampa Bay from 1998-2013.

Golden Knights 7, Sharks 3: Reilly Smith and Jonathan Marchessault each had four points and visiting Vegas won

for the ninth time in 10 games by beating San Jose.

Smith assisted on three goals in the first period and added a score of his own in the third. Marchessault had a goal and two assists in the first and an empty-netter in the third. William Karlsson, Mark Stone, Paul Stastny and Cody Eakin also scored for the Golden Knights. Malcolm Subban made 36 saves in place of injured Marc-Andre Fleury.

Jets 3, Kings 2: Kyle Connor had a goal and an assist to lead visiting Winnipeg over Los Angeles.

Kevin Hayes and Tyler Myers also scored for the Jets, who have a three-point lead on Nashville atop the Central Division. Laurent Brossoit made 15 saves.

Sean Walker and Dustin Brown had the goals for the Kings. Jack Campbell stopped 25 Winnipeg shots.

Canucks 3, Blackhawks 2 (OT): Bo Horvat scored 16 seconds into overtime, and visiting Vancouver stopped Chicago's five-game winning streak.

Alexander Edler and Markus Granlund also scored for Vancouver, which was coming off a 3-2 shootout victory in Dallas on Sunday. Thatcher Demko made 29 saves in his third career win.

The Canucks (31-32-10) pulled within six points of Arizona for the second wild card in the jumbled bottom of the Western Conference. They begin a seven-game homestand on Wednesday night against Ottawa.