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Navy's decision to retire ship under fire

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A Navy decision to decommission the USS Harry S. Truman, taking the aircraft carrier out of service 25 years early, and put the savings into future investments has left some House lawmakers scratching their heads at the service's drastic cost-cutting measure at the expense of a seaworthy ship.

Some lawmakers argued the move goes against the Navy's projected needs for the fleet only three years ago. The decision became a point of contention during a House Armed Services Committee hearing Tuesday afternoon.

Rep. Rob Wittman, of Virginia, the ranking Republican on the committee's subpanel on seapower and projection forces, told Navy and Marines officials at the hearing that mothballing the Truman is counter to the Navy's assessment of how they needed to maintain the fleet.

"Why would then we retire the Truman 25 years early in

relation to the demands that we see around us and with our adversaries building carriers at a pretty brisk pace?" he asked them.

China currently has two aircraft carriers and a third is under construction. Russia has only one aircraft carrier.

The Navy is "all in on the Ford [class] carrier and moving to that carrier as fast as we can," responded James Geurts, assistant secretary of the Navy for research development and acquisition. He then highlighted the new carrier class' features such as "increased survivability" and "increased capability that will allow us to fly the airwing of the future."

Yet in another hearing earlier Tuesday, Wittman also questioned acting Defense Secretary Pat Shanahan about the Truman and the Pentagon chief said the decision to decommission the carrier could be revisited.

"We can change these decisions," Shanahan told members of the House Armed Services Committee.

The Truman is a Nimitz-class aircraft carrier based out of Norfolk, Va., and the fourth-newest carrier in the fleet. The Ford-class carriers are the newest carrier class after the Nimitz, which makes up a total of 10 carriers in the fleet.

The Ford-class has a smaller "Island" structure, which includes the ship's bridge, allowing more space for flight operations on the deck, according to a Navy website about the ship. It also has a smaller crew than the Nimitz-class carrier and is designed to allow the integration of future manned and unmanned aircraft with little modification.

The Navy's only Ford-class carrier, the USS Gerald R. Ford, is undergoing a year of maintenance and upgrades in Newport News, Va., but is three months behind in its availability to the fleet, according to Geurts.

The Navy's decision to buy two Ford-class carriers was to "solidify that production line, get that moving," he said.

When they next looked at how

they would compete in a future conflict, it "led to some tough choices" including retiring the Truman early in order to "look at other technologies."

By retiring the Truman before its next overhaul in fiscal year 2024, the Navy would save \$3.4 billion in the next five years as well as an additional \$1 billion a year in savings related to its operations and maintenance, Rear Adm. Randy Crites, deputy assistant secretary of the Navy for management and budget, said March 12 during a budget presentation at the Pentagon.

Shanahan said Tuesday that the Truman decision was a strategic choice and made in coordination with the buying of the two Ford-class carriers.

The total cost to the Navy for the two ships will be about \$24 billion, according to a USNI News story in January.

The decommissioning of the Truman would leave 10 aircraft carriers in the U.S. fleet and, according to the Navy's 30-year shipbuilding plan, it would drop to nine carriers by 2027.

Admiral: Sub shortfall poses threat in Pacific

BY WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

The Navy has half the submarines it needs to patrol the Pacific as it keeps tabs on undersea competitors such as China and Russia, the head of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said Wednesday.

"My day-to-day requirement is met by slightly over 50 percent of what I ask for," Adm. Philip Davidson told the House Armed Services Committee during a hearing.

"The capacity limitations as

we go down over the course of the next several years is indeed a threat to day-to-day operations that I think we need to have in the theater," he said.

The Navy's submarine shortage is an ongoing problem. Davidson's predecessor, Adm. Harry Harris, bemoaned the shortfall two years ago.

"The numbers are low and getting smaller," Harris told the same committee in April 2017, when the Navy's entire attack sub fleet of 52 was projected to shrink to 42 by 2026.

That number today is 51.

Davidson said it is "a critical need" in the Pacific "to reverse the trend on our way to a force structure of 42 in a 2026 time frame."

"The number of submarines is an area in which we hold an asymmetrical advantage over virtually, well, all our adversaries," he said. "It's a critical advantage that we need to extend."

In his written testimony, Davidson said that of the 400 foreign submarines operating the

world, 75 percent of them are in the Indo-Pacific region.

China, Russia and North Korea alone operate 160 of them, and as they continue to increase their sub capacity, the U.S. is retiring such vessels faster than they are replaced, he said.

"Potential adversary submarine activity has tripled from 2008 levels, which requires at least a corresponding increase on the part of the United States to maintain superiority," he said.

Report: More GIs survived critical injuries as Iraq, Afghanistan wars went on

BY NANCY MONTGOMERY
Stars and Stripes

An analysis of all U.S. casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan found that troops who were critically injured in the wars' later stages were far more likely to survive than those injured at their start, largely due to efforts aimed at stemming blood loss among the wounded.

Survival among those most critically injured increased threefold during the course of the conflicts — from almost 9 percent at the beginning of the Iraq War to 33 percent by the end of 2017. In Afghanistan, the increase in survival was even more dramatic, from just 2 percent in 2001 to 40 percent by the end of 2017.

"We knew survival had improved; it was a little surprising how much it improved," said Jeffrey Howard, a professor at the University of Texas at San Antonio and lead author of the study published this week in *JAMA Surgery*. "It's huge gains."

The study identified the use of tourniquets, pre-hospital blood transfusions and transport to combat hospitals within 60 minutes as the three primary factors in improved survival rates.

"Given that the primary cause of death in combat trauma is hemorrhage, these findings are not surprising," the study said. "The key lesson from 16 years of conflict is that military trauma system advancements may be associated with increased survival, echoing historical themes of continued improvements to hemorrhage control and blood replacement and reducing time to treatment."

Using tourniquets and stepping up response time with blood transfusions and helicopter flights to hospitals happened as military trauma systems expanded, adapted and improved over the decade-plus conflicts.

In Afghanistan, a 2009 policy decision by then-Defense Secretary Robert Gates to halve

the medevac response time to an hour — known as the "golden hour" — was a key to a 63 percent reduction in mortality, the study said. The policy fueled the expansion of medevac services and forward-deployed surgical resources.

"It really made a big impact," Howard said. "Prior to that policy change, only about 25 percent of troops got to (a hospital) within an hour."

But even by 2012, medevacs with transfusion capabilities were rare, a previous study found.

"It really required an extreme reworking of the trauma system in that theater," Howard said.

Some 5,400 Americans have been killed in combat in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars since 2001, Pentagon data show.

The study's analysis of 56,763 injuries from both theaters estimated that improved response prevented 1,506 additional fatalities in Afghanistan and 2,166 additional fatalities in Iraq. Of those, about 24 percent came from timely blood transfusions, 13 percent from tourniquet use and 7.5 percent from transport times within 60 minutes.

Especially in Afghanistan, blood transfusion and transport times were connected because the transfusions were usually given on the medevacs.

Overall, in both Iraq and Afghanistan, critical injuries comprised more than 16 percent of all casualties and more than 90 percent of combat deaths.

"If the system hadn't improved things, it would have been much, much worse," Howard said.

None of the three main factors that boosted survival rates were new. But the study shows the significance of incremental improvements in training, equipment and procedures in recent years, some of which has been driven by changing battlefield conditions.

Don't disengage from fragile states too quickly, Votel warns

The Washington Post

TAMPA, Fla. — Four years, nine months, billions of dollars and tens of thousands of allied fighters' lives. As the U.S.-backed Syrian forces declared a triumphant end last weekend to the battle against Islamic State, Gen. Joseph Votel, the head of U.S. Central Command, took a mental inventory.

Millions of Iraqi and Syrian civilians have died or been displaced in the conflict, which erupted less than three years after Washington declared victory in a previous insurgent war. U.S. combat casualties stand at 14. From that grim tabulation, Votel drew one central conclusion: America cannot afford to take its counterterrorism gains for granted.

"I think that the lesson learned from that is we really have to be very careful when we step away from our interests, and if we try to do it too quickly, that's the cost," he said in an interview from CENTCOM headquarters on the eve of his retirement.

The closure of the campaign to eliminate what the extremist group calls its caliphate coincides with the end of Votel's nearly 40-year military career, about half of which was spent immersed in the counterinsurgency operations that have consumed the Pentagon's attention since 2001. Like other CENTCOM leaders before him, Votel steps down at a moment when the militant threat, while seemingly abated, remains unvanquished and with political objectives elusive.

He spoke as the Pentagon prepares to reduce its troop presence in Syria in keeping with orders from President Donald Trump, who has sought to end U.S. military involvement in the Middle East. While na-

tional security leaders appear to have secured permission to continue ground operations for some period of time in Syria as they have in Afghanistan, how long those counterterrorism missions will continue remains in doubt.

The U.S. force in Syria now stands between 2,000 and 2,500 troops, officials have said, down from a high in February of close to 3,000.

Trump's announcement in December that he would swiftly withdraw all troops took military leaders by surprise and generated widespread concern. The president later agreed to allow a smaller residual force to help Syrian partner forces stabilize areas recaptured from militants. The military effort reaches a milestone as U.S. diplomats struggle to make progress toward a peace process to end Syria's larger civil conflict and the State Department seeks to reduce funding for rebuilding former militant strongholds in another indication of Trump's desire to wash his hands of the war.

Votel said the end of the battle — announced Saturday by the U.S.-allied Syrian Democratic Forces near the village of Baghouz — was not a surprise to ISIS. Experts say the group is already morphing back into an underground insurgent organization.

"We shouldn't look at this as a surrender," he said, but rather a "deliberate effort to evacuate people, to take their chances in internally displaced persons camps and in SDF prisons, and try to export out their capabilities as much as they can."

Votel described a two-pronged mission for a residual force that will remain in Syria: helping the SDF battle militant remnants and secure cleared areas.

US assessing airfields ahead of Africa relief

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany—A U.S. military team dispatched to Mozambique to help with disaster relief efforts is assessing airfields in the country as it prepares to deliver supplies into areas where floods have forced thousands from their homes.

A team of about 40 airmen from the 435th Contingency Response Group are in Mozambique, where they are helping to set up a distribution hub once supplies start rolling in.

"This team will provide 24-hour support operations for

receiving, packaging and distributing food, medical supplies and other relief materials in support of crisis response efforts after Cyclone Idai," U.S. Air Forces in Europe-Air Forces Africa said in a statement.

Col. Jason Terry, commander of the 435th, said Wednesday via phone from Mozambique that his team is examining various airfields to determine if they can support operations. The assessment involves checking for fuel availability, parking for aircraft and supply capacity.

Terry added that his expedi-

tionary wing is effective at finding ways to carry out missions under difficult conditions.

"We are very comfortable working in austere environments," Terry said.

President Donald Trump directed the military to support humanitarian efforts in Mozambique after more than 700 people died as a result of a March 14 cyclone that has caused widespread flooding in a region stretching from Mozambique to Zimbabwe and Malawi.

Some 500,000 people also have been displaced by the

floods. The death toll could rise as floodwaters recede.

The military's job is to assist the U.S. Agency for International Development in the delivery of humanitarian assistance. U.S. Africa Command has put its Djibouti-based Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa in charge of the military's relief effort.

Terry said he expected the military's role in the relief effort to be relatively short in duration, but he added that other aid agencies would likely be needed for longer given the scope of the damage.

Troops stage natural disaster training on Okinawa air base

By MATTHEW M. BURKE

Stars and Stripes

KADENA AIR BASE, Japan — Disaster may strike at any second in the Indo-Pacific, where typhoons and earthquakes are regular events, which is why the medical units of the 18th Wing must always be ready.

This week, the 18th Medical Group and 18th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron took part in a rare mass-casualty training exercise in conjunction with the U.S. Naval Hospital on Okinawa. Over two days of training, airmen processed and evacuated simulated stable patients to a tented staging area so the naval hospital could focus on the critically injured.

"This is the first time we've set these tents up and it's letting our folks see their equipment," said exercise organizer Maj. John Delehanty, 38, of Belfast, Maine. He is the medical readiness flight commander for the 18th Medical Support Squadron.

"What we're doing here is giving them a chance to use it in preparation for a natural disaster-type event so that if that were to happen and we needed to set this up, the first time they're doing it isn't the day we

need it," he said. "That is the big driver here."

The exercise began Tuesday with many patients from a simulated natural disaster coming into the naval hospital. As they were treated, the stable patients were moved to open up beds for the critically injured.

That is where the 18th Medical Group and 18th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron came in. Stable patients were bused to medical tents called an En-Route Patient Staging System set up by medical group airmen near Kadena's sprawling flight line.

Each ventilated tent holds 10 beds, but modules can be added to accommodate up to 200 beds, Delehanty said. They can go anywhere they are needed.

The staging system is equipped with communication and computer systems, medical equipment and basic supplies like intravenous fluids, medications and bandages.

"It gives us a sense of what we're capable of doing and also bringing that team together to be able to see where our strengths lie and then ... location — like where would we set this up," said emergency medical technician Tech Sgt. Kylie Hannan, of the 18th Medical Operations Squadron.

US might not be able to detect N. Korean attack

By KIM GAMEL

Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — The top U.S. commander in South Korea warned lawmakers that intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets may be insufficient to detect a possible attack from the North if denuclearization talks fail and tensions begin to rise again.

Gen. Robert Abrams, U.S. Forces Korea commander, expressed confidence in overall military readiness despite a reduction in the scope of joint training exercises with South Korea. But he noted North Korea's activity is "inconsistent with denuclearization" and is casting a cloud over the sense of calm on the divided peninsula.

"I remain clear-eyed about the fact that despite a reduction in tensions along the Demilitarized Zone and a cessation of strategic provocations coupled with public statements of intent to denuclearize, little to no verifiable change has occurred in North Korea's military capabilities," he said Wednesday during a hearing before the House Armed Services Committee.

"As such, I believe it is necessary to maintain a postured and readied force to deter any possible aggressive actions."

Abrams, who assumed command in November, also said the military has enough intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance resources, known as ISR, as long as the diplomatic push to rid North Korea of its nuclear weapons continues.

"But as we look to the future as conditions might change, if they change negatively then our stance, our posture is not adequate to provide us an unblinking eye to give us early warning and indicators," he said in response to a question. "We're short to be able to do that if things start to turn bad."

North Korea is seeking a reciprocal approach to talks in which it is rewarded for steps already taken toward denuclearization, including a testing moratorium and what it says was the destruction of its main nuclear testing site. However, recent satellite images show it began rebuilding a long-range missile launch platform after the recent summit between President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Hanoi, Vietnam. North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui also warned on March 15 that the regime was considering pulling out of denuclearization talks and could resume missile tests.

Dems want faster release of report

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The battle over releasing the special counsel's report intensified as Democrats in Congress insisted Attorney General William Barr must quickly release its full findings. Barr said he'll release at least a partial version in April.

Skepticism mounted over Barr's four-page synopsis, which was released Sunday and found no evidence President Donald Trump's campaign "conspired or coordinated" with the Russian government to influence the 2016 presidential election. The longer it takes to release the full findings from special counsel Robert Mueller, the more Democrats, in particular, warn they will question the legitimacy of Barr's actions.

The push came as the House moved ahead with its own oversight of the Trump administration, including an Intelligence

Committee hearing scheduled Thursday on Russia's role in the 2016 election. Rep. Elijah Cummings, D-Md., chairman of the House Oversight Committee, said Wednesday he was "disappointed" Barr would take weeks, not days, to release the report.

The attorney general told the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., that he's combing through Mueller's report and removing classified, grand jury and other information in hopes of releasing it to Congress.

Trump also has said he's fine with releasing the findings. "The president said, 'Just let it go,' and that's what's going to happen," Graham said.

What's clear, though, is that Barr will miss the Tuesday deadline set by six House committee chairmen to see the full confidential report and its underlying documents.

FAA defends its use of industry to certify planes

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Under fire from lawmakers on Capitol Hill over the two deadly Boeing crashes, the head of the Federal Aviation Administration on Wednesday defended the agency's practice of relying on aircraft makers to help certify their own planes for flight.

Acting FAA Administrator Daniel Elwell said the strategy has "consistently produced safe aircraft designs for decades."

He said the agency would need 10,000 more employees and an additional \$1.8 billion a year to do all the work now done by designated employees of the companies it regulates.

Under the self-certifying program, those employees perform tests and inspections needed to win safety approvals with the FAA overseeing their work. The approach is credited with holding down government costs and speeding the rollout of new models.

In the wake of disasters involving Boeing's new 737 Max jetliner in Indonesia and Ethiopia, that practice has been

seized on as evidence of an overly cozy relationship between the FAA and the industry.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., said at a Senate subcommittee hearing that delegating safety work to the companies puts "the fox in charge of the henhouse."

"The fact is that the FAA decided to do safety on the cheap, which is neither safe nor cheap," Blumenthal said.

He vowed to introduce legislation to change the system.

At the same hearing, the Transportation Department's inspector general, Calvin Scovel III, said the FAA plans to significantly revamp its oversight of aircraft development by July. But the department gave no indication it intends to abandon the collaborative approach.

Scovel said the changes would include new ways to evaluate training and self-audits by aerospace companies but offered little other detail.

Boeing said the process by which it designs, develops and tests planes has led to safer and safer air travel, and it sees no need for an overhaul.

SIGAR: Peace could threaten US-funded work

BY PHILLIP WALTER
WELLMAN

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — An agreement to end the Afghanistan War could present additional risks to \$130 billion worth of U.S. reconstruction efforts in the country, a government watchdog said Thursday, calling on policymakers to plan for a post-peace deal environment.

Eight high-risk areas capable of hampering U.S.-funded efforts were detailed in a report by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, which was delivered to Congress and the secretaries of State and Defense.

Since 2014, SIGAR has developed a "high-risk list" for each new Congress outlining the threats to U.S. investment in Af-

ghanistan, such as widespread insecurity, corruption and the illegal drug trade. However, the most recent catalog differs in that it identifies three risks that might persist after a peace settlement between the Taliban and the Afghan government or arise out of such a deal.

"Peace would be welcome news," SIGAR said. "But a peace settlement could also bring its own set of challenges to sustaining what has been achieved since 2001 in one of the world's most isolated, impoverished, and conflict-plagued countries."

While officials say much work remains before any accord is reached, both the American and Taliban representatives taking part in the peace talks said progress was made during

the latest round of discussions, which included draft terms on the withdrawal of U.S. troops and Taliban assurances on counterterrorism.

Any deal won't necessarily eliminate all of the concerns on SIGAR's list, but Afghan women's already fragile rights constitute one of three areas that the latest report specifically names as a possible casualty of the peace process.

Reintegrating anti-government fighters into Afghan society and a continuing sluggish economy are two other challenges that could undermine U.S. reconstruction efforts after Taliban reconciliation with Kabul, SIGAR said.

Some 60,000 insurgent fighters "may return to violent and predatory behavior" if the legal

economy cannot provide them a "peace dividend," SIGAR head John Sopko said in prepared remarks about the report he was expected to give Thursday at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

The \$132 billion the U.S. has appropriated for Afghanistan's reconstruction since 2002 has been used to train, equip and pay Afghan security forces, strengthen government institutions, promote the rule of law and stimulate economic development.

But whether or not a peace settlement is reached, years of international financial support for the Afghan government will be required to ensure the survival of those efforts, Sopko said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Baby boom: 9 labor unit nurses pregnant

ME PORTLAND — Nine nurses who work in the labor and delivery unit at the largest hospital in Maine are expecting babies in the next few months.

Maine Medical Center announced the bonanza of babies with a Facebook post Monday featuring eight of the nine nurses.

The infants are expected to arrive between April and July.

WMTW-TV reported they plan to be there for each other's deliveries. The hospital says all nine of them are registered nurses.

Man accused of trying to choke police dog

NH MANCHESTER — A New Hampshire man was accused of attempting to choke a state police dog as officers were trying to arrest him on other charges.

Manchester police found Keon Mercer, 45, of Manchester, on New Year's Day. They sought to arrest him based on outstanding arrest warrants stemming from a Dec. 3 car crash on charges of conduct after an accident, theft and failure to appear.

A Hillsborough County grand jury indictment earlier this month alleges that Mercer tried to choke a police dog that police used during his arrest. Mercer was charged with willful interference of a police dog, a felony.

Supermarket says stores are ghost-free

MA WILMINGTON — A Massachusetts supermarket chain is spiriting away rumors that one of its

stores is haunted.

A spokeswoman for Market Basket in a statement to The Boston Globe said "as far as we know all of our stores are ghost-free" after someone posted on social media this month that they had spotted an apparition at the Wilmington store.

The person said the ghost was "an old Victorian era woman in her nightgown ... near the frozen peas."

Hundreds of people weighed in, including others who claimed to have seen a ghost in the store.

Vicksburg cemetery reopens after cleanup

MS VICKSBURG — After a nearly three-month closure to remove downed trees, the cemetery at Vicksburg National Military Park is reopening.

Scott Babinowich, a park employee, said the cemetery reopened Monday.

It had been closed since a severe storm Dec. 27 damaged more than 35 large trees. The rest of the park has been open.

More than 50 dump truck loads of downed limbs were taken out of the cemetery.

The cemetery was established in 1866 and holds about 17,000 graves. Babinowich said the majority are from the Civil War and all of those are Union troops.

The cemetery also includes veterans up to the Korean War.

Crash sends dish soap spilling onto highway

PA DOWNINGTOWN — A crash involving a tractor-trailer sent jugs of dish soap spilling out onto the Pennsylvania Turnpike, shutting down a portion of the highway.

The accident occurred shortly after 3 a.m. Tuesday in the east-bound lanes between Downing-

town and Valley Forge.

Authorities said the truck and a car collided, causing the truck to hit a bridge and eventually split in half.

Dog dies on flight; family seeks answers

CA PASADENA — A California family is seeking answers from an airline after its pet dog died during a flight.

KABC reported Monday that Andranik Avetisian, of Pasadena, said his family's 5-month-old purebred Central Asian Shepherd was found dead in the cargo hold of a KLM Dutch Royal Airlines jet March 19.

Avetisian said the dog named Bear was on route from his birth home in Greece to his new family in California after family friends in Athens gifted him to the Avetisian children.

The family said they have been unable to view the dog's body or retrieve it.

Report says drought, heat wiped out trees

NM SANTA FE — A new report said near-record heat and persistent drought in New Mexico wiped out more than 120,000 acres of ponderosa pine, spruce, pinon and other trees last year.

The Santa Fe New Mexican reported an annual report on the health of the state's forests found that forest mortality increased nearly 50 percent across New Mexico in 2018.

State entomologist John Formby said the heat and drought weakened the ability of trees to fight off beetles and other pests.

Formby said the health of the state's forests should improve this year due to heavier winter snows and a wet start to spring.

Man kept mother's body in front yard

TX HENDERSON — An East Texas man was jailed after sheriff's deputies said he was keeping his mother's body wrapped in a tarpaulin in their front yard.

Jeremy David Cassin, 42, was charged with corpse abuse. If convicted, he could be sentenced to up to two years in state jail.

Rusk County Sheriff Jeff Price told KYTX-TV, of Tyler, that Cassin's grandmother called deputies from Houston after Cassin told her that her daughter, Karen Cassin, 63, had died.

Deputies said the son told them that he found his mother dead in bed March 18, so he wrapped her in the tarp and placed her under a group of pine trees.

Woman injured by scooter sues store

SD SIOUX FALLS — A Sioux Falls woman is suing Walmart after she was injured when a customer driving a motorized shopping scooter crashed into her.

A civil lawsuit filed in Minnehaha County claims Walmart was negligent in its instructions on how to operate the scooter.

Versella Grasz, 85, was shopping at a Walmart in Sioux Falls in June 2017 when the driver of the scooter crashed into her right side. The lawsuit says Grasz was brought to her knees in pain and taken to a hospital.

The Argus Leader reported that Walmart says it regrets Grasz was injured but the customer operating the scooter was responsible for the woman's injuries.

From wire reports

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Complete games, shutouts are nearly thing of baseball's past

Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — The complete game is nearly completely gone from baseball. Shutouts are vanishing, too.

The numbers are striking.

Go back to 1978, and there were more than 1,000 complete games in the majors. Move to 2003, and the total was about 200. In 2018, though, there were only 42 — the lowest total in the sport's history, according to Baseball-Reference.com — and just 19 of those were shutouts, the fewest since the 1870s.

Or to put it a different way: Roughly every other game featured a starter who went the distance 40 years ago, whereas about one in every 55 games did last season. Stars of the 1960s and '70s such as Bob Gibson, Steve Carlton or Jim Palmer would top 20 complete games in a year. In the '90s, Pedro Martinez, Greg Maddux and Randy Johnson would get to 10 or 12 or so.

Last year, no one threw more than two complete games. No one delivered more than one shutout.

"The special, elite guys are still able to achieve it and want to achieve it," Washington Nationals general manager Mike Rizzo said. "I don't think we'll ever see it disappear completely, but it's definitely becoming a rarity."

So what happened? Various factors contributed to the decline of dominant, nine-inning performances on the mound, from injury fears to an increased emphasis on accumulating bullpen arms, from the newfangled "opener" strategy of using a reliever to get things underway to protecting young pitchers in such a way that they never build up an ability to stay in until the end of games.

Still, the basic sense around the sport is that it's not that pitchers are no longer born with shoulders or elbows capable of producing complete games, but

that their teams simply won't let them even try and generally don't properly prepare them to do so.

"Everyone," Atlanta Braves right-hander Kevin Gausman summed up, "is obsessed with pitch count now."

It's a trend that seemed to gain steam in the 2000s, not coincidentally as more and more pitchers were getting elbow injuries that required Tommy John surgery.

Don't let most guys throw too hard for too long, the thinking goes.

"There's a general pullback in the industry, because they couldn't comprehend why so many people were getting hurt. The biggest mass effect you can have is workload," Houston Astros righty Gerrit Cole said. "Just overall, clubs are kind of doing a risk analysis. ... They are trying to be smarter about it and disburse the load a little bit to some other guys."

Merely six starters averaged at least 100 pitches per outing last season, down from 43 in 2011, per TeamRankings.com.

Cole was a member of that group in 2018, which also included his teammate Justin Verlander, NL Cy Young Award winner Jacob deGrom of the New York Mets, and three-time Cy Young recipient Max Scherzer of the Nationals.

"They're really holding starters down to 100 pitches and not letting you go past that. If you do, maybe you get 110. But you rarely see guys get to 120 anymore," Scherzer said. "If an inning takes 15 pitches, you get to 105 after seven and that's about all you get. The data shows that once you get past 105, 110, that's when you do start losing your effectiveness, no matter how good of a starter you are."

In this age of hard-throwing relievers and lefty specialists, a team would rather have someone fresh pitch than a player laboring for hours.

"Everybody's coming in

throwing gas. Are you really that much better than those guys down there at that point in time?" Scherzer said. "That's where you have to be honest with yourself and your manager and say, 'I've given everything I've got over these 105, 110 pitches.' The decision becomes pretty easy for the manager to say, 'I'm going to go to one of my wipeout bullpen guys.'"

Scherzer has been known to lobby to remain in at key late-game moments. He's as competitive as they come. Yet he says he grasped early in his career that all that truly matters is that his team wins — not how it happens.

His initial complete game arrived in his 179th big league start; he has 10 over the past five seasons.

"There were opportunities where I could have pitched one sooner. But it didn't matter. I could have gone back out there, but we're winning by 10 or 11 runs, so why go pitch the ninth? So I can say that I did it? No, then I'm hurting the team. It would be a selfish accomplishment," Scherzer said. "There's times where if you can get a rest, take it. You're actually helping the team more by not doing it."

As with everything in professional sports these days, it's all about what the numbers dictate. And there are calculations connected to saving up strength for the postseason, too; if NBA players sit out entire regular-season games for "load management," why shouldn't a pitcher head to the clubhouse a little early?

"We have a way of trying to evolve as an industry that's taken out a little bit of the 'machismo' that goes with the complete game," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "I'm not sure if that's good or bad, but it's part of the evolution of analytics being applied at a higher rate across the board."

Tiger wins in return to Match Play

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Six years later, the Dell Technologies Match Play was all too familiar for Tiger Woods.

He was on the cusp of losing his fourth straight hole Wednesday when Woods poured in a 10-foot par putt, and Aaron Wise three-putted from 30 feet. Just like that, momentum swung in his favor. Woods won three of the next six holes and won his opening match.

The round-robin format is new to Woods, who last played this event in 2013.

He had never been to Austin Country Club.

What doesn't change is the fickle nature of match play.

"I was up, the next thing I'm down in the match," Woods said. "Looked like I was about ready to go 2 down through 11. All of a sudden, I'm all square. I'm up and throw away a hole with a three-putt. It's one of those weird matches."

And it was like that all over the place in the opening session of group play.

Jim Furyk, who only two weeks ago never imagined he would be in the 64-man field, was 3 down to Jason Day when he won three straight holes around the turn, and ultimately the last two holes to win.

Ian Poulter was on his way to atoning for his 8-and-6 quarterfinal loss last year to Kevin Kisner until he watched Kisner jar a wedge from 58 yards for eagle, forcing Poulter to birdie the last two holes to win.

Jordan Spieth birdied his last two holes for a halve against Billy Horschel.

"Feels like a win to me," Spieth said. "If I were on his side of things, that's kind of a tough go."

Woods is a three-time winner of the World Golf Championship and has experienced enough to realize that scores don't matter as long as he wins.

"The way we were playing today, we're very thankful it's not stroke play," Woods said with a laugh.

Rivals carried to Sweet 16 by defense

Associated Press

EAST LANSING, Mich. — Put aside all that talk of a rivalry for a second. Right now, Michigan State and Michigan actually have a lot in common.

Both teams are in the Sweet 16 because of their defenses.

The Spartans and Wolverines played in back-to-back games Saturday in Des Moines, Iowa. Michigan beat Florida 64-49, then Michigan State handled Minnesota 70-50. The Wolverines allowed 21 points in the second half of their game, then the Spartans allowed 19 in the first half of theirs.

Two more wins for each, and Michigan State and Michigan would meet in a Final Four matchup that would have an entire state on edge. Both will be tested plenty before then, but if they defend as they did last weekend, they can play with anyone.

“I just think we’ve been real solid defensively,” Spartans forward Kenny Goins said. “It’s not like we’re going to go up and get the jam blocks that are above the rim, skying high for them. We get more of the

ones when it’s right at the start of your shot.”

The numbers at kenpom.com offer some insight into what makes these teams tough. Michigan is No. 2 in the country in adjusted defensive efficiency, and Michigan State is No. 8, but they’ve accomplished that in slightly different ways. The Wolverines are led by Xavier Simpson and Charles Matthews, two standout defenders on the perimeter.

Michigan opponents are attempting just 29.9 percent of their shots from three-point range, the third-lowest mark in the nation, and they’re making only 29 percent of them. Florida went a respectable 9-for-26 beyond the arc, but the Gators made only three threes in the second half.

“We wanted to shut off their water,” Matthews said. “They were getting open looks and our coaching staff did a great job of recognizing that and we just followed the game plan.”

These past couple of seasons have been quite a transformation for a Michigan program that was previously known more for the offensive wizard-

ry of coach John Beilein.

Assistant coach Luke Yaklich has received much of the credit for the team’s stingy defense, and the players have bought in. Michigan went all the way to the national title game last year before losing to Villanova.

“I think our 33 wins last year was the sales job,” Beilein said. “They saw it firsthand ... a team could beat really good teams last year, really good teams, with defense.”

Michigan (30-6) has a rim protector in 7-foot-1 Jon Teske, but shot blocking is more of a strength for Michigan State than Michigan.

The Spartans (30-6) haven’t been good at all at forcing turnovers, but they’re 18th in the country in block percentage and third in two-point defense — opponents are shooting 41.4 percent inside the arc. Last season, Michigan State led in those two categories, but the Spartans lost 6-foot-7 Miles Bridges and 6-foot-11 Jaren Jackson Jr. to the NBA.

Jackson led the team with 106 blocks last season, more than twice as many as any teammate, but Michigan State

still has plenty of guys who can protect the paint. Xavier Tillman has 60 blocks, Goins has 49 and Nick Ward 39.

“We led the conference in blocked shots, and I keep saying, who’s doing it? Jaren coming back as a ghost or what? It’s been strange,” coach Tom Izzo said. “So that was a stat that blew me away that was a really important stat last year, and I didn’t think it would be one this year.”

Michigan State takes on LSU (28-6) on Friday night in the regional semifinals, and Michigan plays Texas Tech (28-6) the previous night. They’ll be on different sides of the country now — and let’s be honest: Many fans of the Spartans and Wolverines will probably be rooting against each other.

But there’s a healthy respect between these programs, and last weekend, they achieved success with similar performances.

“We only scored 64 points,” Beilein said. “These guys holding them to 49 points is incredible, and that’s how we won the game.”

Freshman Reddish emerging as top shooter for Duke

Associated Press

DURHAM, N.C. — When Duke needs a clutch three-pointer, the best option might be Cameron Reddish.

The freshman has been solid overall, hitting one-third of his threes — but that number jumps to 42 percent in the second halves of games that are either tied or within a possession.

And as teams zone-up to slow down Duke’s Zion Williamson and RJ Barrett, Reddish could be the Blue Devils’ X-factor as they advance deeper into the NCAA Tournament bracket.

Reddish believes it comes down to focus.

“We all just want to win so badly, and we all look forward to taking that shot,” he said. “Just the thing is being focused

and being engaged and being ready.”

Next up for top-seeded Duke (31-5) is a rematch with fourth-seeded Virginia Tech (26-8) on Friday night in an East Regional semifinal in Washington, D.C. The Hokies beat the Blue Devils 77-72 on Feb. 26 in their second full game without an injured Williamson.

“We can’t take any team for granted,” Reddish said. “Make sure we give every minute our all. Can’t take any plays off. Every team’s out there playing for their lives, and we have to fight for ours and play our game.”

Shooting from three-point range has been an adventure at times for these Blue Devils, who rank 330th in Division I with a percentage of 30.7 per-

cent that ranks as the worst — by far — in school history. They don’t have a single shooter who ranks in the top 100 nationally.

Reddish has been the best of the bunch. His 33.3 percent shooting is tops on the team among those who have attempted at least 100 of them.

He’s had his share of off games, with a 1-for-9 against Hartford and a couple of 1-for-8s.

But he’s also shown a knack for making them at important times.

His three with 0.8 seconds remaining lifted Duke past Florida State in January. He hit a tying three in the final 90 seconds to cap a rally from 23 points down and help the Blue Devils stun Louisville.

And most recently, his three

— after UCF botched an alley-oop attempt — pulled Duke within one point with 1:44 remaining in a dramatic second-round victory over the Golden Knights.

“They’re young — we’re a young group, but what they did right at the end of that game in willing us to win was just absolutely sensational,” coach Mike Krzyzewski said.

For Reddish, it’s been a season filled with adjustments. He said he was more of a driver than a spot-up shooter in high school, but that desire to attack the rim has gotten him in foul trouble at times — he had three charging fouls in the home finale against Wake Forest.

“I’ve learned to shoot the ball a ton better since I’ve gotten here,” Reddish said.

NBA roundup

Warriors top Grizzlies, lead conference

Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — Stephen Curry and Kevin Durant each scored 28 points, with Durant going 12-for-13 from the field, and the Golden State Warriors beat the Memphis Grizzlies 118-103 on Wednesday night to take sole possession of the Western Conference lead.

Curry also had 10 rebounds, and DeMarcus Cousins added 16 points and nine rebounds to help the Warriors break a tie with idle Denver for the top spot in the West.

Jonas Valanciunas led Memphis with 27 points and 13 rebounds, and Mike Conley added 22 points to take the franchise's career scoring lead and added eight assists. Bruno Caboclo had 17 points and 13 rebounds.

Durant scored seven straight points in a 9-0 run that made it 100-92 midway through the fourth quarter.

Thunder 107, Pacers 99: Paul George scored 31 points against his former team, and host Oklahoma City had a 24-0 run in the third quarter to pull away from Indiana.

Steven Adams had 25 points and 12 rebounds, and Russell Westbrook added 17 points, 12 assists and 11 rebounds for his 29th triple-double of the season. The

Thunder won for only the second time in seven games.

Bojan Bogdanovic scored 28 points for Indiana, and Domantas Sabonis added 18 points and 10 rebounds.

Wizards 124, Suns 121: Devin Booker became the youngest player in NBA history with consecutive 50-point games, but his latest scoring binge was wasted once again by last-place Phoenix in a loss to visiting Washington.

Thomas Bryant's three-point play with 2.8 seconds left put the Wizards ahead for good in a back-and-forth game. Bryant caught Bradley Beal's pass off a baseline drive and dropped in the winning layup while getting fouled. After he added the free throw, Phoenix had one more chance to tie, but Troy Daniels missed a three-pointer from the corner just before the final buzzer.

The 22-year-old Booker finished with 50 points and 10 rebounds as the Suns, with the worst record in the Western Conference at 17-59, dropped their fifth straight. Booker scored 59 points in a 125-92 loss Monday night at Utah.

It was the first time a Phoenix player reached 50 points in back-to-back games.

Beal and Jabari Parker had 28 points apiece for the Wizards, who snapped a five-game skid. Bryant added 18 points and a

career-high 19 rebounds.

Trail Blazers 118, Bulls 98: Seth Curry scored a season-high 20 points and host Portland beat Chicago.

Still shaken by Jusuf Nurkic's gruesome leg injury two nights earlier in a double-overtime victory over Brooklyn that secured the Trail Blazers' sixth straight playoff appearance, Portland won its fifth in a row even though Damian Lillard scored a season-low 11.

The Bulls' Shaquille Harrison set career highs with 21 points and 10 rebounds.

Jazz 115, Lakers 100: Rudy Gobert had 22 points and 11 rebounds, Derrick Favors scored 20 and Joe Ingles nearly posted his first triple-double to power host Utah over depleted Los Angeles.

Jae Crowder scored 16 points and the balanced Jazz, with seven players in double figures, won for the eighth time in nine games.

Six weeks ago, Ingles went public with the news that his 2-year-old son was diagnosed with autism. Since then, he has been a vocal advocate for funding and awareness. Playing on Autism Awareness Night, he set a career high with 14 assists and added 11 points and nine rebounds.

Kyle Kuzma paced the Lakers with 21 points. JaVale McGee had 16 points and 13 rebounds.

NHL roundup

Pastrnak's three goals lift Bruins over Rangers

Associated Press

BOSTON — It certainly appears David Pastrnak has worked the rust off.

Pastrnak had three goals and two assists for a career-high five points Wednesday night, sending the Boston Bruins to a 6-3 victory over the New York Rangers.

Playing his fifth game since missing 16 following left thumb surgery, the winger raised his goal total to a team-leading 36.

"Pretty close," Boston coach Bruce Cassidy said when asked if Pastrnak is fully recovered. "Obviously, a great night. He was firing the puck well. It looked like he was more com-

fortable handling it in traffic."

Coming off a 3-1 road trip but disappointed after blowing a two-goal lead Monday night against NHL-best Tampa Bay, the Bruins broke it open with four goals in the third period for their 12th consecutive victory at home. It's their longest streak since winning 14 straight during the 2008-09 season.

Pastrnak completed his fourth career hat trick and third this season with a power-play goal to make it 4-2 with 7:08 to play, triggering a flow of hats that littered the ice. He became the first Bruins player with a trio of hat tricks in one season since Hall of Famer Cam Neely in 1993-94.

Avalanche 4, Golden Knights 3: Tyson Barrie scored to become the franchise's career goals leader among defensemen, Philipp Grubauer made 34 saves and playoff-chasing Colorado beat visiting Vegas.

Matt Calvert, Nathan MacKinnon and Gabriel Bourque also scored to help the Avalanche stay two points in front of Arizona for the last wild-card spot in the Western Conference with five games left.

Flyers 5, Maple Leafs 4 (SO): Sean Couturier scored in regulation and had the only goal in a shootout in host Philadelphia's victory over Toronto.

Radko Gudas, Travis Konecny and Ryan Hartman also

scored for Philadelphia. The Flyers remained mathematically alive for a playoff berth, moving within eight points of idle Montreal for the final playoff spot with five regular-season games remaining.

Stars 2, Flames 1: Alexander Radulov and Miro Heiskanen scored to lead their team past host Calgary in a game in which Dallas goaltender Ben Bishop left with an injury.

Play was stopped with Bishop on his knees in obvious discomfort at 13:22 of the second period. He skated off under his own power and went straight to the dressing room. There was no immediate word on his condition.