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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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US, Qatar work on special ops crisis response

Stars and Stripes

U.S. Special Forces troops completed a joint crisis response exercise with their Qatari counterparts this week, including a simulated strike on a terrorist network in the Persian Gulf country, which is home to U.S. Central Command's forward headquarters facility and Combined Air Operations Center.

About 200 U.S. troops and 400 Qatari Joint Special Forces and Internal Security Forces took part in the weeklong exercise Invincible Sentry 2019, Special Operations Command Central said in a statement.

The bilateral exercise, which took place at military training areas and remote locations throughout Qatar, involved scenarios in which Qatari officials requested assistance from the U.S. Embassy in Doha in response to a transnational security threat.

The goal for the exercise, one of 80 that CENTCOM conducts with regional partners each year, is to increase awareness of the special operations capabilities of the United States and its allies and to improve their ability to work together, the military said.

"What we (Green Berets) bring to the fight, by doing ev-

erything with and through our partners, is a capability that far outweighs our small teams," said Maj. William Krebs, an Army Special Forces commander quoted in the statement. "We'd like to think some conflicts will never come to fruition because of our persistent engagement at key locations around the world."

Working side-by-side, U.S. and Qatari special operations units carried out a combined strike on a simulated terrorist network as part of this year's exercise. Moving through a town, the two forces infiltrated their objective and took down the terrorists, the statement

said.

Under an agreement signed in 1992, Qatar hosts up to 10,000 U.S. forces personnel at its military facilities, including Al Udeid Air Base, a Congressional Research Service report said in 2017.

The country has also supported U.S. and coalition military operations in the region, to include the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the anti-Islamic State fight in Iraq and Syria. Doha has also recently hosted several rounds of peace talks between U.S. and Taliban representatives aimed at ending the war in Afghanistan, now in its 18th year.

Shanahan's bid for defense secretary nomination in doubt

Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — Acting Defense Secretary Pat Shanahan's prospects to head the Pentagon are increasingly at risk as President Donald Trump holds off on picking him and an investigation continues into whether he's showed favoritism toward Boeing, his former employer.

On Wednesday a key senator said he thinks the nomination — widely expected after former Defense Secretary Jim Mattis quit in December — may not happen at all.

"If he hasn't done it until now — I'm not casting any accusations or even expressing how I personally feel — but if the president hasn't done it by now, then apparently he's not going to," Oklahoma Republican James Inhofe, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said in an interview Wednesday. "That's the only conclusion I can come to."

While Trump has praised Shanahan, he has also passed

up opportunities to endorse him for defense chief, including during trips together over the last week to a tank factory in Ohio and to the president's Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida.

Shanahan, who is already the longest-serving acting defense secretary in U.S. history, could still be picked by the president. Inhofe — who heads the committee that would vote on the nomination and has said he would support Shanahan — may simply be prodding Trump to make a decision.

Unlike the taciturn Mattis, Shanahan has been outspoken in his loyalty to Trump on issues from the border wall to Syria. But the president, who likes his Cabinet members to convey strength, may not have been impressed by Shanahan's testimony before two congressional committees this month.

Inhofe said Shanahan, who served as deputy to Mattis, tried to answer questions before his committee "in a thoughtful way, not wanting to make any blunders by overreacting" so he

"was overly cautious from what his normal behavior would be."

Standing on the tarmac of the West Palm Beach, Fla., airport on Friday during the Mar-a-Lago trip, Trump was asked whether he planned to nominate Shanahan for the job. He declined to answer, saying only that his acting Pentagon chief was a "great guy."

Shanahan has made clear he'd like the post.

"I think I can serve the department well," Shanahan said in an interview Tuesday with Defense One. "I've spent nearly two years on the National Defense Strategy. I know the defense strategy, I know what it takes to see it through, and I think I can make a big impact in that area."

Yet Shanahan appeared to struggle Tuesday when asked to defend Trump's decision to shift \$1 billion in Defense Department funding to help pay for the president's border wall. He conceded the Pentagon's action — made without seeking approval from the leaders of

congressional defense committees — is likely to result in strict limits by Congress on such "re-programming" of funds in the future.

"We said, 'Here are the risks longer-term to the department' and those risks were weighed," Shanahan said at a House Armed Services Committee hearing. "Given a legal order from the commander-in-chief, we are executing on that order."

His potential nomination has also been plagued by bad timing, given his previous role as an executive at Boeing as the Chicago-based company faces scrutiny over the crash of two of its 737 Max passenger planes.

Then there are questions about whether he has inappropriately voiced support for Boeing — or criticism of the No. 2 defense contractor's rivals — since joining the Pentagon. That's the subject of a Pentagon inspector general's probe called for by an outside group, which cited reports by Politico and Bloomberg.

USAF grounds B-1B bomber fleet to inspect ejection seats

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Air Force on Thursday grounded its fleet of B-1B Lancers to inspect the conventional bombers' ejection systems after discovering a parachute rigging problem during a routine inspection, the service announced in a statement.

Air Force technicians will inspect all 62 of the service's B-1B aircraft during the stand-down, said Air Force Capt. Earon Brown, a spokesman for Air Force Global Strike Command. The jets will be returned to flying status on a rolling basis as they are inspected and any issues are resolved, he said.

The stand-down marks the second such grounding of the Air Force B-1B fleet in about one year due to ejection system concerns. Last May, Lancers were grounded about three

weeks after a B1-B from Dyess Air Force Base, Texas, experienced an in-flight emergency and its ejections seats failed to deploy. The crew, in that case, landed safely.

Air Force officials said the problem announced Thursday was unrelated to the 2018 problem, which has been fixed.

At issue, Brown said, is the rigging of a drogue parachute system discovered during an inspection. The Air Force was concerned the issue could be fleet-wide and ordered the inspections.

A drogue parachute is a small parachute that is deployed before the main parachute. In the ejection system, it is used to stabilize the airman's seat before the main parachute ejects from it.

In its statement, the Air Force described the stand down as a precaution.

"The safety of airmen is the

command's top priority and this precautionary step will enable the command to correct any potential issues," the statement reads.

Brown said Thursday that none of the Air Force's B-1Bs are now deployed overseas or supporting direct combat operations. He declined to predict how long the stand down could last.

The Boeing-built B-1B, known as the Bone, is a long-range bomber with four jet engines that has been used by the Air Force for some 30 years including in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan.

It boasts the largest payload of conventional weapons of any U.S. military aircraft, capable of carrying tens of thousands of pounds of a wide variety of guided and unguided bombs, according to the Air Force.

NC may ban wind power near flight training area

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — North Carolina could permanently ban big wind-power projects from the most energy intensive parts of the state's Atlantic coast, but a state senator said Wednesday the move is necessary to prevent hindering military training flights.

Legislation introduced by Republican Sen. Harry Brown would prohibit building, expanding or operating sky-scraping wind turbines within about 100 miles from the coast. The bill would apply to the area that stretches from the Virginia border to south of the Camp Lejeune Marine Corps base.

"It would have a major impact to the areas of North Carolina with potential for wind energy development," said Brent Summerville, who teaches about wind energy in Appalachian State University's sustainable technology program.

Brown said he's trying to keep high structures out of current or future flight paths around the state's major military bases, a Coast Guard helicopter installation, and the coastal bombing range where Air Force from a base in Goldsboro and Navy pilots from Virginia Beach, Va., practice missions day and night.

If there's a conflict between a nascent wind power industry and the tens of thousands of jobs tied to the military in Eastern North Carolina, "I think you do need to make choices," said Brown, whose district includes Camp Lejeune.

"If we lose any of those bases, it would be devastating, in my mind, to eastern North Carolina. If you look, we have agriculture and we have military, and we don't have much else," Brown said.

Adviser to Joint Chiefs reinstated after probe

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said Thursday that he reinstated his senior enlisted adviser after an Army Inspector General investigation found he had violated ethics rules.

Army Command Sgt. Maj. John Troxell was temporarily removed from his position in September and assigned as a special assistant to the vice director of the Joint Staff during the investigation, which concluded in late February, according to the Pentagon.

The investigation by the Inspector General's Office substantiated two complaints against Troxell. The violations include improperly using military personnel to carry out

tasks outside of their official duties such as personal errands and improperly endorsing commercial fitness and nutrition products on his official military social media accounts, according to a Pentagon statement.

However, Troxell did not receive any personal or monetary gain from the endorsements, according to the Pentagon statement.

Troxell was reinstated after Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, reviewed the investigation and "took appropriate administrative action." In the statement, Dunford said he weighed the gravity of the ethics violations by Troxell against his 37 years of military service.

"Appropriate corrective ac-

tion has been taken and I'm confident that [Troxell] has learned from this experience. I am equally confident in his competence and capability to continue serving as our senior enlisted leader, which is why I reinstated him to his duties as [senior enlisted adviser]," Dunford said in the statement. "Now it's time to move on and get back to the important work we have before us."

Troxell became the senior enlisted adviser to Dunford in December of 2015. In that role, Troxell serves as the principal military adviser to Dunford and the defense secretary on issues pertaining to the enlisted force, such as military standards, professional development, pay and promotion, quality of life and awards.

Trump's decrees surprise aides, allies

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — There was just one problem when President Donald Trump walked down the stairs of Air Force One and unceremoniously declared that the Islamic State had lost the last of its territory in Syria.

He wasn't supposed to announce it yet.

Instead, the plan was to let U.S.-backed Syrian Defense Forces proclaim the victory, in recognition of its losses over five years of battle.

But Trump was on the tarmac on a sunny afternoon in South Florida holding a map of Iraq and Syria, which happened to be upside-down. "Here's ISIS on Election Day," he said, pointing to a spot showing ISIS-controlled territory in red. "Here's ISIS right now," he said, gesturing to another point.

Back in Syria, commanders fumed.

"Of course, the SDF was expecting to

announce it to the world, but the White House did it a day earlier," said an SDF official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the press.

It was one of a series of Trump announcements in a 72-hour span hours last week that upended planning on three of the administration's most important foreign policy initiatives. Even with a president known for impulsivity, this was unusual, leaving stunned aides scrambling to explain the moves, according to U.S. and foreign officials.

The announcements, which came as the White House awaited the conclusions of the probe by special counsel Robert Mueller, started with Trump declaring on Twitter that the U.S. would recognize Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, reversing decades of American policy.

Trump made the Golan announcement

on March 21 while Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was in Jerusalem, planning for a routine day of meetings. It had become anything but routine by dusk.

The announcement was quickly criticized as a violation of international law from friends and foes who view the strategic highlands captured from Syria in the 1967 Middle East war as occupied territory.

Trump had cast aside plans to announce the step days later during Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to Washington. He also rejected advice from advisers who suggested he wait, at least until Pompeo left his last Mideast stop in Lebanon, where Syria's influence is strong.

The abrupt announcement caught Americans and Israelis off guard.

Dems continue push to release full report

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Democrats intensified their demands for Robert Mueller's full report after learning the special counsel's findings from his Trump-Russia investigation run to more than 300 pages, while President Donald Trump boasted of total exoneration based on a four-page summary by his attorney general.

House Judiciary Chairman Jerrold Nadler was told by Attorney General William Barr that there's no intention of giving the confidential report to Congress immediately as he redacts grand jury testimony and other elements.

Democrats say they may subpoena the report if it's not forthcoming by their Tuesday deadline, which Barr has said will not be met.

Through the day, tempers were rising on Capitol Hill.

Shaking her fist for emphasis, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Barr's summary, which cleared Trump of cam-

paign collusion with Russia and criminal obstruction of Mueller's federal probe, was "condescending" and "arrogant."

"Mr. Attorney General," she said, "show us the report and we'll come to our own conclusions." She asked what Trump and the Republicans were afraid of and mocked them as "scaredy-cats."

The length of Mueller's still-confidential report makes clear that there are substantially more details that he and his team have documented in their investigation than Barr disclosed to Congress and the public. The volume of pages was described Thursday by a Justice Department official and another person familiar with the document.

The Justice Department official said Barr discussed the length of the report during a phone call Wednesday with Nadler, who would only indicate it was less than 1,000 pages.

Trump turns report into campaign prop

Associated Press

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. — Presenting himself as both vindicated and vindictive, a fired-up President Donald Trump turned the findings of the Russia investigation into a political weapon at a Michigan rally that was part victory lap, part 2020 campaign push.

Trump unleashed a fervent diatribe Thursday about the inquiry, which he deemed "the greatest hoax in the history of our country." He warned that those behind the probe "would be held accountable," aired his grievances about the "unfair" media coverage and seethed that the matter was an attempt "to tear up the fabric of our great democracy."

"After three years of lies and smears and slander, the Russia hoax is dead," said Trump. "This was nothing more than a sinister effort to undermine our historic election victory and to sabotage the will of the American people."

The rollicking 82-minute

speech unfolded before a boisterous crowd in a key state that Trump swiped from Democrats in 2016. It marked his first political event since Attorney General William Barr released a summary that said special counsel Robert Mueller found no evidence that his campaign "conspired or coordinated" with the Russian government to influence the 2016 campaign. With the cloud of the probe largely lifted, Trump is hoping to win re-election by keeping Michigan and several other Rust Belt states in his column.

"It's going to be so much easier the second time: We're one for one," Trump boasted.

The president linked Mueller's probe with the myriad investigations launched by House Democrats and tried to make the case that, after Mueller's findings, further inquiries are partisan overreach.

Parliament again rejects May's Brexit deal

The Washington Post

LONDON — Theresa May's Brexit deal was slapped down for third time by the British Parliament on Friday, with all bets off on when or how United Kingdom will leave the European Union.

The EU gave Britain until the end of this week to approve the withdrawal agreement. Now it has until April 12 to propose a new plan, or leave the bloc without a deal.

The prime minister's stripped-down version of her twice-defeated Brexit deal lost on Friday by 58 votes — 344-286 — in yet another “last ditch” and “cliff edge” attempt to exit from the European Union.

The third losing vote for May in the House of Commons came on the day Britain was due to “take back control” and de-

part the continental trading bloc.

“Today should have been the day that the United Kingdom left the European Union. That we are not leaving today is a matter of deep personal regret to me,” May said, moments before lawmakers started voting.

“There are those who will say, ‘the House has rejected every option so far, you’ll probably lose, so why bother?’ I bother because this is the last opportunity to guarantee Brexit,” she said.

The prime minister offered to resign if her own Conservative Party could help the deal over the line. And that did help convince some members to back it — but not enough.

In a series of tweets on Friday morning, Boris Johnson, Britain's former foreign

secretary and a favorite to replace May, explained his screeching U-turn by saying that not voting for it posed the “risk of being forced to accept an even worse version of Brexit or losing Brexit altogether.”

Dominic Raab, the former Brexit secretary and another potential contender for May's job, said he was now on board.

“I will vote for the motion,” he said, prompting cheers and jeers in the Commons on Friday.

Backing it will “stave off a longer extension and prevent European elections in May,” Raab said.

But May needed more than just Conservative Party “switchers.” She needed the Democratic Unionist Party, who voted against the government.

City leaders say Smollett owes Chicago \$130,000

Associated Press

CHICAGO — City officials have ordered “Empire” actor Jussie Smollett to pay \$130,000 to cover the cost of the investigation into his report of a street attack that Chicago police say was staged to promote his career.

A letter from the city's legal department sent Thursday to Smollett and his attorneys said the figure covers overtime worked by more than two dozen detectives and officers who spent weeks looking into Smollett's claim. The work included reviewing video and physical evidence and conducting interviews.

Those resources, the letter said, “could have been used for other investigations.”

Hours earlier, President Donald Trump tweeted that the FBI and the Department of Justice would review the “outrageous” case, calling it an “embarrassment” to the country.

Prosecutors infuriated Mayor Rahm Emanuel and Chicago's police chief this week when they abruptly dropped 16 felony counts that accused Smollett of making a false police report about being the target of a racist, anti-gay attack in January.

Smollett has maintained his innocence and insisted that the

attack was real.

The prosecution sealed the case, but authorities still say the actor concocted the assault. Prosecutors offered no additional information Thursday during a court hearing where media attorneys argued that the public has a right to know what happened.

The Justice Department sometimes brings federal cases after state prosecutors have declined to file charges, including after police shootings that the federal government believes might constitute civil rights violations. But department policy generally restricts prosecutors from bringing federal charges after state charges have been resolved unless they can establish that the potential crime at issue is a federal one and involves “a substantial federal interest.”

If Smollett fails to pay, officials could charge him with violating a city ordinance and seek fines, damages and court costs, the letter said.

Prosecutors initially charged Smollett with one felony count in February. A grand jury indicted him on 15 more counts earlier this month. But in a stunning reversal Tuesday, prosecutors abruptly dropped all charges, just five weeks after the allegations were filed.

Special Olympics funding will be restored to budget

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump says he is backing off his budget request to eliminate funding for the Special Olympics, reversing course on a proposal that was unlikely to be approved by Congress after days of bipartisan criticism.

Speaking to reporters Thursday as he left the White House for a rally in Michigan, Trump said he had authorized funding for the organization.

“I heard about it this morning,” he said. “I have overridden my people. We’re funding the Special Olympics.”

Trump's announcement came after Education Secretary Betsy DeVos spent days defending the proposal, which drew widespread condemnation from lawmakers as well as advocates and celebrities. The president's sudden reversal reflected a political desire to move away from a plan that was not expected to pass Congress but also underscored Trump's comfort with undercutting top officials.

Said Trump: “I’ve been to the Special Olympics. I think it’s incredible.”

DeVos, walking back her de-

fense of the cuts proposal, issued a statement, saying: “I am pleased and grateful the President and I see eye to eye on this issue and that he has decided to fund our Special Olympics grant. This is funding I have fought for behind the scenes over the last several years.”

The remarks were a sharp contrast from her comments to Senate Democrats in a budget hearing earlier in the day. DeVos said her department had to make “tough choices” on the budget and insisted the Special Olympics should be supported through private donations.

In a heated exchange with Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., DeVos said she “wasn’t personally involved” in pushing for elimination of the funding, but she defended it as her agency seeks to cut \$7 billion for the 2020 budget. “Let’s not use disabled children in a twisted way for your political narrative,” she said.

The president's shift Thursday was not the first time he has undermined a top aide. He repeatedly berated former Attorney General Jeff Sessions in public and private and clashed openly with former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, ultimately firing him in a tweet.

Purdue stuns Tennessee in overtime

Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Down two to Tennessee with 2.7 seconds left, Purdue narrowly avoided a 5-second call before Carsen Edwards took a pass in the corner and heaved up a three-point attempt that bounced off the rim.

But a whistle gave Edwards and the Boilermakers a reprieve.

Lamonte' Turner bumped into Edwards after he released the shot and the Big Ten's leading scorer went to the line for three free throws with 1.7 seconds left. Edwards missed the first, steadied himself, and knocked down the next two to force overtime. Given a second chance to put away the Volunteers, the Boilermakers got it done.

Edwards finished with 29 points as Purdue advanced to the Elite Eight of the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2000, beating Tennessee 99-94 on Thursday night after blowing an 18-point lead.

"When I got to the free-throw line, I was struggling all game," said Edwards, an 85.2 percent

shooter who went 8-for-14 at the line in the game. "Being able to hit the last two was just a blessing. Just an opportunity, stepped up to get us some more time to play."

Turner said Edwards had been kicking out his leg all night, something he had been pointing out to the referee.

"I try to contest the shot, and his leg made contact with me and they called a foul," Turner said. "So I don't understand what I'm supposed to do."

The third-seeded Boilermakers (26-9) will play top-seeded Virginia, a 53-49 winner over Oregon, on Saturday night in the South Regional final for their first trip to the Final Four since 1980.

Purdue is in a regional final for the fifth time, but first with coach Matt Painter, who had gotten the team to the round of 16 four times previously.

"I'm happy for myself, happy for my guys and happy for Coach Paint," said Ryan Cline, who had a career-high 27 points shooting 7-for-10 from three-point range before fouling out in OT.

Grant Williams' dunk with

8.8 seconds left made it 82-80 and had second-seeded Tennessee (31-6) on the verge of its second Elite Eight berth all-time. Williams also blocked Edwards' layup attempt in the closing seconds out of bounds. Officials reviewed the play to see if it went off Edwards' ankle, but only adjusted the clock, giving Purdue one more chance.

"I didn't know if it went off me or his leg or anything," Williams said. "They just said they looked at the clock and the time on the clock. I don't know if they looked for who it went off on so couldn't tell you."

It was Tennessee's second straight overtime game in this tournament. The Vols blew a 25-point lead to Iowa in the second round, but recovered to win it in OT. The last team to play consecutive overtime games in the NCAA Tournament was Florida in 2011. The Gators beat BYU and lost to Butler.

"We had the lead with one-point something seconds left," Tennessee coach Rick Barnes said. "Tough foul."

Purdue scored nine of the first 11 points in OT.

"I think we had that relief," Painter said. "Our guys did such a good job of competing in overtime. You know how it goes. Like the ball bounced our way a couple times. I thought in regulation there were a couple bounces we didn't get. But it did in overtime."

Williams and Admiral Schofield scored 21 apiece for Tennessee. Jordan Bowden had 16, Turner 15 and Jordan Bone 15.

This was the third straight Sweet 16 berth for the Boilermakers, and their experience at this point showed compared to a Tennessee team with nobody around from the Vols' last trip to a regional semifinal back in 2014. The Boilermakers led 40-28 at halftime, handing Tennessee only its fourth double-digit deficit this season.

The Boilermakers led 51-33 with 16:19 left before the Vols turned in a 16-2 run to tie it up at 65 with 6:56 left.

Purdue also advanced to the Elite Eight in 1969, 1980, and 1994. The Boilermakers improved to 5-7 all-time in regional semifinals and also 3-5 against the SEC in the NCAAs.

Texas Tech uses defense to clamp down on Michigan

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — More than 24 minutes into the game, the nation's best defense had yet to allow its 20th point.

Yes, Texas Tech makes it tough on people. One more clamp-down job like this and the Red Raiders will be D-ing up in the Final Four.

Jarett Culver's 22 points were a mere subplot in third-seeded Tech's 63-44 takedown of No. 2 Michigan in the West Region on Thursday night — a victory that set up an intriguing Elite Eight showdown against Gonzaga, which boasts the country's leading offense.

Texas Tech (29-6) is back to this point for the second straight year thanks to a shut-down job of epic proportions. The Raiders held an efficient-

if-not-spectacular Michigan (30-7) offense to 16 field goals, 32 percent shooting and only a single three-point basket on 19 attempts — a clunker by C.J. Baird in mop-up duty that drooled in with 21.8 seconds left.

"We guarded at a high level," coach Chris Beard said.

Sure did.

Only five players scored for Michigan, which was led by its brash playmaker, freshman Iggy Brazdeikis, who finished with 17, most of which came well after the game was out of hand.

There simply wasn't anywhere to go against a lanky, athletic Texas Tech defense that succeeds by clogging the middle, then forcing teams to either move the ball toward the

baseline and settle for jumpers with people in their face, or try to attack the rim, but pay a price while doing it.

Michigan has the nation's second-best defense, and nearly 9 minutes into the game, the score was tied: 6-6.

"At the media timeout, (Assistant coach Mark Adams) was, like, 'We need to make an adjustment,' and I was like, 'Coach, they've scored six points. We need to get a basket,'" Beard said.

Texas Tech got its share. Michigan did not.

Watching the score get out of hand, Wolverines coach John Beilein, one of the best tacticians in the game, called a timeout early in the second half to try to get a shot, a possession, anything, that might generate

something for his team to build on.

The Wolverines worked the ball to Zavier Simpson, who dribbled, and dribbled, and tried to take it to the rim against Red Raiders guard Matt Mooney. Simpson lobbed it up toward the rim. It barely grazed glass.

Moments later on the other end, Culver sent an alley-oop pass to Tariq Owens, who dunked so hard, the ball went into the band section. It made the score 36-18. By that point, the lead might as well have been a million. Michigan scored its 20th point on the next possession, when Jordan Poole looped an impossibly high banker just out of reach of Owens — off glass and in. There was 15:31 left in the game.

Top-seeded Virginia holds off Oregon

Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Ty Jerome's three-pointer was memorable not only for its timing, but because it marked one of the few Virginia made against Oregon.

Jerome gave the Cavaliers a three-point lead with 3:34 remaining, and then they used their trademark defense to smother the Ducks and make it stand.

No. 1 seed Virginia reached its second regional final in four years with a 53-49 victory over 12th-seeded Oregon on Thursday night in the NCAA Tournament. The Cavaliers face third-seeded Purdue in the South Region final Sunday for a trip to the Final Four.

The Cavaliers (32-3) shot 36 percent and matched a season low in scoring, but got baskets when needed to outlast the Ducks (25-13). Jerome's three was the biggest as he took Kihei Clark's pass and converted from deep to make it 48-45.

A follow-up from behind the arc would have been even better for the junior guard, who obviously wanted breathing room in a tight defensive game.

"Honestly, right now I'm just thinking about the one I missed after that," said Jerome, who scored 13 points and made 3 of 8 from long range and 5 of 12 overall. "That would have really sealed the game."

Of his clutch shot, Jerome added, "We started doing a better job of moving. Kihei found me in the right spot, and I think Dre (Hunter) or Mamadi (Diakite) set a great screen. I think they did a great job of finding me in the right spot."

Virginia clamped down from there, holding Oregon scoreless for more than five minutes after the Ducks went ahead, 45-42, on Louis King's three with 5:43 left.

Clark tied it with a three with 5:21 left and De'Andre Hunter got free for a layup with 24 seconds left for a five-point edge that was enough to stop Ore-

gon's 10-game winning streak.

"At times we struggled," Virginia coach Tony Bennett said, "but we made enough offensive plays and certainly rallied defensively."

Most important for Virginia was moving a game closer to its first Final Four since 1984. That goal seemed shaky as the Cavaliers had to rally past No. 16 seed Gardner-Webb in the first round, but they recovered to win that game before beating Oklahoma.

Oregon presented a completely different challenge. The Ducks were on a roll and winning big, thanks to a lineup featuring four 6-foot-9 starters. But the Cavaliers kept them from being a factor to reach the regional final.

"I mean, it's definitely a milestone for us," Virginia guard Braxton Key said. "But we're not done yet."

Clark finished with 12 points, six assists and four rebounds. Diakite grabbed 11 rebounds as Virginia edged Oregon 34-31

on the glass and held the Ducks to 38 percent shooting.

King's 16 points led Oregon, while Payton Pritchard had 11 and Paul White 10. The Ducks had hoped to reach their third Elite Eight in four years but struggled all night to score — especially down the stretch.

"They make a lot of people take bad shots," coach Dana Altman said. "But we didn't handle that very well."

Oregon's loss denied Altman from becoming the program's winningest coach. He entered the game tied with Ernie Kent at 235 wins but must wait until the Ducks' season opener for another chance to stand alone.

Diakite and Oregon reserve guard Ehab Amin were each called for technical fouls following a second-half confrontation under Virginia's basket. Diakite swung around several times to get defenders off him, but ended up in a staredown with Amin, who suddenly fell to the floor in an apparent flop.

Gonzaga hammers Florida State in Sweet 16 rematch

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Gonzaga was not going to be bullied by Florida State again with a spot in the Elite Eight on the line.

The top-seeded Bulldogs beat Florida State 72-58 in a Sweet 16 rematch Thursday night that moved Gonzaga to a regional final for the fourth time.

"This year we came with revenge and we did it," said Rui Hachimura, who led Gonzaga with 17 points in the West Region semifinal.

Gonzaga (33-3) is back in the Elite Eight for the second time in three years after Florida State ended the Bulldogs' season last year. That defeat, as well as games this season against North Carolina, Duke and Tennessee, is what Zach Norvell Jr. said prepared Gonzaga to face fourth-seeded Florida State (29-8) again.

"We wanted to be more physical than them, take the fight to them both on offensive and defensive ends, trying to switch up schemes and don't let them get too comfortable," said Norvell, who scored 15 points.

Gonzaga will face Texas Tech on Saturday for the first spot in the Final Four.

The Bulldogs were the aggressors against Florida State, which had only lost to Duke and North Carolina in the two months leading into the NCAA Tournament. Gonzaga had four players score 14 or more points but was powered by defense — the Bulldogs outrebounded Florida State by nine, had 13 offensive rebounds and scored 17 second-chance points.

Florida State could not consistently counter Gonzaga's physicality, and the Seminoles shot just 39.3 percent from the field (24-for-61), were 3-for-20 on three-pointers and commit-

ted 14 turnovers.

"They are great athletes so it's tough to get them off the boards," Seminoles forward RaiQuan Gray said. "Their off-the-glass play, they attack the boards hard. It was really tough to play against."

Brandon Clarke — who had 15 points, 12 rebounds and five blocked shots — also said that confidence played a role. The Bulldogs had Florida State's 7-foot-4 center Christ Koumadje in early foul trouble and held the senior to eight points and only 12 minutes.

"It's always tough when you're playing a player that's 7-4, so that just always kind of has you second-guessing when you're driving in the lane," he said. "But I feel like this year we weren't really doing that and we were just, you know, going in strong and just playing the game that we always play."

Gonzaga led most of the game

but Florida State rallied to pull within four with less than four minutes to play. The Bulldogs closed the door though with a 12-2 run as Florida State missed six of seven from the field.

Norvell's three-pointer with 3:06 remaining made it 63-56 and ended any hopes of a comeback.

Trent Forrest led Florida State with 20 points. The Seminoles advanced to the Sweet 16 in consecutive seasons for the first time since 1993, but fell one step short of another trip to the Elite Eight.

"I thought the second half where the game had gotten away from us a little bit, our guys worked hard and cut the lead down, but we couldn't seem to hit the open perimeter shots and that seemed to be what made the difference in the game," Florida State coach Leonard Hamilton said.

Roundup

Dodgers knock around D-Backs

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Joc Pederson and Enrique Hernandez each hit two of the Los Angeles Dodgers' eight home runs Thursday in a 12-5 victory over the Arizona Diamondbacks.

The Dodgers set a major league record for homers on opening day and tied the franchise mark for any game.

Hernandez, Austin Barnes and Corey Seager all homered in the fourth inning to chase Arizona ace Zack Greinke (0-1). Max Muncy, Cody Bellinger and Hernandez connected in the seventh for the power-packed Dodgers, whose pursuit of a third straight National League pennant got off to a thrilling start.

Adam Jones and Christian Walker homered for the Diamondbacks, but their pitching staff's eight homers allowed also set a team record.

The Dodgers and Diamondbacks weren't the only ones going deep, either, as teams around the majors combined to set an all-time high for home runs on opening day.

Phillies 10, Braves 4: Bryce Harper struck out twice in green Phanatic cleats in his \$330 million debut and bowed to thousands of fans in No. 3 jerseys who gave him rousing standing ovations during host Philadelphia's win over Atlanta.

Harper had the city electric in anticipation for his first game in Philly since he signed a \$330 million, 13-year deal that was briefly the richest in baseball.

He went 0-for-3 with an intentional walk and failed to deliver a big hit — but no worries, the Phillies picked up the scoring slack.

Harper's presence in the lineup helped blow the game open when the Braves walked the lefty slugger to load the bases. Rhys Hoskins followed with a grand slam off reliever Luke Jackson that broke open the game.

Phillies newcomer Andrew

McCutchen hit a leadoff homer against Julio Teheran (0-1). Maikel Franco added a three-run shot against the defending NL East champions.

Aaron Nola (1-0) won despite walking five in six innings.

Mets 2, Nationals 0: Robinson Cano homered in his first at-bat and added a late RBI single, Jacob deGrom outpitched Max Scherzer as each struck out at least 10 in a sterling matchup between the winners of the past three NL Cy Young Awards, and visiting New York edged Bryce Harper-less Washington.

A day after signing a \$137.5 million, five-year contract, deGrom (1-0) compiled 10 strikeouts with one walk and five hits in six innings, setting a major league record with his 30th consecutive start allowing three runs or fewer.

Tigers 2, Blue Jays 0 (10): Jordan Zimmermann took a perfect game into the seventh inning, Christian Stewart hit a two-run homer in the 10th and Detroit beat host Toronto.

Zimmermann, who pitched a no-hitter for Washington on the final day of the 2014 season, came close to bookending it — Hall of Famer Bob Feller threw the only no-hitter on opening day, for Cleveland in 1940.

This bid ended when Teoscar Hernandez reached on a two-out infield single. That was the only hit Zimmerman allowed in seven sparkling innings.

Rockies 6, Marlins 3: Kyle Freeland allowed two hits and one run over seven innings in his first opening day start as visiting Colorado beat sloppy Miami.

Reds 5, Pirates 3: Pinch-hitter Derek Dietrich connected for a three-run homer in the seventh inning and new-look Cincinnati rallied past visiting Pittsburgh.

Yankees 7, Orioles 2: Luke Voit hit a first-inning homer, Masahiro Tanaka finally got an opening day victory in his fourth try and New York started the season with a win over visiting Baltimore.

Astros 5, Rays 1: At St. Petersburg, Fla., Justin Verlander outpitched Blake Snell in a rare opening day matchup between a reigning Cy Young Award winner and runner-up, helping Houston begin the season with a victory over Tampa Bay.

Athletics 4, Angels 0: Reigning home run champion Khris Davis went deep for the second time this season, Marcus Semien added a solo shot and Oakland blanked visiting Los Angeles for its first win after a pair of losses to Seattle last week in Japan.

Twins 2, Indians 0: New addition Marwin Gonzalez hit a two-run double in the seventh inning, Jose Berrios outpitched Corey Kluber and host Minnesota gave manager Rocco Baldelli a victory in his debut against Cleveland.

Padres 2, Giants 0: Manny Machado went hitless in his first game with San Diego but Fernando Tatis Jr. singled twice in his big league debut against visiting San Francisco.

Royals 5, White Sox 3: Brad Keller pitched two-hit ball over seven shutout innings, Adalberto Mondesi tripled twice and host Kansas City held off Chicago after the start of their season opener was delayed nearly two hours by rain.

Brewers 5, Cardinals 4: Center fielder Lorenzo Cain soared above the wall to rob Jose Martinez of a tying home run for the final out, lifting Christian Yelich and host Milwaukee over St. Louis.

Mariners 12, Red Sox 4: Tim Beckham hit two of his team's three home runs off Boston ace Chris Sale, and host Seattle improved to 3-0 with a victory over the defending World Series champion.

Cubs 12, Rangers 4: Javier Baez homered twice, Jon Lester won for the first time in his last five opening day starts and visiting Chicago spoiled the debut of new Texas manager Chris Woodward.

Woods down, not yet out at Match Play

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Tiger Woods lost his match and got off easy.

At least he still has a chance in the Dell Technologies Match Play.

Brooks Koepka needed to birdie the 18th hole at Austin Country Club to avoid elimination, and he was out of luck when Li Haotong hit a wedge from the rough that stopped inches from the cup.

For players like Keegan Bradley, Patrick Reed and Webb Simpson, a tie felt like a loss because that's exactly what it was.

They all were among 20 players — a group that includes defending champion Bubba Watson and Phil Mickelson — who were mathematically eliminated Thursday.

With one round-robin session remaining, the Match Play began to take shape, not so much from who has the best chance to advance out of group play into the weekend knockout stage, but who has to show up Friday for a match knowing they're going home, win or lose.

Woods, who lost on the 17th hole to Brandt Snedeker, can still advance if he wins his match and Snedeker loses or halves his match.

"All I can do is hopefully get a point tomorrow and see if that's good enough," Woods said.

Jordan Spieth is still alive after building a 6-up lead through 12 holes on Kevin Na, but not winning until four holes later when Na missed a 4-foot birdie putt. Jim Furyk and Henrik Stenson emerged with 2-0 records from the group of major champions.

They play Friday after knocking out Phil Mickelson and Jason Day.

"It's going to be a tough one again," Stenson said. "Jim, I don't think he's given away an easy bogey since 1994 or something."

NBA roundup

Embiid's double-double powers 76ers

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Joel Embiid had 39 points, 13 rebounds and six assists to help the Philadelphia 76ers beat the Brooklyn Nets 123-110 on Thursday night.

JJ Redick added 18 points, and Ben Simmons had 16 points and eight assists. The 76ers snapped a two-game losing streak.

The game matched teams that would've met in the first round of the playoffs had the postseason started Thursday. The 76ers have a strong hold on the No. 3 seed in the East with seven games remaining, and they moved three games ahead of idle Indiana.

Joe Harris scored 22 points and Rondae Hollis-Jefferson added 19 for Brooklyn.

Bucks 128, Clippers 118:

Giannis Antetokounmpo had 34 points and nine rebounds before leaving with an apparent lower leg injury and Milwaukee ended visiting Los Angeles' winning streak at six games.

Antetokounmpo went to the floor and held his right ankle after dunking with 7:46 left, and he immediately went to the bench and didn't return. He missed two games last week with a sprain to the same ankle.

Khris Middleton had a season-high 39 points with eight rebounds and five assists for Milwaukee. Shai Gilgeous-Alexander led the Clippers with 21 points.

Rockets 112, Nuggets 85: James Harden scored 38 points and host Houston used a 40-point second quarter to rout Denver.

Jamal Murray had 20 points for Denver. The Nuggets dropped a game behind Golden State for the Western Conference lead with their second loss in three games.

Spurs 116, Cavaliers 110: DeMar DeRozan had 25 points and San Antonio celebrated Manu Ginobili's number retirement ceremony by beating visiting Cleveland.

Ginobili became the ninth Spurs player to have his number (20) retired. The Argentine star spent his entire 16-year NBA career with San Antonio, winning four championships.

Pelicans 121, Kings 118: Julius Randle capped a 34-point, 11-rebound night with a driving left-handed bank shot with 8 seconds left and New Orleans beat visiting Sacramento.

Buddy Hield scored 27 points for the Kings, but his

three-point attempt for the tie in the final seconds rimmed out, sending the Kings to a loss that put them on the brink of mathematical elimination from playoff contention.

Heat 105, Mavericks 99: Goran Dragic had 23 points, 12 rebounds and 11 assists for his second career triple-double, Dwyane Wade capped the win with a steal and score in the final seconds and host Miami beat Dallas to move back into eighth place in the Eastern Conference.

Pistons 115, Magic 98: Wayne Ellington scored 17 of his 25 points in the third quarter and host Detroit beat Orlando.

Raptors 117, Knicks 92: Pascal Siakam scored 31 points and Toronto routed host New York for the second time in 11 nights.

NHL roundup

Capitals down Hurricanes, wrap up postseason berth

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Nic Dowd scored on a deflection with 4:56 remaining and the Washington Capitals clinched a playoff berth with a 3-2 victory over the Carolina Hurricanes on Thursday night.

Brett Connolly and Jakub Vrana also scored and Braden Holtby made 24 saves to help the defending Stanley Cup champions reach the 100-point mark for the fifth straight season and wrap up their 11th spot in the playoffs in 12 years. Alex Ovechkin — with 49 goals — was held off the score sheet and missed a long shot toward an empty net with about 45 seconds remaining.

Warren Foegele and Nino Niederreiter scored for the Hurricanes. They lost consecutive games in regulation for the first time since mid-January

and missed out on an important two points that would have helped their chase for their first playoff berth in a decade.

Islanders 5, Jets 4: Casey Cizikas and Jordan Eberle scored 33 seconds apart in the final two minutes to lift visiting New York past Winnipeg.

Cizikas took advantage when Winnipeg couldn't clear the puck and scored with 1:46 to go to make it 4-4. Eberle added his second goal of the game with 1:13 left.

Stars 3, Oilers 2 (SO): Jamie Benn scored the shootout winner in visiting Dallas' victory over Edmonton.

Alexander Radulov and Miro Heiskanen scored in regulation for the surging Stars. They won their third straight game to tighten their hold on the first wild-card spot in the Western Conference.

Blue Jackets 6, Canadiens

2: Oliver Bjorkstrand scored twice, Sergei Bobrovsky had 28 saves and host Columbus beat Montreal to move into an Eastern Division wild-card spot.

The Blue Jackets tied Montreal for the second wild card and they hold the tiebreaker with five games remaining. Carolina is one point ahead in the first slot.

Red Wings 5, Sabres 4 (OT): Tyler Bertuzzi scored his second goal of the game in overtime to lift visiting Detroit over Buffalo.

Dylan Larkin also had two goals for Detroit, Filip Hronek added a goal, and Jimmy Howard made 35 saves.

Panthers 5, Senators 2: Jonathan Huberdeau scored twice and visiting Florida beat Ottawa to snap a three-game losing streak.

Troy Brouwer, Dryden Hunt and Evgenii Dadonov also

scored for Florida. Roberto Luongo made 28 saves. Colin White and Brady Tkachuk scored for Ottawa.

Blackhawks 5, Sharks 4: Alex DeBrincat scored twice to reach the 40-goal mark and visiting Chicago handed San Jose its seventh straight loss.

Connor Murphy, Jonathan Toews and Chris Kunitz also scored to give the Blackhawks just their second win in the past six games. Corey Crawford made 26 saves.

Canucks 3, Kings 2 (SO): Tanner Pearson scored in the fourth round of the shootout and host Vancouver kept its faint playoff hopes alive.

Brock Boeser and Alex Edler scored in regulation for the Canucks, who are seven points behind Colorado for the second wild-card spot in the Western Conference with four games to play.