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'Sextortion' cases rising among sailors

The Day

GROTON, Conn. — After a spike in reports of sexual extortion, or “sextortion,” across the Navy — including at the Naval Submarine Base New London, Conn. — the Naval Criminal Investigative Service is warning sailors not to engage in sexually explicit activities online.

Sextortion is a crime in which someone requests money in exchange for not releasing sexually explicit images or information.

Both the number of cases and incidents is growing, according to NCIS, which says that since August 2012, perpetrators have

targeted at least 160 sailors and Marines across the country, resulting in the loss of about \$45,000. Typically, perpetrators will request anywhere from \$500 to \$1,500.

“We’ve had servicemembers individually pay as much as \$11,000,” NCIS Division Chief Megan Bolduc said. “It only stops because credit cards were maxed out.”

The encounters often start on social media sites such as Facebook, or dating websites such as PlentyOfFish or MeetMe.

On Facebook, sailors will receive a friend request from an attractive individual they

don’t know, but with whom they might have mutual friends.

Perpetrators will send requests to multiple people in a community, such as sailors in the same Naval Submarine School class or boot camp classmates, to establish the appearance of legitimacy.

At some point, the sailor and the perpetrator exchange contact information and that’s often followed by the sharing of explicit photos and videos. The images also are shared via direct message on various social media platforms. The perpetrator then will threaten to release the pictures or videos if the

sailor doesn’t wire money.

NCIS encourages victims to maintain their communications with the perpetrators.

“Screen captures or printouts of the conversations or anything like that is always very helpful,” NCIS spokesman Ed Buice said. “We have cyber agents who try to follow the electronic trail to get any information that’s available.”

In March alone, NCIS distributed 109,000 pamphlets across its field offices worldwide with information about what sextortion is, what to look out for and how to protect against being victimized.

Islamic State fight hits hurdles just as US makes gains

The Washington Post

BEIRUT — After months of unexpectedly swift advances, the U.S.-led war against the Islamic State group is running into hurdles on and off the battlefield that call into question whether the pace of recent gains can be sustained.

Chaos in Baghdad, the fraying of the cease-fire in Syria and political turmoil in Turkey are among potential obstacles that have emerged in recent weeks to complicate the prospects for progress. Others include small setbacks for U.S.-allied forces on front lines in northern Iraq and Syria, which have come as a reminder that a strategy heavily reliant on local armed groups of varying proficiency who are often at odds with one another won’t always work.

When President Barack Obama first ordered U.S. warplanes into action against the extremists sweeping through Iraq and Syria in 2014, U.S. officials put a three- to five-year timeline on a battle they pre-

dicted would be difficult. After a rocky start, officials say they are gratified by the progress made, especially over the past six months. Since the recapture of the northern Iraqi town of Baiji last October, Islamic State group defenses have crumbled rapidly across a wide arc of territory. In Syria, the important hub of Shadadi was recaptured with little resistance in February, while in Iraq, the towns of Sinjar, Ramadi, Hit and, most recently, Bashir have fallen in quick succession.

“So far in terms of what we had hoped to do, we are pretty much on track,” said a U.S. official who spoke on the condition of anonymity. “We’re actually a little bit ahead of where we wanted to be.”

The fight, however, is entering what Pentagon officials have called a new and potentially harder phase, one that will entail a deeper level of U.S. involvement but also tougher targets.

In an attempt to ramp up the tempo of the war, the U.S. mili-

tary is escalating its engagement, dispatching an additional 450 special operations forces and other troops to Syria and Iraq, deploying hundreds of Marines close to the front lines in Iraq and bringing Apache attack helicopters and B-52s into service for the air campaign.

The extra resources are an acknowledgment that the war can’t be won without a greater level of American involvement, U.S. officials say.

The battle for Mosul, long a Pentagon priority, has already been delayed by at least a year, in part because of the Islamic State group’s seizure a year ago of the city of Ramadi, which was recaptured in December but only after a significant diversion of resources and time.

“The defenses that they have there are much more developed than what they had the ability to do in Ramadi, so it’s going to get harder the closer we get to Mosul, there’s no doubt about it,” said Major Gen. Gary J. Volesky, who commands the land forces component of

the U.S.-led coalition out of Baghdad.

After being caught unprepared by the Ramadi upset, he and other U.S. officials now decline to put a time frame on the Mosul offensive.

The deepening U.S. military engagement won’t, however, untangle the web of political complexities that appears to be tightening around a strategy critics long have charged is too focused on short-term military gains.

While scoring some significant advances on the ground, the strategy has not yet found answers to the wider political disputes that helped fuel the rise of the Islamic State group and could yet undermine the long-term sustainability of military gains, said Robert Ford, the last U.S. ambassador to Syria, who is now with the Washington-based Middle East Institute.

“The Americans are so happy every time a village falls, they lose sight of the forest while looking at all the trees,” he said.

Iran claims it test-fired ballistic missile

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran test-fired another ballistic missile, the latest in a spate of tests following the implementation of the nuclear deal with world powers earlier this year, according to a report by the country's Tasnim news agency.

The test-firing of the missile was carried out two weeks ago, the agency quoted Gen. Ali Abdollahi, deputy chief of the armed forces' headquarters.

The agency said the missile has a range of 1,250 miles

— enough to reach much of the Middle East. Iranian military commanders have described them as a strategic asset and a strong deterrent, capable of hitting U.S. bases or Israel.

Iran insists the ballistic tests do not violate the nuclear deal and is likely seeking to demonstrate it is making progress with its ballistic program, despite scaling back on the nuclear program.

Abdollahi said the latest missile tested is very accurate, within 8 yards. "Eight meters

means nothing, it means it's without any error," he said.

Last month, Gen. Amir Ali Hajizadeh, chief of the Guard's airspace division, said a new, upgraded version of the Sajjil — a solid fuel high-speed missile with a range of 1,200 miles that was first tested in 2008 — would soon be ready.

It was not immediately clear if the missile Abdollahi referred to was the new Sajjil.

In March, Iran test-fired two ballistic missiles, one with the phrase "Israel must be wiped

out" in Hebrew, that set off an international outcry.

The landmark deal does not include provisions against missile launches. When it came into effect on Jan. 16, the Security Council lifted most U.N. sanctions against Tehran, including a ban it had imposed in 2010 on Iran testing missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

To deal with the restrictions in the nuclear agreement, the council adopted a resolution last July which only "calls on" Iran not to carry out such tests.

Number of kids poisoned by e-cigarettes surging

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Electronic cigarettes have sickened rising numbers of young children, a study of U.S. poison center calls has found. Most cases involve swallowing liquid nicotine.

While most kids weren't seriously harmed, one child died and several had complications, including comas and seizures.

"This is an epidemic by any definition," said lead author Dr. Gary Smith, director of the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio.

The researchers said the results highlight a need for better awareness about the importance of keeping the devices out of reach of young kids. They also recommend stricter regulation and applauded restrictions the U.S. Food and Drug Administration issued Thursday.

The study examined poison center calls about exposure to nicotine and tobacco products among children under 6 from January 2012 to April 2015.

Monthly calls about young kids' swallowing, inhaling or touching e-cigarettes climbed from 14 early on to 223 by the study's end. Most children were age 2 or younger.

Liquid nicotine in e-ciga-

rettes can harm young children if swallowed or absorbed into the skin. Vomiting, a quickened heartbeat and jittery behavior are among the symptoms.

Most exposures to e-cigarettes were managed at home. Among those who received medical care, less than 3 percent were hospitalized. About 2 percent, or 77 kids, had severe complications.

Dr. Joan Shook, chief safety officer at Texas Children's Hospital in Houston and head of the American Academy of Pediatrics' emergency medicine committee, said, "If you use these products, you need to treat them as medication or toxins and keep them closed, locked and out of reach of children."

The FDA rules issued last week will require federal review of the devices and their ingredients, imposing restrictions similar to those affecting traditional cigarettes. The agency intends to issue rules to require nicotine exposure warnings and child-resistant packaging. That action would supplement the Child Nicotine Poisoning Prevention law, which takes effect this summer and will require child-resistant packaging of liquid nicotine containers.

For Trump, party unity is good but not a necessity

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — For Donald Trump, party unity is a good thing. But he's making clear he won't change his views or soften his rhetoric to get it.

"Look, I'm going to get millions and millions of votes more than the Republicans would have gotten" without me, Trump said.

It's a risky calculation for a presumptive Republican nominee who would likely go up against Hillary Clinton, a seasoned campaigner faring well in the polls and who has broad support in her party.

But to Trump supporters like adviser Paul Manafort, shrugging off hostility from party insiders is something Trump can afford to do.

Manafort said that Trump "just won that overwhelmingly, faster than anybody in Washington thought and running as an outsider against Washington. So, his agenda is the people's agenda."

Trump said House Speaker Paul Ryan "blindsided" him by declining to endorse him. He called South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham a "lightweight," and suggested Republicans Mitt Romney and Jeb Bush wouldn't back him be-

cause they were sore losers.

The New York billionaire seemed to be sending a message to party critics who are withholding support or planning to skip the convention.

"I don't think (the party) actually has to be unified" in the traditional sense, he said.

Even if Trump sways Ryan, there are other GOP leaders reluctant to help him win. Arizona Sen. John McCain, the 2008 nominee, said he'll support the party's nominee even if it's Trump. But McCain said it would take a lot to ever stand on stage next to him after Trump's comments in July that he prefers people who don't get captured in war.

McCain, a Navy pilot, was shot down and held as a prisoner of war by the North Vietnamese for five years.

Sen. Jeff Flake, a Trump critic, said Republicans should figure out something fast because Trump's ability to win primary contests by relying on hard-line policies might not translate into general election success against the Democrats.

"If Republicans want to win, and we do, then we've got to change the approach because we're not going to win taking these positions," said Flake, R-Ariz.

Cavs finish sweep of Hawks

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Cleveland's Big Three is on quite a roll.

Two playoff series, two sweeps. Now, the Cavaliers get to rest up for the Eastern Conference finals.

Kevin Love scored 27 points, LeBron James knocked down a huge shot with 39.2 seconds to go, and Kyrie Irving turned in another dazzling performance to lead Cleveland past the Atlanta Hawks 100-99 on Sunday.

The Cavaliers finished off the second-round series with four straight wins, just as they did in the opening round against Detroit.

"This is more than I dreamed of," Irving said. "It's what I genuinely enjoy about basketball, playing with great guys."

When James returned to Cleveland after four years in Miami, winning the franchise's first championship was the only goal that mattered. Love was acquired from Minnesota to complete the dynamic trio, but the Cavaliers came up short in Year 1 when both Love and Irving went down with injuries in the playoffs.

Now, fully healthy and finally comfortable together after some rocky moments, LeBron & Co. cruised into the conference finals to meet either Toronto or Miami. The Raptors lead that series 2-1.

"We're in a great rhythm right now," said James, who won two titles with the Heat and wants to bring one home. "We know exactly where we want to be on the floor."

Love carried Cleveland much of the game, hitting one three-pointer after another as the Hawks continually left him open in the corner. He went cold down the stretch but still finished 8-for-15 from beyond the arc. He made only one two-point basket — with his toe on the stripe.

James and Irving finished with 21 points apiece. James also doled out nine assists, while Irving had eight.

The Hawks had one last chance to ex-

tend the series and put the ball in the hands of Dennis Schroder, who led the team with 21 points. The speedy point guard drove into the lane but was surrounded by James and Tristan Thompson. Schroder slipped and James tied up the ball, forcing a huge mismatch of a jump ball with 2.8 seconds left.

"I just tried to be aggressive," said Schroder, who was at least hoping to draw a foul. "They didn't call it, so we can't take it back. We've got to live with that."

With a 7-inch height advantage on the jump, James easily flicked the ball toward the sideline. Paul Millsap wound up with it, flinging up a desperation shot, but it was after the buzzer and didn't go in anyway.

Cleveland launched into a raucous celebration on Atlanta's home court.

"We know Atlanta is a tough team, and the closeout game is the hardest game," said coach Tyrone Lue, who took over the Cavaliers during the season after David Blatt was fired.

This was a rematch of last year's conference finals, in which the Hawks were the top seed but got swept by the Cavaliers. With Cleveland seeded No. 1 this time, the result was the same. Atlanta Hawks had fourth-quarter leads in three of the four games but wasn't strong enough to finish, dropping to 0-12 in the postseason against the Cavs.

Schroder put the Hawks up 97-96 on a drive with 1:31 remaining. But James, after having one shot blocked and missing two tip-ins, got another chance when a video review overturned a call that Cleveland had knocked the ball out of bounds. Off the inbounds pass, Matthew Dellavado found James streaking into the lane and Millsap was called for goaltending.

Even though the call stood after another review, Millsap insisted it was a clean block.

"I'll believe that all summer," he said.

Thunder 111, Spurs 97: Kevin Durant went on a scoring spree that was spec-

acular, even by his standards.

The four-time NBA scoring champion matched his career playoff high with 41 points as host Oklahoma City tied the Western Conference semifinal series 2-2.

Durant had 29 points on 10-for-13 shooting in the second half. He scored 17 points in the fourth quarter, one more than the Spurs, and did it on 6-for-6 shooting.

"When you have a deep team, those 40-point nights — they don't come a lot," he said. "I'm just trying to be consistent in what I do, and I know in any given moment, I can go off and get a few shots."

Durant had plenty of help.

"My teammates did a great job of sticking with me and finding me and getting me easy baskets and screening for me and sacrificing their bodies, and I'm definitely grateful for it," he said. "After they do all that, it's on me to finish the shot and just stick to the fundamentals I've been practicing since I was a kid."

Russell Westbrook finished with 14 points and 15 assists while Dion Waiters added 17 points and Steven Adams had 16 points and 11 rebounds for Oklahoma City. The Thunder shot 50.6 percent overall and 57 percent in the second half to avoid going back to San Antonio down 3-1 for Game 5 on Tuesday night.

"Durant got away from us," San Antonio's Kawhi Leonard said. "Westbrook did a great job getting his teammates involved. But (they) got those offensive rebounds when we'd get him to miss."

Tony Parker led San Antonio with 22 points while Leonard had 21 and LaMarcus Aldridge 20.

San Antonio led by 11 early in the second quarter but the Thunder rallied and took a 45-44 lead on a 3-pointer by Durant with 1:47 left in the first half. The Spurs closed the quarter on a 9-0 run, with all the points coming from Leonard and Aldridge, to take a 53-45 lead at the break. Durant and Westbrook were a combined 6 for 21 from the field in the first half.

Lightning advances

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Victor Hedman and Ben Bishop lifted the Tampa Bay Lightning into the National Hockey League Eastern Conference final for the second straight year.

Hedman scored twice and Bishop stopped 28 shots Sunday, helping the defending conference champions beat the New York Islanders 4-0 and end their second-round playoff series in five games.

The Lightning advanced by winning four straight after dropping the series opener at home. They also eliminated Detroit in five games in the opening round, making them 2-0 in close-out situations this postseason.

"I think we learned last year we had a couple of series where we had chances to close (opponents) out at home and we kind of let them slip," Bishop said. "We really wanted to take pride in closing teams out this year."

Hedman scored an unassisted goal from the slot at 13:49 of the first period, then beat Islanders goaltender Thomas Greiss again on a second-period power play that gave Tampa Bay a three-goal lead.

"Brutal. It's hard to believe it's over," Islanders captain John Tavares said. "You put a lot into this and we didn't accomplish what we set out to do."

Nikita Kucherov and Brian Boyle also scored for the Lightning, who will face either the Pittsburgh Penguins or Washington Capitals in the East final. The Penguins lead that series 3-2, with Game 6 Tuesday night in Pittsburgh.

"Back to back, it's pretty impressive what our guys have done," Tampa Bay coach Jon Cooper said. "Once you get there, you want to get back. I'm really impressed with our drive. We didn't play perfect playoff games every time, but we're getting contributions from everybody in the lineup. If you want to win, you need that."

New rivals lining up for shot at Nyquist at Preakness

Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Kentucky Derby winner Nyquist headed to Baltimore on Monday to prepare for the Preakness, where the undefeated colt could face up to 13 rivals including nine new shooters seeking to derail his Triple Crown bid.

Nyquist had been walked, bathed and returned to his stall at Churchill Downs by 6 a.m. Sunday, less than 12 hours after he won the Derby by 1¼ lengths and improved his record to 8-0. Trainer Doug O'Neill had already gone back to Southern California for a few days before returning east to rejoin his bay colt at Pimlico.

O'Neill told a track official that Nyquist was "doing great" and "looking bright-eyed" the morning after. The colt is the first unbeaten Derby winner with eight victories since Majestic Prince in 1969.

He will put that record on the line in the 13/16-mile Preakness on May 21 against a mix of old and new rivals. The field is limited to 14 horses.

Derby runner-up Exaggerator, who has lost all four meetings with Nyquist, and ninth-place finisher Lani,

who was beaten 103/4 lengths, are expected to return in the Preakness. Also possible are third-place Derby finisher Gun Runner, who was beaten by 4½ lengths, and Suddenbreakingnews, who was fifth.

The newcomers are Laoban and Cherry Wine, who were both entered in the Derby but didn't get in the race; Lexington Stakes winner Collected, trained by Bob Baffert; Federico Tesio winner Awesome Speed; Stradivari, trained by Todd Pletcher; and California Chrome Stakes winner Uncle Lino.

Also under consideration are Pat Day Mile winner Sharp Azteca; Wood Memorial third-place finisher Adventist; and Florida Derby third-place finisher Fellowship.

Keith Desormeaux, who trains Exaggerator, said he would like a rematch in the Preakness.

"He was the closest threat," said J. Paul Reddam, who owns Nyquist. "If I were him, I would want a rematch too. The horses are not machines, so it will be a great race."

Reddam, O'Neill and jockey Mario Gutierrez enjoyed their second Derby victory, having won in 2012 with I'll Have Another.

"There was no wild, drunken party," said Steve Rothblum, manager for Reddam Racing. "With a horse

this good, we wanted to treat it with respect and the reverence that we owe the horse."

I'll Have Another also won the Preakness that year but was retired on the eve of the Belmont with a leg injury.

Nyquist is following a schedule similar to I'll Have Another, who also spent the two weeks leading up to the Preakness at Pimlico. Nyquist came into Louisville a week before the Derby.

"This year we are a lot more mature," O'Neill said. "The people that were surrounding Nyquist are a lot more mature. It felt really good to be the (Derby) favorite. I felt it was a real honor. Part of me was, 'God, I want to represent Nyquist in the proper way.' I think the whole crew did a pretty good job, so it felt good being the favorite."

Nyquist is expected to have a light training schedule between now and the Preakness.

Five of Nyquist's eight wins have come in prestigious Grade 1 races. His latest victory boosted his earnings to \$4,954,200, which includes a \$1 million bonus for winning the Florida Derby in his previous start.

The colt is the third straight Southern California-based horse to win the Derby, and the fourth in five years. I'll Have Another started the run.



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Ortiz, Wright power Red Sox

Associated Press

NEW YORK — As usual, Big Papi was in the pink against the New York Yankees.

David Ortiz homered twice, passing Hall of Famer Carl Yastrzemski for second place on Boston's career list, and Steven Wright pitched a three-hitter as the Red Sox beat the Yankees 5-1 on Sunday night.

Swinging a pink bat and wearing pink wrist bands for Mother's Day, Ortiz hit two long solo shots off a struggling Luis Severino. And in his farewell season, the 40-year-old Ortiz has already been a major New York nemesis again: He has five home runs against the Yankees since April 29, giving him 52 in his career — all but one with the Red Sox.

"I do what I do," the slugger said.

Dustin Pedroia lofted an early two-run homer and Xander Bogaerts also went deep for the Red Sox, who prevented a three-game sweep and won for the fourth time in six meetings with their longtime rivals this year.

Wright (3-3) walked one and struck out seven, sailing to his first complete game in 17 major league starts and lowering his ERA to 1.52. He was two strikes from a shutout, too, when Brett Gardner homered with two outs in the ninth inning.

The knuckleballer hardly got rattled, whiffing pinch-hitter Ronald Torreyes with his 101st pitch to end it.

"It definitely helps when the wind's not blowing as hard. There was a little bit of breeze but it was almost like throwing inside," Wright said.

Mixing his 73-75 mph knuckleballs with the occasional 87 mph fastball, Wright baffled the last-place Yankees all night. When he threw something soft, they seemed to hit it even softer. When he dialed up a heater, they swung late and missed.

"He was really good. He's been great all year," Yankees catcher Brian McCann said. "I felt like he could do whatever he wanted tonight with the ball."

Ortiz took out some frustrations from the series opener, when he went wild and got ejected after he was called out on strikes with the bases loaded in the ninth inning of a one-run game. He connected in the fourth and seventh to give him three homers in five at-bats against Severino (0-5) since the 22-year-old righty

made his big league debut against Boston last August.

Big Papi has hit 454 of his 512 career homers with the Red Sox, moving him ahead of Yastrzemski (452) and leaving Ortiz behind only Ted Williams (521) on the franchise list.

"You're starting to get into names that are historic. A great career. And no signs of slowing down," Boston manager John Farrell said.

It was Ortiz's 51st career multihomer game and first since Sept. 12, 2015, at Tampa Bay.

"He's in such a good groove. So many balls are squared up, hit hard," Farrell said. "He's having fun."

Severino matched a career best with nine strikeouts in 6²/₃ innings, but gave up a career-high three home runs. He retired 10 straight, seven on strikeouts, before Ortiz's first long ball.

Cubs 4, Nationals 3 (13): Javier Baez got the pitch he wanted and propelled host Chicago to yet another victory on a day when it looked like Jake Arrieta might finally pick up a loss.

Baez homered in the 13th inning after Chicago walked Washington star Bryce Harper a record-tying six times, giving the Cubs a victory over the Nationals and four-game sweep on Sunday.

The Cubs won their seventh in a row and improved the best record in the majors to 24-6.

Baez homered with one out off Blake Treinen (2-1). Baez entered as a pinch hitter, stayed in to play third base and later connected for his second home run of the season.

Dodgers 4, Blue Jays 2: Howie Kendrick hit a tiebreaking RBI single in the eighth inning as Los Angeles rallied to beat host Toronto.

Joc Pederson connected for his sixth homer in the seventh inning as the Dodgers took two of three.

Rangers 8, Tigers 3: Bobby Wilson broke a 2-2 tie in the eighth with a grand slam against the team that just traded him, helping visiting Texas complete a three-game sweep.

Indians 5, Royals 4: At Cleveland, Josh Tomlin (5-0) allowed four runs and seven hits in six-plus innings and became the first Cleveland pitcher to win his first five outings since Justin Masterson in 2011. Tomlin is 12-0 in 13 starts following a loss

since the beginning of last season.

Phillies 6, Marlins 5: Rookie Tyler Goeddel's first career extra-base hit drove in a run with two outs in the eighth inning, then he scored himself as Philadelphia rallied past host Miami.

Orioles 11, Athletics 3: Manny Machado hit two of host Baltimore's season-high six homers, including a grand slam, and had a career-high six RBIs.

White Sox 3, Twins 1: David Robertson pitched a hitless ninth for his 10th save in 11 tries as host Chicago completed a three-game sweep and moved 12 games above .500 for the first time since September 2012.

Diamondbacks 5, Braves 3: Chris Herrmann's second homer of the game and a two-run drive off Jim Johnson with two outs in the 11th inning lifted visiting Arizona to a three-game sweep.

Astros 5, Mariners 1: At Houston, rookie Tyler White doubled twice and drove in a run to back Collin McHugh (4-3), who allowed one run and five hits in seven innings to win his third straight start.

Pirates 10, Cardinals 5: Gregory Polanco hit a three-run homer and John Jaso added a two-run drive for visiting Pittsburgh.

Brewers 5, Reds 4: Jonathan Lucroy greeted Ross Ohlendorf (3-3) with a tie-breaking home run leading off the eighth inning for visiting Milwaukee, then caught Billy Hamilton stealing for the final out — a call upheld in a video review.

Mets 4, Padres 3: Matt Harvey (4-3) struck out a season-high 10 in six innings while Yoenis Cespedes homered off Andrew Cashner (2-3) as visiting New York escaped a bases-loaded jam with no outs in the eighth to salvage a four-game split.

Rays 3, Angels 1: Matt Andriese (1-0) pitched seven innings of four-hit ball to win his season debut while Brad Miller hit a two-run homer as visiting Tampa Bay completed a three-game sweep.

Rockies 2, Giants 0: Nolan Arenado had three hits while Eddie Butler (1-1) gave up four hits in six innings for his first win since being promoted from the minors for visiting Colorado.

Army star chases goal of WNBA

Associated Press

UNCASVILLE, Conn. — Kelsey Minato dreamed of playing in the WNBA growing up but wasn't sure that would ever become a reality.

Minato enrolled at West Point four years ago and has a military service requirement after graduation. Yet she recently finished off the most decorated career in women's basketball history at the school, and now, she just may get that chance.

The guard was invited by the San Antonio Stars to training camp by coach Dan Hughes. She already survived the team's first round of cuts but knows it's a long shot she'll make the roster when the season opens on May 14.

"It's been a great experience," she said Wednesday before the Stars played in an exhibition tournament in Connecticut. "A chance to see what the WNBA is all about. Whatever happens, happens. I'm just so grateful for the opportunity they gave me."

Hughes first heard of Minato from Detroit Pistons general manager Jeff Bower, who was friends with her coach at Army. Other college coaches also had recommended that the Stars coach take a look at the guard.

As soon as Minato wasn't drafted, Hughes picked up the phone and invited her to join the Stars in camp.

"She deserved to have an opportunity. What goes beyond that, that's life," Hughes said. "My son's going to the Air Force Academy next year. I appreciated what she had done. When you look at what she accomplished, when you throw her name in with David Robinson. This girl deserved a chance to get on the court."

Robinson, who graduated from Navy, starred in the NBA for the San Antonio Spurs and led them to two titles.

Like Robinson, Minato needed to get special permission to even try out for the Stars because of her service commitment.

Minato is on an unpaid leave of absence from West Point while she's with the Stars. And the Army has said she will be allowed to play in the WNBA if she makes a team but can't pursue other playing options overseas. She has final exams next week and graduation on May 21.

Minato isn't the first player from Army to have a chance to play in the WNBA. Katie MacFarlane, whose scoring record Minato broke this year, was invited to Connecticut's training camp in 2004. She played in one exhibition game for the Sun before getting cut.

Minato, who is from Huntington Beach, Calif., averaged 23.2 points her senior season for Army (29-3) and was second in three-point percentage in the nation (.478). In her sophomore season, she scored a Patriot League-record 49 points in a game and made an NCAA record 26 of 26 free throws in one game.

The honorable mention AP All-American played in two games last week for the Stars. She saw her first action in the second half of the opener against Atlanta on Wednesday, playing four minutes. She played for six minutes Thursday against Connecticut.

"Just to see her on the court and having a chance is something really inspiring," Connecticut Sun forward Chiney Ogwumike said. "There are a lot bigger things out there than basketball and knowing that she's serving our country when this is done is amazing."

Chapman ready to join Yankees

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Aroldis Chapman's nameplate and No. 54 are in place above his locker, which has already been stocked with T-shirts, caps, jerseys and gloves.

No question about it, the New York Yankees are ready for the long-awaited arrival of their new star closer.

Chapman was set to be activated Monday after serving a 29-game suspension under baseball's domestic violence policy. The left-hander from Cuba, a four-time All-Star with a fastball that regularly exceeds 100 mph, will immediately move into the ninth-inning role for an imposing relief corps that already features Dellin Betances and Andrew Miller.

"We have a chance to be maybe the best bullpen in baseball," Chapman said through a translator Sunday at Yankee Stadium, with two sparkling chains dangling from his neck and a shiny earring in each lobe. "The quality of arms that we have, it's amazing."

To some, the addition of Chapman gives

the Yankees an embarrassment of riches in the late innings, only incrementally strengthening an area of strength on a last-place team that's struggled to score and get steady starting pitching.

New York is 91-0 over the past two seasons when leading after eight innings. The team is 83-2 during that stretch when ahead after seven, and 73-4 when in front after six. That's all since Miller, the 2015 Mariano Rivera Reliever of the Year in the American League, signed on as a free agent.

But the Yankees are eager for Chapman's help, especially after designated hitter Alex Rodriguez and veteran pitcher CC Sabathia went on the disabled list last week. And they've been waiting to try out their three-headed bullpen formula since Chapman was acquired from Cincinnati for four prospects in December.

"He's an established closer, he's a guy that throws incredibly hard, he's got incredible stuff and he's got a great track record," Miller said before Sunday night's 5-1 loss to Boston.

Chapman, who can become a free agent after the season, threw the 62 fastest pitches in the major leagues last year, ranging from 102.36 to 103.92 mph, according to MLB's Statcast data. He'll join the Yankees for the opener of a four-game home set against World Series champion Kansas City.

A day after accepting the suspension, Chapman apologized for using a gun and insisted he never hurt his girlfriend, 22-year-old Cristina Barnea.

Barnea told police he pushed and choked her during an Oct. 30 incident at his home in Davie, Fla. Chapman said there was an argument but he was pushed down by Barnea's brother, then got a handgun and fired eight shots into a wall and window while locked in his garage.

Prosecutors declined to file charges, citing conflicting accounts.

"I learned a lot from it," Chapman said. "The good thing is that's something that is behind me now. I want to focus on baseball, being here with my teammates, having the opportunity to hopefully contribute."