

STARS AND STRIPES®

Tuesday, May 10, 2016

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Bigger troop pay hike opposed

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A House proposal to give troops their biggest pay raise in years ran into opposition Tuesday from Senate lawmakers.

A key Senate panel said it is backing the Obama administration proposal of a 1.6 percent military raise for the coming year, a rate that again falls below private-sector wage growth and is at odds with the 2.1 percent pay hike that is part of the House's defense budget bill.

The opposing numbers indicate Congress will again wrestle over how big of a raise to dole out as it crafts a defense budget. Last year, President Barack Obama ordered a 1.3 percent raise after a protracted House and Senate debate.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., the chairman of a Senate Armed Services subcommittee, unveiled the pay proposal in an early preview of an annual military budget bill called the National Defense Authorization Act. "At the end of the day, if we can't come together to take

care of our men and women (in uniform), we've lost out way up here," Graham said. "Let it be said that we did come together."

The smaller Senate proposal equals an additional \$36 per month in pay for an E4 with three or more years of experience.

The Armed Services Committee is expected to vote Thursday or Friday on the massive bill, which also includes reforms to Tricare and the Uniform Code of Military Justice, he said.

Meanwhile, the House is moving ahead with its 2.1 percent hike, which equals an additional \$48 per month for the same servicemember.

The raise was passed late last month by the House Armed Services Committee and is expected to come up for a final floor vote next week as part of the chamber's version of the NDAA.

Typically, the House and Senate must reconcile any differences in the two versions of the NDAA bill. But Congress has another option if it cannot reach agreement — stay silent and let Obama choose the in-

crease amount.

The president used an executive order for the current 1.3 percent increase in military pay. Raises have hovered at about that percentage since 2011, which critics have said means armed services pay is lagging behind the general public.

For now, it is unclear who will win the debate in Congress.

In the House, Democrats have already raised concerns about the larger pay raise, saying it would cost \$330 million amid a very tight defense budget. Any increase must survive the coming House floor vote.

But the higher raise has support from Rep. Mac Thornberry, R-Texas, the House Armed Services chairman who is proposing a big boost in defense money for the coming year.

In what the Pentagon has called a "gamble," Thornberry wants to cover \$18 billion in spending above what the Obama administration has proposed, including the pay raise and a bigger Army, by taking money from the war fund to fight the Islamic State group.

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US sails by militarized Fiery Cross

BY ERIK SLAVIN

Stars and Stripes

The destroyer USS William P. Lawrence reportedly transited near a militarized reef claimed by China on Tuesday, the latest move by Washington to counter what it views as Beijing's growing aggressiveness in the South China Sea.

The destroyer sailed inside 12 nautical miles — the typical limit that would denote a country's territorial waters — of Fiery Cross Reef, a Spratly Islands reef claimed by several nations, according to media reports.

The ship's actions "challenge excessive maritime claims of some claimants in the South China Sea," Reuters quoted Defense Department spokesman Bill Urban as saying.

"These excessive maritime claims are inconsistent with international law as reflected in the Law of the Sea convention in that they purport to restrict the navigation rights that the United States and all states are entitled to exercise," Urban said in an emailed statement.

The ship, which belongs to the John C. Stennis carrier strike group, made one pass near the island as "innocent passage," according to a Wall Street Journal report.

Innocent passage is a concept that allows ships to pass through any waters, including territorial waters, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which China has ratified and the Navy follows in practice.

It precludes "any exercise or practice with weapons of any kind," as well as intelligence gathering, according to international law.

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Army eases rule on gym headphone use

BY LEON COOK

Stars and Stripes

Soldiers are now allowed to wear headphones while working out at fitness centers in their physical-training uniforms, although outdoor use will remain prohibited.

"Effective immediately, unless the unit or installation commander prohibits otherwise, soldiers may use headphones, including wireless or non-wireless devices and earpieces, in uniform only while performing individual physical training in indoor gyms or fitness centers,"

said a directive issued Friday and signed by Acting Secretary of the Army Patrick J. Murphy.

Sgt. Major of the Army Dan Daily, who last summer said it is "pretty hypocritical" to allow soldiers in civilian clothes to wear headphones while those in uniform cannot, proposed the rule change earlier this year.

The directive, which also applies to Army National Guard and Army Reserve soldiers, says:

■ Wireless or wired headphones are permitted within fitness centers while a soldier

is in the PT uniform conducting individual training.

■ Headphones should be conservative and discreet, and the ear pads shouldn't exceed 1.5 inches in diameter at the widest point.

■ Portable music players or cellphones must be worn in a solid black armband, which can't be worn outside the gym.

■ Outside the gym, headphones aren't allowed to be used, worn around the neck or attached to the uniform.

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Pentagon: Strike kills top militant commander

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Islamic State group's top military commander in battle-torn Anbar province was killed Friday in an airstrike, a Pentagon spokesman said.

Abu Wahib, the terrorist group's longtime military emir, and three other militants were killed by the U.S.-led anti-Islamic State group coalition in the western region of Anbar, Iraq's most expansive province, Pentagon press secretary Peter Cook said Monday.

Cook declined to provide specific details about the strike.

"Abu Wahib's death is another blow to [the Islamic State group's] leadership that will further degrade its ability to operate, especially in Anbar province," he said. "... It is dangerous to be an [Islamic State group] leader in Iraq and Syria these days."

Wahib, also known as Shakir Wahib, had been loyal to the Islamic State group since it was known as al-Qaida in Iraq. He had appeared in some of the group's notorious execution videos, including a brutal 2013 video that showed him fatally shooting a trio of kneeling Syrian truck drivers.

Wahib was riding in a vehicle near Rhutba, a small town in Anbar about 50 miles from the Syrian border, when he was killed, Cook said.

Anbar province, the Sunni heartland in Iraq just west of Baghdad, has been the site of much of the recent fighting between the coalition-backed Iraqi security forces and the Islamic State group. The militants gained control of much of Anbar beginning in 2014. After months of heavy fighting, Iraqi forces recently retook two of the province's key cities, Ramadi and Hit. The militants still control another key Anbar city, Fallujah.

Son of Pakistan's ex-PM freed by US, Afghan forces

BY CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — U.S. Special Operations forces and Afghan commandos freed the kidnapped son of Pakistan's former prime minister on Tuesday morning, three years after he was abducted by insurgents, government officials said.

Ali Haider Gilani, son of former Pakistani Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani, was recovered in a joint raid in the Giyan district of Paktika province, which borders Pakistan, Afghan Defense Ministry spokesman Gen. Dawlat Waziri said.

U.S. Forces-Afghanistan said in a statement that four "enemy combatants" were killed in the operation. Waziri said the four were members of al-Qaida.

The raid was conducted under the authority of Operation Freedom's Sentinel — the U.S. counterterrorism mission in Afghanistan — the USFOR-A statement said. The mission was planned and launched after evidence of terrorist activity

was confirmed, it said.

The operation was "to go after al-Qaida-related targets in the area, and there was an indication that there may have been a hostage being held with them," USFOR-A spokesman Brig. Gen. Charles Cleveland said. The Associated Press reported.

Gilani, who is reported to be in his 30s, was taken to Bagram Air Field and was to be transferred to Pakistan after a medical checkup, a spokesman for the Pakistani Embassy in Kabul said.

"This is a very big achievement, and we are very much thankful ... and appreciate the effort of Afghan and foreign security forces," embassy spokesman Akhtar Munir said.

The former prime minister, who served from 2008 to 2013, said last year that the kidnapers had demanded the release of several al-Qaida prisoners in exchange for his son.

Gilani's secular Pakistan People's Party was vehemently opposed to the Taliban and

mounted several military campaigns against the insurgents.

The younger Gilani was abducted in his Pakistani hometown of Multan in southern Punjab province on May 9, 2013, days before a national election in which he was running.

"Good news for Mr. Gilani's parents, the government of Afghanistan has safely handed him over to the Embassy of Pakistan in Kabul," said a message posted to the official Twitter account of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani on Tuesday afternoon.

"When we first heard the news, we didn't believe it and only believed it once the foreign office confirmed it," brother Ali Musa Gilani said on Pakistani TV, according to Reuters. "Right now, we don't have any plans to celebrate. We are just waiting to see his face."

While Gilani was held captive, the family spoke to him only once during an eight-minute phone call, according to media reports.

Former Marine sues Iran over imprisonment

BY SLOBODAN LEKIC
Stars and Stripes

Amir Hekmati, a former U.S. Marine who was imprisoned in Iran for more than four years after being sentenced to death for spying, is suing Tehran for alleged torture during his time in detention, his attorneys said Tuesday.

The lawsuit, which states that Hekmati was arrested on fabricated charges and then tortured by his captors, was filed in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. It seeks unspecified economic, compensatory and punitive damages from Tehran.

"Iran's treatment of Amir Hekmati was utterly contempt-

ible," his attorney, Scott D. Gilbert, said in a statement released by his office.

The complaint charges that Hekmati was subjected to prolonged physical and psychological abuse, "including beatings, electric Taser-ing, sleep deprivation and the forced ingestion of dangerous drugs."

Hekmati was arrested in August 2011, soon after flying into Tehran to visit his family. The following year, the dual American-Iranian citizen was tried, convicted and sentenced to death on espionage charges. That conviction was overturned on appeal by Iran's supreme court, which ordered a retrial. The espionage charges were

then dropped, and a lower court sentenced him instead to 10 years in prison for "cooperating with hostile governments."

Hekmati was released in a prisoner swap in January on the heels of a nuclear pact with Iran. Three other Americans — Jason Rezaian, a Washington Post correspondent; Saeed Abedini, an evangelical pastor; and Nosratollah Khosravi-Roodsari — were released in exchange for seven Iranians held in the U.S. Student Matt Trevithick was released in a separate deal.

Hekmati served from 2001 to 2005 as an infantry rifleman and translator, his attorney's statement said. He completed two tours of duty in Iraq.

Curry first unanimous MVP

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Stephen Curry is the first unanimous NBA MVP, earning the award for the second straight season Tuesday after leading the defending champion Warriors to a record-setting season.

The Golden State superstar is the 11th player in NBA history to be voted MVP in consecutive seasons and the first guard to do so since Steve Nash in 2004-05 and 2005-06. Curry received 1,310 points from the 130 media voters from the U.S. and Canada.

He was followed in the vote by Kawhi Leonard of San Antonio, LeBron James of Cleveland and Oklahoma City teammates Russell Westbrook and Kevin Durant. Curry's teammate Draymond Green was seventh.

Curry is the first two-time winner in franchise history, and Wilt Chamberlain

(1959-60) is the lone other Warriors winner.

After guiding Golden State to its first championship in 40 years, Curry and Co. took that success even further to finish with a record 73 regular-season wins to top the 1995-96 Chicago Bulls team that went 72-10.

In a stunning overtime performance Monday night, Curry showed exactly how he can take over a game in a matter of seconds. He returned from a sprained right knee to score 40 points — and 17 in overtime — in a 132-125 win at Portland to put his team up 3-1 in the Western Conference semifinals.

"I figured that he'd find his stroke and make a few shots but I mean that was, that was crazy," said Steve Kerr, who was voted NBA Coach of the Year last month.

Curry was to be presented with the trophy Tuesday afternoon at Oracle Arena before trying to close out the series

against the Portland at home Wednesday night.

With that jaw-dropping, long-range touch from way, way back and dazzling ballhandling, Curry made a record 402 three-pointers after no player had previously even hit 300 in a season. He averaged an NBA-best 30.1 points per game to go with 6.7 assists and 5.4 rebounds. He also led the NBA with 2.1 steals a game while shooting 50.4 percent from the field, 45.4 percent from three-point range and 90.8 percent from the foul line.

From the start of the season, Curry vowed to take his game to another level — and did he ever. Now, all that matters to Curry is staying healthy to lead the Warriors to another title.

"The reason Steph is as good as he is because he can score from anywhere," Kerr said. "If you take away the three he can penetrate and hit the floaters or get to the rim."

Strasburg, Nats agree to 7-year, \$175M deal

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A day after Stephen Strasburg deflected questions about a new contract, the Washington Nationals announced that they had, indeed, agreed to a seven-year extension with the right-hander.

The team was to hold a news conference at Nationals Park on Tuesday with Strasburg. He is surprisingly skipping his first chance at free agency to stay with the club that drafted him No. 1 overall in 2009 and — in a move debated around baseball — shut him down before the playoffs in 2012 to protect the pitcher's surgically repaired right elbow.

According to a person familiar with the negotiations, the agreement will pay Strasburg \$175 million starting in 2017. The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity Monday night because the Nationals had not yet announced the deal.

Strasburg will go from making \$7.4 million this season to earning \$25 million annually from 2017-23. The new deal's total dollars match the 2013-19 contract of Seattle's Felix Hernandez for the sixth-highest among big league pitchers.

Strasburg would earn a \$1 million performance bonus each year for pitching 180 innings. The new contract has an escape clause: Strasburg can opt out and become a free agent after the 2019 or 2020 seasons.

Word of the agreement emerged Monday while Strasburg was pitching in Washington's 5-4 victory over the visiting Detroit Tigers. After the game, Strasburg was asked about his contract and replied: "I don't really have a comment about that right now."

Asked about his comfort level in Washington, Strasburg answered: "Growing up in Southern California, San Diego, all my life and stuff, the East Coast is a little bit of a change. But the city of D.C. has been great to me and my family. It's really grown on us. We're very comfortable here."

By agreeing to a deal now, Strasburg leaves a weaker free-agent class in his wake, because he would have been the No. 1 pitcher available.

The 27-year-old Strasburg has a 59-37 career record and a 3.07 ERA across 139 appearances, all starts. He led the National League in strikeouts with 242 in 2014.

"From the moment he was drafted, Stephen has been far more than just a pitcher for our organization, and his talent is transcendent," Nationals general manager Mike Rizzo said. "The numbers speak for themselves."

Star returns, helps Warriors win

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — Stephen Curry nailed a three-pointer in overtime and gestured to the crowd, exclaiming over and over: "I'm back! I'm back!"

Golden State's superstar certainly was. Curry returned from a sprained right knee to score an NBA-record 17 points in overtime, finishing with 40 as the Warriors rallied to take a 3-1 lead in the Western Conference semifinals with a 132-125 victory over the Portland Trail Blazers on Monday night.

"I love this game, I love playing and love competing. And really, really missed being out there with my teammates," Curry said. "To help our team get a win to-night and in that fashion, that was a good feeling in that moment to be back on the floor and playing."

Playing for the first time since he was injured in Game 4 of the first-round series against Houston, Curry was rusty for three quarters and sensational down the stretch after the Warriors trailed by as

many as 16 points.

Originally expected to play about 25 minutes off the bench, Curry picked up a heavier workload in the second half after Shaun Livingston, who had been starting in his absence, was ejected in the second quarter after arguing a call and picking up two technical fouls.

Curry's fast-break layup gave the defending NBA champions a 120-118 lead with 2:21 left in the extra period. He followed with a three-pointer, strutting and pumping his fist in celebration.

"You knew he'd catch his rhythm eventually," teammate Klay Thompson said. "He's probably the best player in the world, the best shooter of all-time. He was getting good looks. We'll take those all day."

Heat 94, Raptors 87 (OT): Just about everyone struggled to score, with one very notable exception.

Dwyane Wade was rolling.

And host Miami couldn't be more thankful.

Wade scored 30 points, including the

layup that sent the game to overtime and finished off Miami's frantic comeback from a nine-point deficit, as the Heat beat the Toronto Raptors 94-87 in Game 4 of the Eastern Conference semifinals on Monday night.

The series is tied 2-2, heading to Toronto for Game 5 on Wednesday.

"It looked dark for a minute," Wade said, "but there was no quit in us."

It looked dark for a lot of minutes before Wade and the Heat figured it out. Goran Dragic had 15 points, including a three-point play that just about clinched it for the Heat with 22.4 seconds left in overtime. Joe Johnson also scored 15, despite still being without a three-pointer in this series — but setting the tone with two blocked shots in the first 59 seconds of the extra session.

Miami led for only 13 seconds in the fourth quarter, but never trailed in overtime — the third time in four games the Heat and Raptors needed five extra minutes to decide a winner.

WADA to probe doping at Sochi Olympics

The Associated Press

MONTREAL — The World Anti-Doping Agency will immediately begin an investigation into newly revealed details about Russian doping at the Sochi Olympics.

In a news release Tuesday, agency president Craig Reddie says it was surprising to hear the new claims so long after an independent commission appointed by WADA finished its report about widespread doping on the country's track team.

In an interview with "60 Minutes"

that aired Sunday, whistleblower Vitaly Stepanov said the former director of the suspended Moscow anti-doping lab told him four Russian gold medalists at the Sochi Games had used steroids.

Reddie said the independent commission interviewed the lab director, Grigory Rodchenkov, but he did not reveal information about the Sochi Winter Games.

Athletes and others have long been pushing WADA to expand its probe beyond track and field.

Stepanov, a former worker at the Russian anti-doping agency, said after three years of correspondence, WADA eventu-

ally steered he and his wife, 800-meter runner Yulia, to a German TV network that produced the 2014 documentary that prompted WADA's investigation.

WADA spokesman Ben Nichols said before 2015, WADA didn't have authority to conduct its own investigations, and officials didn't think turning the information over to Russian investigators "would have led to the scrutiny required." Nichols said WADA was mostly worried that turning over the information would put the Stepanovs in danger.



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Marlins win despite baserunning gaffe

Associated Press

MIAMI — J.T. Realmuto managed a smile when informed he had joined Lou Gehrig on the list of players to have a home run negated by a baserunning blunder.

The gaffe cost Realmuto and the Miami Marlins a run, but not the game.

Jose Fernandez pitched well enough to overcome the mistake, throwing seven shutout innings to help Miami beat the Milwaukee Brewers 4-1 Monday night.

With the game scoreless in the second inning, Realmuto's homer was negated when he passed teammate Marcell Ozuna after rounding first base.

Realmuto's hit struck the home run sculpture in center field. Ozuna, who was on first base, misjudged the fly and retreated to first, and Realmuto trotted past him.

In the postgame clubhouse, Ozuna wore a T-shirt the Marlins hand out in such situations. It read, "I stink at baserunning."

"My mistake," Ozuna said. "I feel bad. I apologized."

First base umpire Mike DiMuro didn't see what happened, but the Brewers did. After Ozuna and Realmuto crossed the plate, Milwaukee manager Craig Counsell challenged the two-run homer, and the play was overturned.

According to Retrosheet, the last major league player to lose a home run because of such a gaffe was Baltimore's Javy Lopez in 2006. It happened to the Yankees' Gehrig in 1931, and he finished the season tied with teammate Babe Ruth for the major league home run title.

"I don't think it's going to cost me the home run title," Realmuto said.

Realmuto was credited with a single and an RBI and ruled out at second base. Ozuna was credited with a run, giving Miami a 1-0 lead.

"It's inconvenient it happened," Realmuto said. "But Marcell has apologized to me four or five times already. I love that guy. There are no hard feelings. We won. That's really all that matters."

The Brewers missed a similar blunder by an opponent earlier this season. The Cardinals' Randal Grichuk hit a two-run homer and passed teammate Brandon Moss rounding first base, but the Brewers didn't challenge and the umpires also failed to see the mistake.

Ozuna also dropped a deep fly by Ryan Braun that went for a double. Fernandez retired the next batter to end the threat.

Fernandez (4-2) allowed four hits and pitched around four walks in his longest start this season. He improved to 20-1 at Marlins Park.

Nationals 5, Tigers 4: Moments after Bryce Harper was ejected from the dugout, pinch hitter Clint Robinson hit a game-ending homer to give host Washington a comeback victory over Detroit.

As he joined his teammates in racing to the plate to greet Robinson for a celebration, Harper yelled something in the direction of umpire Brian Knight.

Knight pointed toward the dugout and signaled Harper's ejection after the batter before Robinson, Danny Espinosa, was called out on strikes.

Then Robinson connected with a 1-0 pitch from Mark Lowe (1-2).

Yankees 6, Royals 3: Carlos Beltran hit two of New York's five solo homers in the first three innings off an ineffective Chris Young, and Aroldis Chapman allowed a run in his home debut before closing out a victory over slumping Kansas City.

Brian McCann, Brett Gardner and Aaron Hicks also went deep to help the Yankees win the opener of a four-game series against the defending World Series champions.

Alex Gordon and Eric Hosmer homered for the Royals, who have lost 10 of 13.

Ivan Nova gave the Yankees a good effort in his first start of the season, pitching in place of injured lefty CC Sabathia. Nova was pulled after 81 pitches — one out short of qualifying for a win — but New York's fortified bullpen held Kansas City at bay.

Red Sox 14, Athletics 7: Jackie Bradley Jr. extended his career-high hitting streak to 15 games with a two-run single in Boston's six-run fourth and added a grand slam two innings later, carrying host Boston over struggling Oakland.

Brock Holt hit a two-run homer, and David Ortiz had three hits and two RBIs for Boston, which has won seven of its last 10 games.

Khristian Davis hit his seventh homer and drove in two runs for Oakland, which has lost 12 of 16 and fell to 1-7 this month.

Josh Reddick's club-record streak of hits in eight consecutive at-bats was stopped when he grounded out his first time up.

Reds 3, Pirates 2: Tucker Barnhart hit the last of his team's three solo homers off Jonathon Niese, and Cincinnati relievers threw three scoreless innings — a rarity for the major leagues' worst bullpen — to close out a victory over visiting Pittsburgh.

Zack Cozart, Joey Votto and Barnhart connected off Jonathon Niese (3-2), with all three homers barely reaching the stands in left field. Barnhart's tiebreak-

ing homer in the seventh was upheld on review.

Barnhart's first homer since last May 27 ended the seventh-longest active streak without a homer in the major leagues — 270 at-bats. It was the first time this season that Niese allowed three homers in a game.

Astros 7, Indians 1: Jose Altuve had three RBIs and Colby Rasmus added two as Houston jumped on Corey Kluber for five runs in the third and cruised to a win over visiting Cleveland.

Altuve drove in two with a double in the third and Rasmus had a two-run single later in the inning to make it 4-0.

Kluber (2-4), coming off the second shutout of his career in his last outing against the Tigers, was chased after just 2 2/3 innings. He entered with a 1.48 ERA in five career appearances against the Astros, and had allowed just five earned runs in 30 1/3 innings against them.

On Monday he gave up five hits and five runs in his first loss since April 17.

Houston starter Mike Fiers (3-1) allowed season lows of one run and three hits in seven innings for his third straight win.

White Sox 8, Rangers 4 (12): Todd Frazier hit a tiebreaking grand slam in the 12th inning for his second homer of the game, powering Chicago over host Texas.

Frazier had four hits and a career-high six RBIs to help the White Sox win after the bullpen blew leads in the eighth and ninth innings despite a majors-leading 1.82 ERA coming in.

Last year's All-Star home run derby winner in front of the home crowd in Cincinnati, Frazier has 10 homers with Chicago after an offseason trade. His go-ahead blast to left came off left-hander Cesar Ramos (0-2).

Dan Jennings (1-0) pitched a scoreless 10th and 11th as the White Sox won their fourth straight in a series opener between teams coming off three-game sweeps.

Diamondbacks 10, Rockies 5: Jake Lamb homered, tripled and drove in four runs, Jean Segura also went deep and Arizona beat host Colorado.

Archie Bradley (1-0) shook off a rough start to pitch six innings and get the win the same day he was recalled from Triple-A Reno.

The win was the Diamondbacks' fourth straight and ended a four-game skid to Colorado. The Rockies took two out of three in Arizona to start the season and then swept the Diamondbacks at Chase Field at the end of April.

All it took was a change of venue and some power to turn things around against

Colorado and Tyler Chatwood (4-3), who gave up six runs and seven hits in seven innings.

Mariners 5, Rays 2: Ketel Marte hit a tiebreaking three-run homer off Steve Geltz and had a career-high four hits to lead host Seattle to a victory.

Felix Hernandez (3-2) allowed just two runs on four hits over seven innings to pick up the win, the 146th of his career, and move past Jamie Moyer for most in franchise history.

Steve Cishek earned his 10th save of the season.

Dana Eveland (0-1) was saddled with the loss.

Marte went 4-for-5 with two doubles, three RBIs and three runs scored. With the game tied at 2 in the sixth inning, Marte hammered the first offering from reliever Geltz over the right field wall to give the Mariners a 5-2 cushion.

Mets 4, Dodgers 2: Steven Matz won his fifth straight start, Curtis Granderson homered on the first pitch of the game, and Kevin Plawecki also went deep to lead New York over host Los Angeles in their first meeting since last year's NL Division Series.

Matz (5-1) allowed two runs and six hits in six innings and struck out five in the opener of a four-game series. Matz served up a two-run homer to Trayce Thompson in the fourth after he was staked to a 3-0 lead, but the left-hander helped himself out in the sixth with an RBI double.

Jim Henderson struck out Yasiel Puig and got Thompson on a foul pop with the tying runs on base in the eighth. Jeurys Familia got three outs for his 11th save in 11 chances.

Scott Kazmir (2-3) gave up four runs and six hits in 5 2/3 innings.

Blue Jays 3, Giants 1: Edwin Encarnacion hit a two-run homer, Aaron Sanchez struck out five over seven innings, and Toronto beat San Francisco in its first visit to AT&T Park in nearly three years.

Encarnacion connected in the third off Jake Peavy (1-4), who has given up five homers in his last two outings and lost his third straight start.

Toronto had gone back-to-back games without a home run for the third time this season, but Encarnacion's deep third-inning drive into the left-field bleachers kept the Blue Jays from doing so in three straight for the first time since Sept. 26-28, 2014.

Sanchez (3-1) allowed one run and three hits and walked one in a strong 105-pitch performance.

Predators outlast Sharks in OT, force seventh game

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Viktor Arvidsson's first playoff goal of his young career certainly is a moment to remember. The rest of the Nashville Predators are just grateful he scored so quickly after surviving a triple-overtime thriller in Game 4.

Arvidsson scored 2:03 into overtime, and the Predators forced a deciding seventh game for their second straight series by beating the San Jose Sharks 4-3 on Monday night.

"That was the second most exciting part of him scoring was that it was in the first three minutes," Predators left wing Colin Wilson said. "We get to get to bed at a regular time. It's big to get that out of the way early. I'm happy for Arvy."

The young Swede jumped the puck just

inside the blue line going into Nashville's offensive zone, splitting between Melker Karlsson and Justin Braun on his left with Marc-Edouard Vlasic on the right. He skated up the left side into the circle before throwing a backhand past goaltender Martin Jones.

"Unbelievable," said Arvidsson, who turned 23 last month. "I didn't see it go in at first. The crowd went crazy, and I just didn't know what to do. It was really nice."

Nashville coach Peter Laviolette had just moved Arvidsson to the top line with Johansen and Filip Forsberg for this game, and the Swede responded by scoring his first goal this postseason. Fans celebrated by tossing a bunch of the hats given away for this game onto the ice.

"He's such a fun player to watch,"

Laviolette said of Arvidsson. "He got some speed behind him in the neutral zone. He was able to turn it over and get an angle to get a shot off. It was a great shot."

Stars 3, Blues 2: Rookie Mattias Janmark ignited a three-goal first period and Kari Lehtonen made 35 saves for visiting Dallas, which forced Game 7 with a victory over St. Louis.

Vernon Fiddler and Jason Spezza also scored for Dallas, which reclaimed home ice for the deciding game on Wednesday night despite getting outshot 37-14 with the Blues dominating the last two periods.

Alexander Steen and Patrik Berglund scored for St. Louis.

Home ice has meant little, given the road team has won three in a row and four of six in the series.

Blues goalie Brian Elliott, who had played well throughout the postseason, was replaced with the Stars leading 3-0 on just seven shots at 16:49 of the first.

Jake Allen finished in his first appearance of this postseason, facing just seven more shots in the final two-plus periods.

St. Louis will be seeking its first trip to the Western Conference final since 2001 and Dallas, which finished first overall in the West, previously made it that far in 2008.

The Stars were ahead 3-0 after the first, their first two- and three-goal leads of the series. That early show of strength muzzled another standing room crowd of 19,808 at the Scottrade Center with the first two goals coming in a span of 20 seconds.