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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Jetliner crashes into Mediterranean Sea

Associated Press

An EgyptAir jetliner en route from Paris to Cairo with 66 people aboard swerved wildly in flight and crashed into the Mediterranean Sea early Thursday, authorities said. Egyptian and Russian officials said it may have been brought down by terrorists.

There were no immediate signs of survivors.

EgyptAir Flight 804, an Airbus A320 with 56 passengers and 10 crewmembers, went down about halfway between the Greek island of Crete and Egypt's coastline after takeoff from Charles de Gaulle Airport, authorities said.

Greek Defense Minister Panos Kammenos said the plane spun all the way around and suddenly lost altitude just before vanishing from radar screens about 2:45 a.m. Egyptian time.

He said it made a 90-degree left turn, then a full 360-degree turn toward the right, plummeting from 38,000 to 15,000 feet. It disappeared at about 10,000 feet, he said.

Hours later, Egypt's Civil Aviation Ministry said that life jackets, plastic items and

other floating objects had been found, and authorities were trying to confirm whether the debris was from the plane.

Civil Aviation Minister Sherif Fathi cautioned that the disaster was still under investigation but said the possibility it was a terror attack "is higher than the possibility of having a technical failure."

The Egyptian military said it did not receive a distress call, and Egypt's state-run daily Al-Ahram quoted an unidentified airport official as saying the pilot did not send one. The absence of a distress call suggests that whatever sent the aircraft plummeting into the sea was sudden and brief.

The plane's erratic course raised a number of possibilities, including a catastrophic mechanical or structural failure, a bombing, or a struggle over the controls with a hijacker in the cockpit.

Egyptian security officials said they were running background checks on the passengers to see if any had links to extremists.

If it was terrorism, it was the second deadly attack involving Egypt's aviation industry in seven months.

Last October, a Russian passenger plane that took off from an Egyptian Red Sea resort crashed in the Sinai, killing all 224

people aboard. Russia said it was brought down by a bomb, and a local branch of the Islamic State claimed responsibility.

The disaster also raises questions about security at De Gaulle Airport, at a time when Western Europe has been on high alert over the deadly Islamic extremist attacks in Paris and at the Brussels airport and subway over the past six months.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault said that airport security had been tightened considerably before the disaster, in particular because of the coming European soccer championship, which France is hosting.

Retired U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Robert Latiff, an expert on aerospace systems at the University of Notre Dame, said that while it is too early to tell for certain, a structural failure aboard the plane is "vanishingly improbable."

He also cast doubt on the possibility of a struggle in the cockpit, saying the crew would have triggered an alarm.

Instead, he said, "sabotage is possible, and if there were lax controls at airports and loose hiring and security policies, increasingly likely."

House GOP defies veto threat, passes defense budget

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — House Republicans on Thursday urged the president against a veto after passing an annual defense budget that dramatically increases spending on troops and military equipment.

The \$602 billion bill was passed 277-147 with opposition from many Democrats. It pays for a bigger Army, the largest troop pay raise in years, and more training and equipment by taking about \$16 billion from the war fund used to fight the Islamic State group.

The Republican-crafted plan will cause U.S. forces in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan to run out of money in April

unless Congress can cobble together new spending legislation. The White House issued a veto warning earlier this week, calling the budget maneuver a dangerous gimmick, and the Pentagon has said the House plan gambles with deployed military forces.

"I call on the president to drop his veto threat and stand by our troops and give them the tools they need to continue fighting in a very dangerous time in our nation's history," said Rep. Steve Scalise, R-La., the House whip, who gathered with leadership and members of the Armed Services Committee gathered in front of the Capitol.

The House Republicans said tapping the war fund, known

as Overseas Contingency Operations, is necessary because the military is in the midst of a "readiness crisis" that has left it unable to face threats around the world.

Defense spending has dipped and leveled off after years of increases for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Meanwhile, troops have seen little rest as operations in those countries continue, despite President Barack Obama's promises to end U.S. involvement.

"By gambling with warfighting funds, the bill risks the safety of our men and women fighting to keep America safe, undercuts stable planning and efficient use of taxpayer dollars, dispirits troops and their families, baffles our allies, and

emboldens our enemies," the White House Office of Management and Budget wrote Monday in the veto threat.

Obama vetoed the prior defense budget in November after Congress pushed ahead with a similar plan to tap the war fund.

So far, the Senate has rejected the House plan, but senators are set to debate and vote next week on their version of the defense bill, called the National Defense Authorization Act.

Eventually, House and Senate lawmakers must agree on a final budget deal, and Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, has called for boosting the military budget.

Chinese jets fly close to US plane

BY WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

The Pentagon says two Chinese fighter jets flew dangerously close to a Navy reconnaissance plane Tuesday in international airspace over the South China Sea.

The J-11 fighters came within 50 feet of the U.S. EP-3 Aries aircraft, an encounter that an unidentified Pentagon source characterized as an “unsafe intercept,” The Associated Press reported.

The fighters came so close that the Navy pilot was forced to drop several hundred feet to

avoid a collision.

The U.S. surveillance plane was conducting routine operations south of Hong Kong in the northern part of the South China Sea.

Tense encounters between U.S. and Chinese military air and sea vessels have become routine as China more aggressively asserts its sovereignty claims over parts of the sea. The Philippines, Vietnam and Taiwan, among others, have also laid claim to certain reefs and atolls there.

The U.S. has vocally maintained it will continue so-called freedom-of-navigation patrols

and reconnaissance flights in the region.

Most military encounters between the U.S. and China have taken place in the southern part of the sea near the disputed Spratly Islands.

The U.S. does not take a position on the sovereignty of the claims but has expressed concerns over China’s militarization of the islands, as well as what it views as Chinese attempts to limit Navy transit through international waters. About \$1.2 trillion in U.S. trade passes through the sea annually, according to U.S. government figures.

New penis recipient: ‘We belong together’

Associated Press

BOSTON — The recipient of the nation’s first penis transplant says he is looking forward to walking out of the hospital a “complete” man.

“There is no doubt in my mind that everything is going to work. And I mean everything,” Thomas Manning, 64, said Wednesday with a grin as he continued to recover at Boston’s Massachusetts General Hospital. “You can interpret that any way you wish.”

The former Halifax, Mass., bank courier whose organ was amputated after he was diagnosed with penile cancer in 2012 has been ambling around his room with a walker and said he doesn’t feel any pain.

Manning is the third man to receive a new penis, following transplants in South Africa in 2014 and China in 2005.

The South African patient remains healthy and was able to father a child, though the baby was stillborn. The Chinese man, however, had his new penis removed weeks later because he said it made him and his wife uncomfortable.

Manning’s doctors said in announcing the operation on Monday that they hoped to release him sometime this week. But Manning said he will stay and undergo largely cosmetic surgery on Monday to improve the organ’s appearance.

Doctors said that it will be a few more weeks before Manning can urinate normally and that sexual function is further down the line. But reproduction is not possible because Manning didn’t receive new testes.

Manning’s penile cancer was discovered after a workplace accident in which he slipped on ice. Doctors told him they needed to take aggressive action to save his life.

Crew in Guam B-52 crash safe

Associated Press

HAGATNA, Guam — All seven crewmembers made it out safely when their B-52 crashed on Guam shortly after takeoff, the U.S. Air Force said. No injuries were reported.

Takeoff was aborted, and the plane caught fire about 8:30 a.m. Thursday Guam time, Pacific Air Forces public affairs said. It crashed on the flight line of the base.

“The aircraft was carrying inert munitions at the time and posed no danger to the local community,” the military said in a later news release. The Air Force website says the aircraft is capable of carrying nuclear or precision guided conventional ordnance.

The bomber was deployed to Guam from Minot, N.D., as part of the military’s continuous

bomber presence in the Pacific, The Air Force said. The crewmembers are with the 69th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron and were performing a routine training mission, it said.

The incident is under investigation. The Air Force is taking steps to mitigate any possible hydraulic oil and fuel contamination, said Capt. Ray Geoffroy, spokesman for Pacific Air Forces. The plane had a full load of fuel.

In addition, Air Force environmental specialists were assessing any potential impact to the environment from burning aircraft materials.

The Air Force said later Thursday that emergency responders and law enforcement officials had completed their initial checks.

The Air Force has been rotating B-1, B-2 and B-52 bombers through Guam since 2004 to boost the U.S. security presence in the Asia-Pacific region.

Navy chief tells admirals to rethink behavior

The Washington Post

The Navy’s highest-ranking officer summoned more than 300 admirals to a gathering near Washington Thursday at which he will urge them to place a renewed emphasis on integrity in light of several scandals that have plagued the service.

Although Richardson did not single out specific cases of misbehavior, the Navy has been dogged by a major corruption

scandal involving an Asian defense contractor who has pleaded guilty to bribing Navy officers with cash, sex and luxury goods over a decade.

Three admirals were censured last year for accepting gifts from the contractor, Leonard Glenn Francis, a Singapore-based businessman.

In December, the Navy reprimanded a two-star admiral for getting drunk and wandering naked around a hotel while attending a conference with

defense contractors. In January, a one-star admiral was reprimanded and relieved of his command after an investigation found that he had spent hours watching pornography on a Navy computer while at sea.

And in March, the Navy denied promotion to the admiral in charge of its elite SEAL teams after the Pentagon’s inspector general determined that he had retaliated against whistleblowers.

Curry, Warriors even series

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Once Stephen Curry finally gathered himself and got up following a scary first-quarter dive into the stands, fans inside Oracle Arena could take a breath, sit back and watch the MVP put on a spectacular shooting show. Puffy right elbow and all.

"The elbow's fine," said Curry, who hit it first on a metal platform then later knocked it again. "It looks like it has a tennis ball on top of it. ... I should be all right."

He seemed more than fine, scoring 15 straight points in less than 2 minutes during one dazzling third-quarter stretch to lead the Golden State Warriors past the Oklahoma City Thunder 118-91 on Wednesday night to even the Western Conference finals at one game apiece.

"Business as usual. This is what he does," coach Steve Kerr said, before being asked how he feels during such a Curry onslaught and responding with a chuckle: "I feel great joy. It's true."

The MVP scored 28 points, making five of eight three-pointers and shooting 9-for-15 overall.

Klay Thompson added 15 points in a balanced performance by the defending champions to bounce back from just their third home defeat all season in the series opener two nights earlier.

"We responded all year long whether it was a bad loss or a sloppy win,"

Thompson said. "We come back sharp the next game, and it's a testament to everybody on this team."

Kevin Durant scored 29 points but just six after halftime. Russell Westbrook had 16 points and 12 assists for the Thunder, who were outrebounded for the first time in five meetings with the Warriors this season.

"They were sending three guys. I was trying to make the right pass," Durant said. "Maybe I've just got to shoot over three people."

Game 3 is Sunday night in Oklahoma City.

Durant provided a big assist during Curry's flurry. He fouled the superstar point guard on a three-point attempt with 6:33 to go in the third, then swatted his hand in disgust at the call and received a technical — a costly four-point play. While Durant hit a fadeaway jumper moments later, Curry answered by knocking down consecutive long shots, one a three, to make it 76-59 with 5:47 to go in the third.

"They were certainly very, very lively on both ends of the floor," Thunder coach Billy Donovan said. "We let Curry get loose a few times."

NBA Finals MVP Andre Iguodala missed his first five shots before a beautiful double-clutch, no-look layup in the final minute of the first half and then an alley-oop dunk the next time down that put the Warriors up 57-49 at halftime. He wound up with 14 points.

Festus Ezeli scored 12 points for his

first game in double digits these playoffs, Marreese Speights had 13 points off the bench, and Golden State didn't falter after halftime the way it did two nights earlier in losing Game 1 108-102.

It was a stark contrast from Monday, when Golden State allowed 38 third-quarter points and was held to playoff lows of 42 second-half points and 14 in the fourth quarter. Oklahoma City's 14-point comeback in Game 1 was the largest against the Warriors this postseason.

Curry said he couldn't wait for another chance after dropping the series opener for the first time since 2013. Then, he took out any remaining frustrations from Monday's loss on the Thunder.

Even if the do-everything point guard gave the entire building a gasp when he went diving into the stands at the 2:54 mark of the first quarter before slowly finding his way up in one piece.

"I was just hoping he was OK," Draymond Green said. "Flying over the seats like that you don't know if it's a leg, if it's an elbow, if it's a head."

Curry was sidelined by ankle and knee injuries during the first two rounds of the playoffs.

"Tonight, started off with a nice punch and was able to sustain it over the course of the game," Curry said. "When I get open shots obviously the confidence is there to knock them down. It's been like that since I've been back. My body's catching up and I think I'm there."

Luyendyk mark still the fastest

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Twenty years and one week after Arie Luyendyk became the fastest man to conquer Indianapolis Motor Speedway's 2.5-mile oval, his records remain untouched and unchallenged.

And unlikely to fall anytime soon. The man who sped around the 2.5-mile oval at a mind-blowing 237.498 mph during qualifying in 1996 and finished with a four-lap average of 236.986 finds it hard to believe he's still talking those speeds as the 100th running of the Indianapolis 500 nears.

"It seems like a long time," Luyendyk said Wednesday. "I knew it would be a while with the changes going on at the speedway. I anticipated the speeds would be slower for a while, but 20 years is a long time."

It's not that series officials are afraid of pushing the limits.

They call the IndyCar Series the world's fastest and three years ago, Mark Miles, the CEO of Hulman & Co., IndyCar's parent company, discussed the possibility of breaking Luyendyk's records at the centennial race.

But with qualifying set for Saturday and Sunday and the May 29 race less than two weeks away, a record-breaking run is the one element that's missing from this month's grand celebration.

"It used to be if you ran faster than me, fine. If I ran faster than you fine, as long as it was all within the rules," four-time Indy 500 winner A.J. Foyt said. "Now, it's kind of like spec racing, if you want to know the truth. The cars have so much drag and downforce ... It's not like it used to be."

Some contend the changes have been good for the sport.

By using more standardized equipment, costs have been cut and races have become more competitive. Drivers are safer, too, even at speeds that routinely top 225 mph. Ryan Hunter-Reay, the 2014 Indy 500 winner, had the fastest lap in Wednesday's practice, going 228.202.

But the debate that once drove the month of May — how fast can these cars go? — has been on hold ever since series officials decided to slow things down for the 1997 season.

The late Scott Brayton won the '96 pole with an average speed of 233.718. Luyendyk won it the next year at a seemingly pedestrian 218.263.

"I understand why it (a record-breaking run) hasn't happened because I think at that time there was a transitioning period and Tony George really was pushing hard for the SAFER barriers," said Mike Hull, the managing director for Chip Ganassi Racing. "I think everybody thought we would eventually go again with speed."

During the offseason, to the consternation of some drivers, the series added more safety equipment — equipment that appeared to help rookie Spencer Pigot stay on the ground after the first crash of the week.

All of that means Luyendyk will keep the record for yet another year.

Irving sharing the load for Cleveland

Associated Press

INDEPENDENCE, Ohio — Kyrie Irving dribbled behind his back and then behind his back again, leaving Toronto's Cory Joseph grasping at air.

Irving pulled off a few other dizzying spins and other did-he-just-do-that moves while finishing with 27 points, five assists and two steals. He even got free for a rare breakaway dunk as the Cleveland Cavaliers overpowered the Raptors by 31 points in Game 1 of the Eastern Conference finals.

Irving did a little of everything, but perhaps his most significant action came off the floor.

As Cleveland's reserves were putting the finishing touches on the 115-84 blow-out Tuesday night, raising the unblemished Cavs to 9-0 in these playoffs, Irving danced along the sideline to the delight of a smiling LeBron James, who looked like a proud older brother.

"He's waited a long time to get back to this position," James said Wednesday following practice. "The kid is playing some great basketball right now."

The kid has been brilliant in his second postseason.

Irving has outplayed a group of talented point guards who haven't been able to stay with him or stop him. He has already left Detroit's Reggie Jackson, Atlanta's Dennis Schroder and Jeff Teague in his

wake, and unless the Raptors can come up with a defense to re-route the Cavaliers — who had nine dunks in Game 1 — from unimpeded attacks at the rim, Kyle Lowry will become Irving's latest victim on his tornadic path back to the NBA Finals.

One of four elite guards in the NBA's final four, Irving, whose playoffs ended last year when he freakishly shattered his kneecap in Game 1 of the Finals, has taken the scoring burden off James. He's averaging a team-leading 24.7 points per game and at times he's Cleveland's first offensive option, a role James has owned but is now willing to share with his 24-year-old teammate.

Irving said he was looking forward to the conference finals matchup with Lowry, who averaged 31 points in three games against Cleveland during the regular season and torched the Cavs for 43 in a win on Feb. 26.

On Tuesday, Irving never let Lowry get started and harassed him all over the floor. Toronto's All-Star guard, playing his second game in three days after leading the Raptors to a Game 7 win over Miami, finished just 4-for-14 from the field. He missed all seven three-pointers and didn't get to the free-throw line.

Part of Lowry's struggles can be traced to having to deal with Irving on the defensive end.

The Raptors have been bouncing back throughout the postseason and Lowry

expects them to do the same in Game 2 on Thursday night.

"They're playing at a championship level right now," he said. "LeBron is playing like LeBron. Kyrie is playing like Kyrie, and their bench played extremely well. We've just got to figure it out and match it, and just go out there and do things that we do. There's always a fire if you get your butt kicked like that. You've got to want to win. We want to win. We didn't just get here to be like, 'Oh, OK. We want to win games. We want to compete.' Our competitive nature as NBA players, as professionals, is going to be at a high level."

The relationship between James and Irving is an interesting study, and it has taken time for them to get to this point. The stars haven't always been aligned during their two seasons together, but they're in sync now — a devastating 1-2 punch — and maybe on the verge of a championship.

James has pushed Irving toward greatness.

"He's grown every single day, every single week, month, and over the course of these last two years, becoming a leader and becoming a staple of our team," James said. "We all knew how talented the kid was and how talented he is still today, but his growth and what he demands out of all of us as the point guard, as one of the leaders of the team. That's the best part about it."



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Verlander reaches strikeout milestone

Associated Press

DETROIT — Justin Verlander, sporting a scruffy beard on his 33-year-old face, chuckled when the Detroit Tigers showed a video montage of some of his significant strikeouts during a career that started more than a decade ago.

“Man, the first strikeout they showed against [Travis] Hafner I looked pretty doggone young, fresh-faced,” Verlander said. “A lot of great moments along the way, and a lot of great moments here in this stadium in front of these fans. A lot great seasons. It really all brings that back to the forefront pretty quickly. Most importantly, we won.”

Verlander struck out 10 batters, including the 2,000th of his career, to help Detroit beat the Minnesota Twins 6-3 on Wednesday.

“Personal accomplishments are nice, but what I take the most pride in is being out there every fifth game,” he said. “Numbers come with time.”

Talent and an ability to adapt have also helped.

While Verlander can’t throw around 100 mph like he could when he made his debut July 4, 2005, at Cleveland, he can still blow mid-90s fastballs past players and mix his other pitches to keep them guessing. And, he is willing to make changes as he did by dropping his arm slot recently.

“It’s a huge part of this game, being able to make adjustments on the fly, mid-season, mid-at-bat,” Verlandersaid. “It’s been good since I made that adjustment.”

Verlander (3-4) allowed six hits and three runs over 7 1/3 innings while matching his season high in strikeouts. He joined Mickey Lolich as the two pitchers in franchise history with 2,000 career strikeouts, and became the 76th in baseball history to reach the milestone.

“Ver has to catch up to Rocket (Roger

Clemens) to really impress me,” Tigers manager Brad Ausmus joked. “But it’s an outstanding accomplishment. Ver has been one of the elite pitchers in baseball since he arrived on the scene. Since the end of last July, when a lot of people doubted him, he’s kind of shown he’s got some left in the tank.”

The Tigers have shown they can compete and win, too. They’ve won four straight, equaling a season high, after losing 11 of 12 games.

Minnesota, meanwhile, is simply struggling.

The Twins have lost 11 of 13, dropping to 10-29 for the worst record in the majors.

“We talked a lot about the first inning, being ready,” Minnesota manager Paul Molitor said. “Some of the basic things that you would hope at this level. We got to catch the ball, hit the cutoff man, all those kind of things that just jump out at you when you’re playing poorly. Give extra bases, extra opportunities. It’s a tough hole to dig for your starting pitcher when you don’t make plays early.”

Ian Kinsler finished 3-for-4, hitting a solo homer in the sixth and an RBI single in the fourth. He has hit homers in four straight games for the first time in his 11-year career, and has become the first leadoff hitter to do that for the Tigers since Dick McAuliffe did it in 1969.

Francisco Rodriguez pitched a perfect ninth to earn his 11th save in 12 chances.

Yankees 4, Diamondbacks 2: Nathan Eovaldi doesn’t consider himself an ace just yet. He sure pitched like one Wednesday night, though.

Eovaldi retired the 18 batters he faced after allowing a freak leadoff base hit and New York salvaged the final game of a three-game series in Arizona.

Jean Segura’s ground ball to start the first inning bounced off the bag at second and dribbled into the outfield for a

double.

After that, only two balls even reached the outfield off the Yankees right-hander, who hit 100 mph on the Chase Field radar gun while improving to 4-0 in his last five starts.

Cubs 2, Brewers 1 (13): Pitcher Travis Wood drove in the go-ahead run when he walked with the bases loaded in the 13th inning to lead visiting Chicago over Milwaukee.

Nationals 7, Mets 1: Daniel Murphy drove in two runs against his former team to back Gio Gonzalez in his latest win at Citi Field as a patient Washington beat host New York.

Anthony Rendon snapped a fifth-inning tie with a two-run single for the Nationals, who held on to first place in the NL East.

Giants 2, Padres 1: Johnny Cueto threw a four-hitter and Hunter Pence hit a two-run homer to lead San Francisco to its seventh straight win with a victory over host San Diego.

Royals 3-2, Red Sox 2-5: Jackie Bradley Jr. and Mookie Betts homered to back a strong start by David Price as Boston beat Kansas City to salvage a split of their day-night doubleheader.

The Royals won the opener 3-2 behind a strong performance by Ian Kennedy and their bullpen. Kennedy allowed two runs on six hits and a walk over 5 2/3 innings, striking out nine, before Brian Flynn — who earned his first career win — and Luke Hochevar combined to strike out four consecutive batters.

Cardinals 2, Rockies 0: Adam Wainwright had his best start of the season and Matt Holliday had a two-run double as host St. Louis ended Colorado’s five-game winning streak.

Angels 8, Dodgers 1: Mike Trout homered as the Angels broke the game open with five runs in the fifth inning to beat the visiting Dodgers in the Freeway

Series.

Astros 5, White Sox 3: Jose Altuve had three hits and two runs batted in while Colby Rasmus and Jason Castro each had a solo home run and Houston beat host Chicago despite the White Sox turning their second triple play of the season.

Indians 8, Reds 7 (12): Rajai Davis hit a tying, two-run homer in the ninth inning then Francisco Lindor led off the 12th with another homer to power visiting Cleveland to victory.

Braves 3, Pirates 1: Julio Teheran allowed five hits in 7 2/3 innings as visiting Atlanta gave Brian Snitker his first victory as interim manager.

Tyler Flowers hit a home run to the bushes in center field and finished with three hits for the Braves, who won for just the third time in their last 13 games.

Orioles 5, Mariners 2: Chris Tillman won his fifth straight start with another solid performance against his former team as host Baltimore beat Seattle.

Rays 6, Blue Jays 3: Kevin Kiermaier hit a two-run homer while Logan Morrison and Desmond Jennings each had solo shots as Tampa Bay beat host Toronto to complete a three-game sweep.

Athletics 8, Rangers 1: Khris Davis hit his fourth home run in two games and Danny Valencia drove in two as Oakland completed a three-game sweep of visiting Texas.

Phillies 4, Marlins 2: Tyler Goeddel hit his first career homer and Jeremy Hellickson pitched six sharp innings as host Philadelphia beat Miami.

Hellickson (4-2) allowed two runs and five hits, striking out four. He retired 11 in a row at one point and pitched well after a shaky start. Jeanmar Gomez tossed a perfect ninth for his 16th save in 17 tries.

Nyquist draws No. 3 post

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — Doug O’Neill couldn’t have done any better if he picked Nyquist’s post position himself.

After Kentucky Derby winner Nyquist landed the No. 3 post for the Preakness in a blind draw Wednesday, O’Neill looked like a man with a winning lottery ticket.

“The 3 is exactly what I wanted,” O’Neill said. “... We’re very optimistic that we’re going to break good and get into position.”

Unbeaten in eight races, Nyquist was made the overwhelming 3-5 favorite among 11 horses in Saturday’s race.

His selection as the best horse in the field was justified, according to Hall of Fame trainer Bob Baffert, who will saddle new shooter Collected.

“I’d probably be surprised if he didn’t win,” Baffert said about Nyquist. “He’s going to be tough to beat.”

Secretariat started from the 3-hole to win the 1973 Preakness, but California Chrome in 2014 was the only horse to win from third post since 1993.

Starting from the 13th post position in the Derby, Nyquist won the 20-horse race by 1 1/4 lengths over Exaggerator. Nyquist can expect far less traffic against a smaller field at the Preakness, which covers 1 3/16th miles at Pimlico Race Course.

“He’s a very mature horse that has speed away from the gate,” O’Neill said. “And he doesn’t like to lose.”

O’Neill enters the Preakness seeking to keep alive his hopes of winning the Triple

Crown. A year ago, American Pharoah became the 12th Triple Crown winner and the first since Affirmed in 1978.

Exaggerator has the best odds behind Nyquist at 3-1. The horse, trained by Keith Desormeaux, drew the fifth post position.

“Being that Nyquist is speed oriented, he’ll probably get pressed from the outside,” Desormeaux said. “It may make him go a little faster. That could be tactically advantageous for us.”

Exaggerator has finished behind Nyquist on four different occasions, but Desormeaux hopes things will be different on Saturday.

“We respect what he’s done,” Desormeaux said, “but we’re hopeful of turning the tables.”

Stradavari, at 8-1, was the third choice, as selected by Pimlico handicapper Keith Feustle.

Trainer Todd Pletcher, asked his reaction to having Stradavari starting outside at 11, said, “I’m happy with it. The good thing is you can kind of dictate things instead of them being dictated to you.”

The race is scheduled for around 6:30 p.m. EDT on Saturday. The field includes Lani, a Japanese-bred horse who finished ninth in the Derby, and eight new shooters.

Lani will start from the No. 6 post, which has produced 16 Preakness winners — most of any starting spot.

“He wanted the outside draw and No. 6 is technically outside, so he is pretty much satisfied,” said Soshi Inoue, spokesman for trainer Mikio Matsunaga.

3-goal third boosts Pens past Lightning

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Sidney Crosby and Co. kept pressing and shooting until the Pittsburgh Penguins finally imposed their will.

Crosby, Phil Kessel and Chris Kunitz scored third-period goals to help the Penguins beat the Tampa Bay Lightning 4-2 in Game 3 of the Eastern Conference finals Wednesday night.

Carl Hagelin snapped a scoreless tie late in the second period and Matt Murray had 26 saves for the Penguins, who took a 2-1 lead in the best-of-seven series and proving that they’re far from a one-man show.

“You don’t win consistently without depth,” Crosby said after scoring the winning goal for the second time in three nights.

Game 4 is Friday night at Amalie Arena in Tampa.

Crosby’s power-play goal off a pass from Evgeni Malkin restored a two-goal lead midway through the final period. Kunitz also beat goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy from the right circle to make it 4-1.

“It was a 4-on-3 so we had a one-timer on either side and [Malkin] was in a good spot to shoot it at the top of the ice,” Crosby said. “He’s just smart with the puck and he’s going to make the right

decision.”

Tyler Johnson and Ondrej Palat scored for the Lightning. They have lost two straight after winning the series opener in Pittsburgh. The defending Eastern Conference champions were outshot 48-28, including 38-16 over the last two periods.

The Lightning were outshot by a combined 76-41 in the first two games, but weren’t as concerned with that disparity as much as by a lack of good scoring chances — a problem they hoped to rectify by coming out more aggressive to try to put more pressure on Murray on Wednesday night.

And for a while, they did.

Murray, though, had 12 saves in the opening period, but the Lightning couldn’t keep up the pace. Pittsburgh controlled the puck for much of the second period, taking 21 shots to Tampa Bay’s six and finally breaking through against the 21-year-old goaltender when Kessel chased down a loose puck before flicking a shot from the right circle.

Vasilevskiy, making his third career playoff start, finished with 44 saves. He’s stopped 115 of 123 shots since taking over in goal after Ben Bishop suffered a lower body injury during Game 1.

The Lightning have lost consecutive games for the first time this postseason.