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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Explosions kill 80 in Syrian strongholds

Associated Press

BEIRUT — A series of coordinated explosions including suicide bombings rocked two normally quiet coastal government strongholds in Syria on Monday, killing more than 80 people and wounding 200 others, state media and opposition activists said. The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the attacks.

The morning blasts in the pro-government cities of Tartus and Jableh were the first of their kind targeting civilians in those areas in the course of Syria's civil war, now in its sixth year. The targets included bus stations, a gas station and a hospital, marking a sharp escalation in the conflict as world powers struggle to restart peace talks in Geneva.

Several rounds of talks were held in the Swiss city earlier this year, although there was

no breakthrough and the talks never really took off.

Russia, which is heavily invested in the Syrian war on behalf of President Bashar Assad's government, keeps a naval base in Tartus and an air base in Latakia province, about 3 miles north of Jableh. Insurgents fighting to topple Assad maintain a presence in rural Latakia.

Syria's SANA news agency reported that four explosions struck Jableh. The attacks included a suicide bombing at the emergency entrance of the Jableh national hospital, state media said.

Jableh News Network, an opposition activist media group, said that one of those killed at the hospital is a nurse, Huda al-Houshi.

Shortly afterward, TV reports and residents said suicide bombers followed by a

car laden with explosives tore through a packed bus station and a gas station in Tartus, minutes apart. More than 33 were killed and many were injured in the bombings.

The explosions caused panic and took people by surprise.

A resident said she heard the first explosion followed by the wail of ambulance sirens rushing to the scene. Ninth-graders were taking their exams Monday and had just finished at 9:30 a.m. local time, about the same time of the explosion, and the bus stop would have been crowded, she said.

The attackers also targeted a nearby gas station, where more than 100 cars are usually lined up to get fuel at that time of day, she said.

She spoke on condition of anonymity, citing security concerns.

In all, seven explosions

ripped through both locations about the same time: four in Jableh, including three suicide bombings and one car bomb, and three in Tartus, including two suicide bombings and one car bomb.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition monitoring group based in Britain, put the death toll at more than 100.

The coordinated and near-simultaneous attacks marked a major security breach of government strongholds that have remained calm throughout the war. Tartus and Jableh are home to thousands of internally displaced people from violence-stricken areas across Syria.

The bombings unleashed an immediate backlash against the refugees, with families of the victims attacking IDP shelters. One shelter, al-Karnak, was burned down.

Iraqi forces fight Islamic State militants outside Fallujah

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Iraqi government forces on Monday pushed Islamic State group militants out of some agricultural areas outside Fallujah as they launched a military offensive to recapture the city from the extremists, officials said.

Backed by U.S.-led coalition airstrikes and paramilitary troops, Iraqi government forces launched the long-awaited military offensive late Sunday. The city, located about 40 miles west of Baghdad, has been under the militants' control since January 2014.

The commander of the Fallujah operation, Lt. Gen. Abdul-Wahab al-Saadi, could not say how long the offensive would take, citing the terrain, the number of civilians in the

city and bombs planted by the militants. Al-Saadi added that the first phase aims to surround and bomb Islamic State positions.

Federal police battalion commander 1st Lt. Ahmed Mahdi Salih said ground fighting was taking place around the town of Garma, east of Fallujah, which is considered the main supply line for the militants. The Islamic State group holds the center of Garma and some areas on its outskirts.

Col. Mahmoud al-Mardhi, who is in charge of paramilitary forces, said his troops recaptured at least three agricultural areas outside Garma. Al-Mardhi added that airstrikes and artillery shelling intensified against Islamic State positions inside Fallujah.

In the early days of the Sunni-led insurgency following the 2003 U.S.-led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein, Fallujah emerged as the main stronghold for different militant groups opposed to American forces. The main group was al-Qaida in Iraq, which later spawned the Islamic State group. The city was also the site of two bloody battles against U.S. forces in 2004.

Since August, Fallujah has been under siege by government troops who have prevented the entry of food and medicine into the city. Residents seeking to flee the city have sometimes found themselves trapped by the militants, who aim to retain Fallujah's civilian population as human shields against a full-scale government assault.

As of Monday, there was no evidence of mass displacement from the city or surrounding areas, but the U.N. refugee agency, UNHCR, said in a statement that about 80 families are reported to have fled Fallujah over the past few days. UNHCR said it has emergency stocks in Baghdad of 10,000 tents and 10,000 core relief items — such as sanitary kits and food and water supplies — that can assist families.

Flanked by senior military commanders, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi announced the beginning of military operations in a televised speech late Sunday night. He vowed to “tear up the black banners of strangers who usurped this city” and hoist the Iraqi flag.

Baltimore officer acquitted in Freddie Gray death case

Associated Press

BALTIMORE—A Baltimore officer was acquitted Monday of assault and other charges in the arrest of Freddie Gray, dealing prosecutors a significant blow in their attempt to hold police accountable for the young black man's death from injuries he suffered in the back of a police van.

A judge also found Officer Edward Nero not guilty of reckless endangerment and misconduct in office, saying he acted as any reasonable officer would and only touched Gray after he was in handcuffs.

As the verdict was read, Nero dropped his head down and his attorney placed a hand on his back. The courtroom was quiet. When the judge said he was not guilty, Nero stood up and hugged his attorney, and appeared to wipe away a tear.

"The state's theory has been one of recklessness and negligence," Baltimore Circuit Judge Barry Williams said. "There has been no evidence that the defendant intended for a crime to occur."

The assault charge carried a

maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and reckless endangerment carried a punishment of up to five years.

Gray died April 19, 2015, a week after his neck was broken in the back of a police transport van while he was handcuffed and shackled but was left unrestrained by a seat belt.

Nero, who is white, was one of six officers charged in the case. He waived his right to a jury trial, opting instead to argue his case before judge Williams. A jury trial for Officer William Porter late last year ended in a hung jury when the panel could not reach a decision on manslaughter and other charges. Porter is black.

Gray's death set off more than a week of protests followed by looting, rioting and arson that prompted a citywide curfew. His name became a rallying cry in the growing national conversation about the treatment of black men by police officers.

Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake said in a statement that Nero will still face an administrative review by the police department.

Navy identifies sailor who died in fall at S. Korea hotel

BY KIM GAMEL

Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — A U.S. sailor died after plunging more than 120 feet down an elevator shaft at a South Korean hotel, officials said Monday.

Petty Officer 3rd Class James "Jimmy" McLaughlin, 28, apparently was trying to climb out of the elevator after it got stuck between floors at the Hotel International in the city of Changwon over the weekend, police and fire officials said.

He was in cardiac arrest when rescue crews arrived and died after being taken to a hospital, they said.

Lt. j.g. Joshua Kelsey, a U.S. Naval Forces Korea spokesman, confirmed that McLaughlin died of injuries from a fall at the hotel early Sunday but said he couldn't provide further details until the investigation is a complete.

"Our main concern right now is sending our condolences to his family and loved ones," he said.

McLaughlin, a hospital corpsman who was on liberty when the fall occurred, was in South Korea with Undersea Rescue Command out of Naval Air Station North Island, Calif., for joint exercises, Kelsey said.

Obama: Taliban head's death a 'milestone'

BY CHAD GARLAND

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — The death of Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour "marks an important milestone" in the U.S. effort to bring peace to Afghanistan, President Barack Obama said Monday.

"After so many years of conflict, today gives the people of Afghanistan and the region a chance at a different, better future," he said in a statement issued by the White House.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah also hailed the strike, describing Mansour as responsible for a sharp escalation in bloodshed and an obstacle to a negotiated peace.

Obama thanked members of the U.S. military and intelligence community and said they "have once again sent a clear message to all those who target our people and our partners — you will have no safe haven." He also called on Pakistan, where the strike occurred, to deny terrorists sanctuary.

The strike came as Islamabad faced mounting pressure from U.S. and Afghan officials to take action against insurgent groups after months of failed attempts to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table. Saturday's attack, believed to be the first American strike on an area considered a Taliban sanctuary along Pakistan's border with Afghanistan, may be a sign Washington is growing tired of waiting.

Western intelligence agencies have long believed that after the U.S.-led invasion that overthrew the Taliban regime in 2001, former members of that government and its military found refuge in the Pakistani border town of Quetta and that many remain there and in the port city of Karachi.

In a statement Sunday, Pakistan's Foreign Ministry said it learned of the strike only after it occurred. It called the incident a violation of its sovereignty, an issue it said has been raised with U.S. officials in the past.

On Monday, Capt. Jeff Davis, a Pentagon spokesman, would not say whether Pakistani officials were notified before this specific strike. However, he did say the United States and Pakistan have had ongoing conversations about Mansour and other targets the U.S. is tracking.

Davis also said the airstrike was defensive, a response to specific information that Mansour was plotting attacks on U.S. and coalition personnel, although he would not elaborate.

Obama lifts US arms ban in 1st visit to Vietnam

HANOI, Vietnam — President Barack Obama on Monday lifted a 50-year-old ban on selling arms to Vietnam, looking to bolster a government seen as a crucial, though flawed partner in a region he has tried to place at the center of his foreign policy legacy.

Obama announced the full removal of the embargo at a news conference where he vowed to leave behind the troubled history between the former war enemies and embrace a new

era with a young, increasingly prosperous nation. Obama steered clear of harsh condemnation of what critics see as Vietnam's abysmal treatment of dissidents.

"At this stage, both sides have established a level of trust and cooperation, including between our militaries, that is reflective of common interests and mutual respect," Obama said. "This change will ensure that Vietnam has access to the equipment it needs to defend itself and removes a lingering vestige of the Cold War."

From The Associated Press

Thunder take series lead over Warriors

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Kevin Durant, Russell Westbrook and the Thunder gave the Warriors as complete a beating as they experienced during their record-setting season.

Suddenly, a second straight title seems to be anything but a given for Golden State. Now the Warriors are just trying to survive.

Durant scored 33 points, Westbrook had 30 points, 12 assists and eight rebounds, and Oklahoma City rolled to a 133-105 victory on Sunday night to take a 2-1 lead in the Western Conference finals.

The Warriors, who set an NBA record with 73 victories in the regular season, trailed by 41 points, their largest deficit this season.

"We got what we deserved," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said.

Durant made 10 of 15 shots and Westbrook was 10 of 19. It was the first time this postseason both players shot better than 50 percent from the field.

"We're not going to win that way," Golden State guard Klay Thompson said. "One of those guys got to have an off night."

Serge Ibaka added 14 points and eight rebounds for the Thunder, who matched a franchise record for most points scored in a playoff game.

Oklahoma City outrebounded the Warriors in its Game 1 victory, but the Warriors won the battle of the boards in Game 2 and beat the Thunder 118-91. Oklahoma City reasserted its dominance

NBA suspends Cavs' Jones, fines Casey

NEW YORK — Cleveland's Dahntay Jones has been suspended for one game by the NBA for striking Toronto's Bismack Biyombo in the groin.

The league also fined Raptors coach Dwane Casey \$25,000 on Sunday for his criticisms of the officiating.

Biyombo remained on his knees on the court after time expired in Game 3 on Saturday night after Jones hit him with 17.6 seconds remaining. The little-used reserve will miss Game 4 of the series Monday night.

Casey's comments, including his belief that Biyombo isn't getting enough calls, came in his postgame press conference following the Raptors' 99-84 victory. Cleveland leads the series 2-1.

— The Associated Press

on the glass on Sunday, outrebounding Golden State 52-38.

Westbrook said the Thunder also needed to make the hustle plays that add to the rebounding totals.

"That's one thing we slipped up on in Game 2, and I think tonight, we did a good job of getting loose balls and finding ways to get 50/50 basketballs and give ourselves extra possessions," he said.

Golden State will be in an uncomfortable position heading into Game 4 on Tuesday in Oklahoma City, but the Warriors remain confident. Golden State trailed Memphis and Cleveland 2-1 in playoff series last year and won both on its way to claiming the NBA title.

"Both times, we got blown out in Game 3, and we responded well, so we have that memory," Kerr said. "I'm confident we're going to come out and play a really

good game in Game 4, and we'll see what happens."

The last time Golden State's Stephen Curry had played in Oklahoma City, he scored 46 points, tied an NBA record with 12 3-pointers and hit a game-winning, 37-footer. This time, the league MVP finished with 24 points on 7-for-17 shooting. Klay Thompson added 18 points on 8-for-19 shooting.

Golden State's Draymond Green, who kicked Oklahoma City's Steven Adams in the groin and has become Thunder fans' No. 1 target because of some questionable tactics, struggled on both ends of the floor and finished with six points on 1-for-9 shooting. The Warriors were outscored by 43 points when he was in the game.

With 5:57 left in the second quarter, Green kicked Adams after a foul. It was

the second time in the series Green hit Adams there — he hit him with a knee in Game 2. The crowd chanted "Kick him out! Kick him out!" but Green was issued a flagrant 1 foul and remained in the game.

Green said he wasn't trying to hurt Adams.

"I thought it would probably get rescinded," he said. "I followed through on a shot. I'm not trying to kick somebody in the midsection. Somebody wants to have kids someday. I'm not trying to end that on the basketball court."

Seemingly energized after Green's foul, the Thunder outscored the Warriors 24-7 the rest of the half, with many of the baskets coming against Green. In a play that summarized the second quarter perfectly, Green went in for a layup and got it blocked by Durant, then Durant made a 3-pointer on the other end to give the Thunder a 64-47 lead.

Green fouled Westbrook on a long 3-pointer with 1.3 seconds left in the first half. Westbrook made all three free throws to put the Thunder up 72-47 at the break. Durant had 23 points on 6-for-10 shooting and 10 of 10 free throws in the first half, and Westbrook had 16 points, seven assists and six rebounds at the break. It was the most points scored against the Warriors in any half this season.

Curry shot 4 for 13 in the first half, Thompson went 5 for 14 and Green 1 for 8.

The Thunder continued the onslaught by making 17 of 22 shots in the third quarter to take a 117-80 lead into the fourth.

Open champ Wawrinka avoids early Paris upset

Associated Press

PARIS — Defending champion Stan Wawrinka got off to a shaky start at the French Open, surviving five tough sets to beat Lukas Rosol 4-6, 6-1, 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 Monday in the first round.

Struggling against his Czech opponent on Court Philippe Chatrier, Wawrinka was at risk of becoming the first defending champion ever to lose in the first round at Roland Garros.

Ranked 59th, Rosol had never beaten Wawrinka — and had taken only two sets off him — in four previous encounters. But he took the match against the third-seeded Swiss player to five sets with frequent forays to the net, a broad array of accurate strokes and an abundance of confidence.

"He was going for his shots all the time, not missing much," Wawrinka said.

Rain delayed the start by more than 2½ hours. Rosol broke Wawrinka in the fifth game of the first set with a drop shot that died on the damp red clay.

With the crowd wrapped in heavy coats against the unusually chilly May day, Wawrinka steadied himself in the sec-

ond set, but the shift in momentum was brief. Rosol came out for the third set with a fresh shirt and jumped out to 3-0 lead. He had a break point for 4-0 but failed to convert.

Once Wawrinka saved a pair of break points in the fourth set, the match shifted back to the defending champion. He broke Rosol to love in the eighth game.

In the final set, a backhand passing shot down the line earned a roar from the crowd and a break point that Wawrinka converted for a 2-1 lead and, eventually, the match.

Elsewhere, finishing a match stopped by rain on Sunday night, fifth-seeded Kei Nishikori of Japan completed a 6-1, 7-5, 6-3 victory over Simone Bolelli of Italy. In the women's draw, fourth-seeded Garbine Muguruza of Spain rebounded from losing the first against Anna Karolina Schmiedlova to beat the Slovakian 3-6, 6-3, 6-3. Svetlana Kuznetsova, the 2009 French Open champion, advanced to the second round with a 4-6, 6-1, 6-4 victory over Yaroslava Shvedova, in another match played over two days because of the rain that played havoc with the schedule.

Pats' Brady appeals again

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Tom Brady will appeal his four-game suspension by the NFL, seeking a second hearing before a circuit court.

The decision by the New England Patriots quarterback was confirmed Monday by the NFL Players Association. If the appeal is denied by the full panel, Brady could try to take his case to the Supreme Court.

The court ruled 2-1 on April 25 that Commissioner Roger Goodell was within his rights to suspend Brady for four games for his role in using improperly inflated footballs in the 2015 AFC championship game.

The full court in the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals rarely reconsiders cases. But pushing this matter forward could be an attempt to pressure Goodell into a settlement so another NFL season is not dominated by talk of deflated footballs.

Brady has added lawyer Ted Olson to his legal team. Olson and union chief DeMaurice Smith appeared on ABC's "Good Morning America," saying they plan to ask for a new hearing before the entire 13-judge circuit.

Olson has experience arguing in front of the Supreme Court, including the Bush v. Gore case that settled the 2000 presidential election. Olson also was involved in the case that overturned California's ban

on same-sex marriages.

The union on April 29 sought an extension to file a petition for a new hearing. It cited the "serious consequences for each of the NFLPA's over 1,600 members" and labor law issues that could have "far-reaching consequences for all employees subject to collective bargaining agreements."

The three-judge panel in Manhattan ruled that Goodell did not deprive Brady of "fundamental fairness" with his procedural rulings. In a majority opinion written by Judge Barrington Parker, the court said the contract between players and the NFL gave the commissioner "especially broad" authority.

In dissent, Chief Judge Robert Katzmann said Goodell failed to even consider a "highly relevant" alternative penalty.

Last September, U.S. District Judge Richard Berman lifted the four-game suspension, saying Brady was treated unfairly by Goodell.

The judge cited "several significant legal deficiencies" on the league's part, including no advance notice of potential penalties, a refusal to produce a key witness and the apparent first discipline of a player based on a finding of "general awareness" of someone else's wrongdoing.

The Patriots open the season Sept. 11 at Arizona.



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Puig bails out Dodgers in 17th

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — It took 17 innings, nearly six hours and pretty much everyone on the roster for Yasiel Puig and the Los Angeles Dodgers to beat the San Diego Padres 9-5 on Sunday.

Eight innings after committing a baserunning gaffe that probably cost the Dodgers a run, Puig hit a tiebreaking, two-run single with the bases loaded and one out in the 17th inning to help the Dodgers snap a four-game losing streak.

"The infield was playing in so I had to put the ball in play," Puig said through an interpreter. "I had to do something to help my team, especially after the baserunning I did, when I didn't run, when Ellis hit the bunt, and I was able to make up for it."

In the ninth, Puig hit a leadoff single against Fernando Rodney and took second on a wild pitch. A.J. Ellis bunted, but Puig didn't take third, even though it was open because Yangervis Solarte fielded the bunt. Ellis raised his arms in frustration after seeing that Puig didn't advance. Crawford lifted a fly ball to shallow left that might have brought in Puig.

"I got confused," Puig said. "I just didn't run. That's it."

Manager Dave Roberts said he was "shocked" when Puig didn't run.

"A.J. squared early and in that situation, everyone in the ballpark knew what was going to happen," Roberts said. "He executed and made the third baseman field the baseball, so after you see the execution, you're waiting for the baserunner to advance and it didn't happen, so I was shocked."

"There was no sign," Roberts said. "The ball's just in front of you and you see it." Had Roberts talked to Puig about it?

"We're still enjoying this moment so I haven't had a chance to revisit the moment," he said.

The game started in afternoon sunshine and ended at dusk, taking 5 hours, 47 minutes.

Dodgers reliever Chin-Hui Tsao wasn't available a night after walking in the win-

ning run in the 11th inning.

Everyone else was. Ross Stripling (2-3), scheduled to start Tuesday night against Cincinnati, pitched three innings for the win. Clayton Kershaw pinch hit in the 15th.

Red Sox 5, Indians 2: David Ortiz's last hit wound up being a souvenir. Many in the crowd at Fenway Park wished the ball had stayed on the field.

Ortiz went 4-for-4 with a solo home run and a double that sent a fan flying, Jackie Bradley Jr. extended his hitting streak to 27 games and Boston beat Cleveland.

Big Papi drove in three runs. His RBI double in the second put the Red Sox ahead 3-2, and when the ball bounced over Boston's bullpen, a fan came charging from his seat and fell into a fence trying to retrieve it.

The 40-year-old slugger was a triple short of a cycle when another ground-rule double bounced into the bullpen near the center-field triangle in deep center.

Giants 1, Cubs 0: Madison Bumgarner pitched 7²/₃ dominant innings and doubled in a run in the fifth to lift host San Francisco.

The Giants won for the 11th time in 12 games and took two of three from a Cubs team with the best record in baseball.

Tigers 9, Rays 4: Jordan Zimmermann (7-2) left with a strained right groin after allowing two runs and five hits in 5²/₃ innings for host Detroit.

Blue Jays 3, Twins 1: Jose Bautista and Josh Donaldson started the game with back-to-back home runs in a three-run first inning against Phil Hughes (1-7), who leads the major leagues in losses.

A day after Donaldson was ejected by umpire Toby Basner in the first inning, John Gibbons got the early exit from crew chief Joe West in the fifth — the fourth ejection of the year for the Toronto manager.

Mets 3, Brewers 1: Noah Syndergaard (5-2) struck out 11 in seven overpowering innings, allowing an unearned run and six hits.

Michael Conforto homered in the third as host New York completed a three-game sweep.

Nationals 8, Marlins 2: Max Scherzer (5-3) struck out eight while giving up two runs and six hits in eight innings with no walks. He has 38 strikeouts in his past three starts, including a record-tying 20 against Detroit.

Mariners 5, Reds 4: Leonys Martin got four hits, Robinson Cano drove in two runs and Seattle completed a three-game sweep that extended host Cincinnati's losing streak to seven.

Phillies 5, Braves 0: Jerad Eickhoff (2-6) pitched five-hit ball over seven innings for his first win since April 13, and host Philadelphia avoided a three-game sweep. He had lost his previous five decisions.

White Sox 3, Royals 2: Todd Frazier tied for the AL lead with his 13th home run, Melky Cabrera drove in two runs and host Chicago avoided what would have been the first sweep against the White Sox this season.

Rangers 9, Astros 2: Cole Hamels (5-0) won his career-best 12th straight decision. He fanned a season-high 11 in eight innings, allowing two runs — one earned — and five hits as the visiting Rangers completed a three-game sweep.

Diamondbacks 7, Cardinals 2: Zack Greinke (5-3) won for the fifth time in six starts, allowing one run and five hits in eight innings for Arizona, which won a series in St. Louis for the first time since April 18-20, 2003.

Angels 10, Orioles 2: Jered Weaver (4-3) took a shutout into the seventh inning to win for the first time since April 26, and Carlos Perez homered, had three hits and drove in a career-high five runs for host Anaheim.

Yankees 5, Athletics 4: Michael Pineda (2-5) allowed three runs and six hits in six innings to win for the first time since his opening start this season, Starlin Castro hit a tiebreaking, two-out single in the sixth off Jesse Hahn (1-2) and visiting New York extended a winning streak to five.

Johnson, Lightning strike in overtime

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Tyler Johnson turned toward the net, wary of taking another shot to his already battered face.

The puck off Jason Garrison's stick found him anyway, and this time he didn't even feel it. He was too busy celebrating lifting the Tampa Bay Lightning to within one win away from a return trip to the Stanley Cup Finals.

Garrison's wrister smacked off Johnson's back and into the Pittsburgh Penguins net 53 seconds into overtime on Sunday night, giving the Lightning a 4-3 victory and a 3-2 lead in the best-of-seven series. A year after falling to the Chicago Blackhawks in the Cup finals, Tampa Bay can head back to the championship round with a win in Game 6 at home on Tuesday.

"I was just battling in front," Johnson said. "I saw Garry starting to shoot it, thought he was going for my head again, so I turned around."

Just in time for his seventh — and most important — goal of the playoffs. The Lightning are 12-1 in the last 13 postseason games in which Johnson has scored, his fortunate bounce Sunday coming two days after he received stitches and lost some teeth after a puck smashed into his face during warmups before Game 4. He didn't miss a shift that night. He didn't miss the net in overtime 48 hours later, even if he wasn't technically aiming for it.

"He's a winner, that's what winners do," Tampa Bay coach Jon Cooper said of Johnson. "They don't back down."

Even on the road. Even down a pair of goals. Even trailing by one heading into the third period against a team that began the night 46-0 on the season when leading after two. Yet Tampa Bay survived by consistently and expertly counterpunching every time the Penguins provided an opportunity.

Nikita Kucherov scored twice to boost his postseason total to an NHL-best 11 — including a wraparound that beat Marc-Andre Fleury and tied it at 3 with just 3:16 left in regulation. Alex Killorn picked up his fifth of the playoffs as the Lightning handed the Penguins consecutive losses for the first time since January. Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 31 shots to outplay Fleury, who returned to the lineup for the first time in more than seven weeks.

Fleury finished with 21 saves. Brian Dumoulin, Chris Kunitz and Patric Hornqvist scored for the Penguins, who appeared to be in firm control at certain points only to find themselves on the brink of elimination.

"This is the first time we've been in this position," coach Mike Sullivan said. "I know our guys will respond the right way."

If the Penguins want to play at least one more game in Pittsburgh this season, they don't really have a choice. While the Penguins have peppered Vasilevskiy for the better part of five games, the Lightning keep finding ways to create quality chances around the Pittsburgh net, though Garrison's flick toward Johnson might not exactly qualify.

"No shot's a bad shot in overtime," Garrison said with a laugh.

Hinchcliffe wins Indy 500 pole

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — James Hinchcliffe watched the Indianapolis 500 last year from his hospital bed. He had nearly died from injuries six days earlier in a crash at famed Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

Now he'll start the historic 100th running of "The Greatest Spectacle In Racing" from the pole.

The Canadian driver who spent the past year fighting back from the life-threatening leg injury, completed a remarkable comeback Sunday by posting a four-lap qualifying average of 230.760 mph on the final run of the day to barely edge American Josef Newgarden for the pole.

"I get it. [The accident] was a big deal," Hinchcliffe said after the fourth-closest pole finish in race history, winning by 0.06 mph. "You're coming back to this place and you want to focus on the here and now and not remember or focus on hitting the wall at 125 Gs. ... Hopefully, [the pole] is the topic of conversation for the next week."

The pole shootout was so close that Ryan Hunter-Reay, who will start third, thought he actually had passed Newgarden on the second-to-last attempt when he was

clocked at 230.648.

Newgarden and Hunter-Reay, the 2014 race champ and one of Hinchcliffe's former teammates with Andretti Autosport, both congratulated the Schmidt Peterson Motorsports driver who missed the final 11 races last season after a broken suspension part punctured his left leg and nearly caused him to bleed out the day after Indy 500 qualifying ended.

"I don't think anyone can describe nearly losing your life at a track, then going back there to go 240 mph into a corner," Hunter-Reay said.

Hinchcliffe also struggled to explain the frenzied finish on a wild qualifying weekend.

Newgarden thought he had given Ed Carpenter Racing its third pole win in four years after finishing with an average of 230.700 on the 2.5-mile oval.

Hunter-Reay's teammate with Andretti, Townsend Bell, came up a little short on the next run and the last two Team Penske drivers, Helio Castroneves and Will Power, both posted averages under 230.

When Hunter-Reay's speed was posted, Newgarden started trading high-fives with his crew members but then had to watch Hinchcliffe pull off of the most

memorable pole-winning runs in recent years.

Hinchcliffe's victory marks the first time in six races that Team Penske drivers have not won the pole and ends a 31-race pole drought for Honda, which dated to the 2014 race in Houston. It's the first time Honda has taken the 500 pole since 2011, the year before Chevrolet rejoined the IndyCar engine competition.

For Newgarden, it will be his first career front-row start at Indy.

There was one crash Sunday. Alex Tagliani spun coming out of the fourth turn of his warmup lap and slammed into the attenuator at the entrance to pit road. Though his car spun 5½ times, he was quickly checked, released and cleared to drive by the infield medical center. He will be the first race starter since 1924 to make the starting grid without an official qualifying speed.

Defending 500 champ Juan Pablo Montoya will start 17th after a bizarre sequence in which he ran over a trash bag during his qualifying attempt. IndyCar said the debris on the track was its responsibility and gave Montoya a second chance.