

STARS AND STRIPES®

Friday, May 27, 2016

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Militants grab string of Syrian villages

Associated Press

BEIRUT — Militants of the Islamic State group on Friday seized a string of villages from Syrian rebels near the Turkish border in rapid advances that forced the evacuation of a hospital and trapped tens of thousands of people amid heavy fighting, Syrian opposition activists and an international medical organization said.

The advances in the northern Aleppo province brought the militants to within 2 miles of the rebel-held town of Azaz and cut off supplies to Marea farther south, another rebel stronghold north of Aleppo city.

They also demonstrated the Islamic State group's ability to stage major offensives and to capture new areas, despite a string of recent losses in Syria and Iraq. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which monitors the conflict through a network of activists on the ground, said Friday's advance was the biggest by the Islamic State group in Aleppo province in two years.

Human Rights Watch said about 165,000 civilians are trapped near the Turkish border as a result of the fighting. Turkey has kept its borders with Syria closed for the past 15 months, and HRW said Turkish border guards enforcing the closure have at times shot at and assaulted Syrian asylum seekers as they try to reach safety in Turkey — charges the Turkish government denies.

"While the world speaks about fighting ISIS (the Islamic State group), their silence is deafening when it comes to the basic rights of those fleeing ISIS," Gerry Simpson, senior researcher with the group's refugee program, wrote in a

DOD denies US forces on Syrian front lines

By TARA COPP
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon denied U.S. special operations forces are on the front lines with Kurdish soldiers fighting the Islamic State group after photographs surfaced Thursday of American troops in Syria on the ground advancing toward Raqqa.

Agence France-Presse reported and took photographs of the U.S. special forces operators manning gun trucks alongside members of the Syrian Democratic Forces in Fatisah, Syria, which is approximately 30 miles north of Raqqa, which is the Islamic State group's capital in that country.

There are about 300 U.S. troops deployed to Syria for what the Pentagon and White House have described as a noncombat, training and advising mission. The U.S. forces are there to support several thousand Syrian Kurds and Arabs who are receiving equipment and logistical and airstrike support to help them take back territory held by the Islamic State group.

The Pentagon also repeatedly has said U.S. forces are operating in a dangerous place, though troops are not on the front lines. Instead, they are only advising and assisting behind the forward line of Syrian troops.

However, in the Agence France-Presse report, a commander for the Syrian

Democratic Forces said U.S. operators are "present at all positions along the front. ..."

Pentagon press secretary Peter Cook on Thursday would not discuss the content of the photographs or the story, citing operational security. But he did say that despite what the photos seemed to capture, the mission for U.S. operators in Syria and Iraq remains the same.

"That mission has not changed," Cook said Thursday. "They are not on the forward line." Cook also said there was no specific measurement in defining what forward line means in terms of actual distance.

"Our forces in Iraq and Syria — their instructions, their mission is clear — they are not at that leading edge," he said. "But they have to be in a position to be able to provide the kind of advice and assistance needed to help ... these local forces succeed."

In some of the Agence France-Presse photos, the U.S. operators are wearing the patch of the People's Protection Units — or YPG, as they are commonly known — one of the Kurdish militias participating in the wider umbrella group called Syrian Democratic Forces.

After the photos surfaced, Col. Steve Warren, the Baghdad-based spokesman for Operation Inherent Resolve, said via Twitter that U.S. forces will often wear the patches of the forces that they are partnered with as a sign of solidarity.

dispatch.

The Islamic State offensive began Thursday night. By Friday, the group had captured six villages east of Azaz, including Kaljibrin, cutting off rebels in Marea from the Azaz pocket.

The rebels in the area — which include mainstream opposition fighters known as the Free Syrian Army along with some ultraconservative Islamic insurgent factions — have been squeezed between the Islamic State group to the east and predominantly Kurdish forces to the west and south, while Turkey restricts the flow of goods and people through the border.

The Islamic State group news agency, Aamaq, also reported the advance, saying the militant group seized six villages from the rebels.

The humanitarian medical organization Doctors Without Borders said its team is currently evacuating patients and staff from the Al Salama hospital, which it runs in Azaz, after the front line shifted to within 2 miles of the facility.

The group, known by its French acronym MSF, said a small, skeleton team will remain behind to stabilize and refer patients to other health facilities in the area.

"MSF has had to evacuate most patients and staff from our hospital as front lines have come too close," said Pablo Marco, MSF operations manager for the Middle East. "We are terribly concerned about the fate of our hospital and our patients, and about the estimated 100,000 people trapped between the Turkish border and active front lines. There is nowhere for people to flee to as the fighting gets closer," he said.

Al Salama hospital is the largest of six medical facilities run by MSF in Syria.

Navy probing cause of jet crash during training

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Four Navy aviators ejected from two fighter jets “at a high rate of speed” after their aircraft got into trouble in the air and plunged into the Atlantic Ocean off the North Carolina coast, one of the rescuers said.

The F/A-18 Super Hornet jet fighters, based in Virginia Beach, Va., crashed Thursday about 10:40 a.m. off the coast of Cape Hatteras following an “in-flight mishap” that happened during a training exercise, said Lt. Cmdr. Tiffani Walker, a spokeswoman for Naval Air Force Atlantic. Walker did not have any further details.

The four crewmembers suffered only minor injuries.

“In my opinion, the guys got pretty lucky,” Derick Ansley, an aviation survival technician with the Coast Guard who helped rescue two of the aviators, told WTKR-TV. “Every-

thing happened exactly the way it should have in that situation and somebody was looking over their shoulder when it was happening. For people to walk away from that is a pretty amazing thing,” he said.

Claude Morrissey, another Coast Guard rescuer, told WTKR the aviator ejected from the jet “at a high rate of speed.” Ansley said some wreckage from one of the jets was still on the surface of the water when they got to the men.

Two of the aviators were rescued by the crew of the commercial fishing vessel Tammy, and the other two survivors were hoisted out of the water by a Coast Guard helicopter, the Coast Guard said in a statement.

A safety investigation will be carried out to determine the cause of the accident, Navy spokesman Ensign Mark Rockwellpate said.

President meets with Marines at Iwakuni

BY SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION IWAKUNI, Japan — President Barack Obama took a break from a busy day of diplomacy and solemn remembrance to meet with servicemembers at a U.S. Marine base.

A smiling and waving Obama, looking relaxed with his shirt sleeves rolled up on a warm day, was quickly working the crowd like a political rally and seemed to revel in the brief respite in his itinerary.

“I wanna shake as many hands as possible,” he told the cheering American and Japanese troops. “I gotta warn you in advance: No selfies, because then I’ll be here all day.”

The stop in Iwakuni was sandwiched between the end of the G-7 economic summit in Ise-

Shima and a trip to Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, where he became the first U.S. president to visit the city devastated by the first nuclear weapon dropped on a populated area.

Obama focused his Iwakuni speech on the U.S. role in the region, including the “Pacific pivot,” and the value of the alliance with Japan.

“As president, I’ve made sure that the United States is leading again in the Asia-Pacific,” he said. “That takes security cooperation. That takes trade agreements, it takes relationships built between people, and it takes the proud service of the men and women in uniform throughout the region working with outstanding men and women in the armed forces of Japan.”

robson.seth@stripes.com

Flags In at Arlington sets stage for Memorial Day

BY MEREDITH TIBBETTS

Stars and Stripes

ARLINGTON, Va. — His grandfather died four years before Capt. Andrew McDaniel was born and was the reason he joined the Army.

McDaniel stopped in front of Maj. Earl McDaniel’s grave at Arlington National Cemetery on Thursday, touched his boot toe gently to the gravestone and inserted a flag placed behind his heel into the ground.

McDaniel stood silently at his grandfather’s grave for a moment before he continued with Flags In, the annual Old Guard tradition of placing flags in front of every headstone at the cemetery just before Memorial Day.

Flags In has been conducted annually since 1948 and every available soldier in the 3rd

U.S. Infantry Regiment participates. In four hours, every headstone — more than 228,000 — and row at the Columbarium Courts and Niche Wall receives a small American flag.

Lt. Col. Ryan Morgan took a moment to place American flags at the headstones of two friends in Section 60, where many casualties of the most recent wars are buried.

Army Capt. Ian Patrick Weikel, killed in action April 18, 2006, in Iraq, was a 1997 West Point classmate and Morgan’s friend. Sgt. Brett Thomas Christian died under Morgan’s command during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

“Ian was a good friend,” Morgan said, adding he represents all his fallen West Point comrades, most notably good friend Lt. Col. Jaimie Leonard.

US sees first case of germ resistant to last-resort drug

Associated Press

NEW YORK — For the first time, a U.S. patient has been infected with bacteria resistant to an antibiotic used as a last-resort treatment, scientists said Thursday.

The patient — a 49-year-old woman in Pennsylvania — has recovered. But health officials fear that if the resistance spreads to other bacteria, the country may soon see supergerms impervious to all known antibiotics.

“It is the end of the road for antibiotics unless we act urgently,” Dr. Tom Frieden, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said during an appearance in Washington.

The woman had gone to a military clinic in Pennsylvania last month and was treated for

a urinary tract infection. Initial tests found she was infected with E. coli bacteria, a common variety of a germ seen in the gut that often makes its way to the bladder.

But the tests showed this E. coli was resistant to antibiotics commonly used first for such infections. She was successfully treated with another kind of antibiotic.

But while she has recovered, further testing completed in the last week confirmed that the E. coli was carrying a gene for resistance against the drug colistin.

Colistin is an old antibiotic. By the 1970s, doctors had mostly stopped using it because of its harsh side effects. But it was brought back as other antibiotics began losing their effectiveness.

Penguins knock off Lightning, advance

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — The hours before the biggest game of Bryan Rust's life were restless. The nap he tried to sneak in never materialized. The Pittsburgh Penguins forward's mind was simply too busy.

"I was just sitting up there looking at the ceiling," Rust said.

Yet even those daydreams didn't compare to the reality: the rookie forward who began training camp hoping just to make the team scored both of Pittsburgh's goals in a 2-1 win over the Tampa Bay Lightning in Game 7 of the Eastern Conference finals on Thursday night.

Pittsburgh will host Western Conference champion San Jose in Game 1 of the Stanley Cup Final on Monday night.

In a building littered with stars, it was the relentlessness of the 24-year-old Rust and the steadiness of 22-year-old goaltender Matt Murray who provided the difference as the Penguins reached the final for the first time since 2009.

"I'm in that mode where I'm getting the bounces and the breaks right now," Rust said.

Ones Rust and his teammates are earning. The Penguins rallied from a 3-2 deficit by controlling the final two games of the best-of-seven series, winning 5-2 in Tampa Bay in Game 6, then backing it up with what coach Mike Sullivan said "might have been the most complete 60-minute effort we had."

In disarray in December when Sullivan took over for Mike Johnston, the Penguins have sprinted through April and May and will head into June with a chance to win the franchise's fourth Cup, one that would serve as a bookend to its last triumph seven years when stars Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin were still in their early 20s.

They're older now. Wiser. And undaunted by a series of postseason failures that made it seem the window of their primes were closing. Yet here they are after dispatching the New York Rangers in five games, the Presidents' Trophy-winning Washington Capitals in six and the defending Eastern Conference champion Lightning in seven.

"They played better hockey than us the whole series," said Tampa Bay defenseman Anton Stralman, who lost a Game 7 for the first time after starting his career 7-0 when pushed to the limit.

Jonathan Drouin scored his fifth goal of the playoffs for the Lightning and Andrei Vasilevskiy made 37 saves, but it wasn't enough to send Tampa Bay back to the Cup Final for a second straight year. Captain Steven Stamkos had two shots in 11:55 in his from a two-month layoff while dealing with blood clots, his best chance coming on a breakaway in the second period that deflected off Murray and trickled wide. One of Murray's teammates deftly guided the puck out of harm's way, emblematic of Tampa Bay's inability to keep the puck in Pittsburgh's end with

any sort of consistency.

"I thought I beat him," Stamkos said. "It just went through him and out the other side. It was close, but we didn't generate enough offensively in order to win a game."

Mostly because the Penguins didn't let them. It's part of what Sullivan calls "playing the right way," a way abetted by the influx of speed brought in by general manager Jim Rutherford. That group includes Rust, who forced his way onto the roster thanks to feverish skating and a self-confidence that belies his nondescript 5-foot-11 frame.

That effort — or "desperation level" as Crosby calls it — provided the Penguins with the boost they needed to overcome a bit of unfortunate history and the return of Stamkos. Pittsburgh had dropped five straight Game 7s at home, including a 1-0 loss to Tampa Bay in 2011 in a series in which both Crosby and Evgeni Malkin missed due to injury.

That loss had become symbolic of the franchise's postseason shortcomings following that gritty run to the Cup in 2009 that culminated with a Game 7 win in Detroit that was supposed to be the launching pad of a dynasty.

Seven long years later, with an entirely new cast around mainstays Crosby, Malkin, Kris Letang, Chris Kunitz and Marc-Andre Fleury, the Penguins have returned to the league's biggest stage.

"We've always believed in one another," Crosby said. "Trying to get back, it's not

easy."

Not by a long shot.

Vasilevskiy, a revelation while filling in for injured Vezina Trophy finalist Ben Bishop, spent most of the night facing barrage after barrage as Pittsburgh controlled the puck and the pace of play for long stretches.

The Penguins finally broke through behind Rust, who managed all of five goals in 55 regular-season games, a total he's matched in just 17 games during the postseason. He gave the Penguins the lead 1:55 into the second when he raced down the slot, took a feed from Kunitz and beat Vasilevskiy over his glove.

Drouin's fourth goal of the series tied it at 9:36 of the second, a wicked wrist shot from the circle that zipped by Murray and seemed to blunt Pittsburgh's momentum.

Only it didn't.

All of 30 seconds later, the Penguins were back in front. Ben Lovejoy's slap shot from the point caromed off the end boards to the right of the net. Rust jabbed at it, squeezing it between Vasilevskiy's left arm and his body.

Their season on the brink, the Lightning recovered but Murray never wavered. His teammates in front of him kept Tampa Bay from getting in his way and when the final horn blared, Pittsburgh's metamorphosis was complete.

"The biggest challenge is ahead of us," Crosby said. "We have to finish it off the right way."

Curry, Warriors stave off elimination, beat Thunder

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — "We ain't going home! We're not going home!" Stephen Curry screamed at the top of his lungs.

No, his Golden State Warriors are going back to Oklahoma City, after keeping their title reign and the winningest season in NBA history alive for at least one more game.

Curry scored 31 points, raising his arms in the early moments to fire up Golden State's raucous crowd, and the defending champions staved off elimination with a 120-111 victory over the Thunder on Thursday night in Game 5 of the Western Conference finals.

"We just did what we're supposed to do. We're supposed to win at home," Curry said. "We know what we still have to do going forward. ... We knew if we didn't win we were going home. There's no other motivation you need."

For all the speculation about the current state of Curry's beat-up body — that troublesome ankle, sore knee or tender elbow — he did it all.

"I thought he looked like 91 percent," coach Steve Kerr cracked. "He came out and played a really good game. That's all I can tell you. He's going to compete every night. He had an excellent night and helped us get it done."

Led by Curry, the Warriors looked like their old winning selves again.

The MVP made a snazzy layup late and dished out six assists, while Klay Thompson added 27 points as Golden State sent the best of the best-of-seven series back to Oklahoma City for Game 6 on Saturday night. The Warriors trail 3-2 and are trying to become just the 10th team to rally from a 3-1 deficit.

"None of us want to go home," Thompson said. "We're having too much fun out there."

Kevin Durant scored 40 points and Russell Westbrook added 31 points, eight assists, seven rebounds and five steals for the Thunder, trying for the fifth NBA Finals appearance in franchise history and first championship since moving from Seattle.

The record-setting, 73-win Warriors, coming off their first back-to-back defeats all season, had been blown out in two losses at Oklahoma City by a combined 52 points.

"We have to take that game and travel," Curry said of keeping momentum.

Kerr wasn't surprised to see this team respond so well.

"We played with great desperation," Kerr said. "I knew how we would play. This is a championship team."

Baylor's brash Briles era comes to ignominious end

Associated Press

A brash Texan with a bold approach, Art Briles made Baylor football relevant after years of wallowing in the basement of the Big 12 Conference.

The Bears became one of college football's cool teams under Briles, winning league titles and earning lofty rankings with one of the most exciting and prolific offenses in the history of the sport. The new, \$250 million stadium on the banks of the Brazos River doesn't have Briles' name on it but there is no one more responsible for its existence.

That era is over now in Waco, Texas. Briles is on his way out at Baylor after the school released details Thursday of a sweeping investigation into allegations that the football program and other school leaders failed to take action after complaints of sexual assault and violence by players.

Baylor regents said the 60-year-old Briles had been suspended "with the intent to terminate according to contractual procedures" — an extraordinary and rare decision in a sport where coaches often survive scandals. Briles has eight years left on a 10-year contract that runs through 2023 and paid him \$4 million per year.

The Bears went 65-37 in eight seasons under Briles and won two Big 12 titles. In

Waco and among Baylor fans, Briles was revered like Bear Bryant was at Alabama and Bo Schembechler was at Michigan. He was a savior.

But the program had become insulated to a fault, according to the investigation by the Pepper Hamilton law firm.

"The football program failed to identify and maintain controls over known risks, and unreasonably accepted known risks," the Pepper Hamilton report stated.

Briles took in some players with troubled pasts, like defensive end Shawn Oakman, who had been dismissed from Penn State before becoming an all-conference performer for the Bears. Oakman is currently facing a rape charge from an incident that occurred in Waco after he left school.

The transfer of Sam Ukwuachu looked like a similar move. The defensive end had been dismissed from the team at Boise State before coming to Baylor, but never played for the Bears. Ukwuachu was convicted of sexually assaulting a former Baylor soccer player last year, and from there more stories were reported by ESPN and other media about allegations of violence by Baylor football players that were seemingly never dealt with.

The next coach at Baylor will inherit a far better football program than Briles did, but the glory days will never be looked at the same way again.



Ship's Store official new car program

Exclusive Navy at-sea offers:

www.navyauto.com or nasinfo@navyauto.com

Rockies snap Bradley's streak

Associated Press

BOSTON — Jon Gray walked into Fenway Park on Thursday just a week removed from the worst pitching performance of his young career.

He bounced back by silencing the best offensive team in the majors.

Carlos Gonzalez, Trevor Story and Dustin Garneau hit two-run homers and the Colorado Rockies stopped Jackie Bradley Jr.'s 29-game hitting streak with an 8-2 victory over the Boston Red Sox.

The win ended a three-game losing streak by Colorado and it ended a four-game winning streak for the Red Sox. Bradley's major league-best streak was halted when he went 0-for-4 after moving up to the leadoff spot for the first time this season.

"It was a tough assignment. That train over there was rolling pretty good," Rockies manager Walt Weiss said. "For Jon to go that deep in the game, shut them down, it's probably the best lineup in baseball right now, so a great performance."

Gray (2-2) gave up a two-run home run to David Ortiz in the first, but pitched six scoreless innings before leaving in the eighth. The performance came in his first start since giving up a career-worst nine runs in a 13-7 loss May 19 at St. Louis.

"Yeah I knew we needed a 'W' and I knew their lineup was good," Gray said. "I just took one pitch at a time and focused on what I can do and didn't worry about the results."

Thursday marked the first time this season any Red Sox player besides Mookie Betts had led off a game. He had the night off, before pinch-hitting in the ninth with Bradley on deck. But Betts grounded out to end the game.

Gray was unfazed by the shuffle. He was steady throughout the night, mixing his pitches and scattering five hits while striking out six. He got Bradley out by mixing in some changeups, which Bradley later acknowledged caught him off guard.

"I definitely had it in mind and knew that he's been swinging the bat really well and was going to be a tough out. A lot of the guys were," Gray said. "But once again, I just took one pitch at a time and executed each one best I could."

Clay Buchholz (2-5) took the loss. He pitched three perfect innings before things came apart in the fourth, when he gave up Gonzalez's homer with the other two coming the following inning. Thursday was just the fifth time in Boston's last 15 home games that it has failed to score eight or more runs.

While Bradley's streak ended, team-

mate Xander Bogaerts managed to extend his hitting streak to 19 games, which takes over as the longest in the majors.

Blues Jays 3, Yankees 1: J.A. Happ pitched seven strong innings, Edwin Encarnacion and Devon Travis had two-out RBIs, and the Toronto Blue Jays beat the Yankees 3-1 on Thursday to win the three-game series.

CC Sabathia was the tough-luck loser for New York, allowing just two unearned runs. Alex Rodriguez went 0-for-4 with two strikeouts in his first game since going on the disabled list May 4 with a strained right hamstring.

Happ (6-2) allowed one run on three hits in seven innings with five strikeouts and three walks. He has given up three earned runs or fewer in 19 of his last 20 starts.

Sabathia (3-3) retired the first seven batters before an error by shortstop Didi Gregorius on Travis' grounder with one out in the third.

Sabathia retired No. 9 hitter Darwin Barney on a lineout, but then a single by Jose Bautista and a walk to Josh Donaldson loaded the bases with two outs. Encarnacion singled to left for the 2-1 lead.

Nationals 2, Cardinals 1: Bryce Harper hit a slump-busting home run, Danny Espinosa also went deep and host Washington got seven strong innings from right-hander Joe Ross (4-4) to beat St. Louis.

Washington trailed 1-0 in the sixth inning before Harper ended a 4-for-33 skid with a no-doubt-about-it shot into the upper deck, far beyond the wall in right field. It was his 12th homer of the season, the first since May 13.

The light-hitting Espinosa snapped the tie in the seventh with a drive to right. Batting eighth, Espinosa came in with a .199 batting average and three home runs.

Both homers came off Mike Leake (3-4), who won his previous three starts while allowing only two runs over 21 innings.

Ross (4-4) gave up one run and six hits over seven innings.

Astros 4, Orioles 2: George Springer homered twice and host Houston set a major league record for strikeouts in a three-game series, finishing a sweep of Baltimore.

Houston starter Lance McCullers (1-1) allowed just one hit — a home run to Mark Trumbo — and had 10 strikeouts in five innings, helping the Astros break the major league record for strikeouts in a three-game series with 52. The previous mark was 47 by Washington earlier this season.

Ken Giles gave up an RBI single to Manny Machado in the ninth but still finished up

for his first save of the season.

Baltimore's Kevin Gausman (0-2) allowed four runs and five hits — including three homers — in five innings.

Brewers 6, Braves 2: Ryan Braun and Jonathan Villar homered and visiting Milwaukee earned its first sweep in Atlanta.

The Brewers began the three-game series with a 6-14 road record, but they found the right matchup at Turner Field. Atlanta is 2-20 at home, worst in the majors.

Rain delayed the game 1 hour, 17 minutes in the seventh inning.

Wily Peralta (3-5) gave up seven hits and Carlos Torres pitched the last two innings to earn his second save.

Braves starter Matt Wisler (2-4) had a tough fourth, intentionally walking Martin Maldonado with two outs to get to Peralta, whose two-run bloop single made it 2-2.

Wisler allowed six hits, three runs, two walks and struck out seven in six innings.

Pirates 8, Diamondbacks 3: Josh Harrison came off the bench to hit a two-out, two-run double in the sixth inning and put host Pittsburgh ahead for good in its victory over Arizona.

It gave the Pirates a 5-3 lead.

Reliever A.J. Schugel (1-1) got his first major league win after he had surrendered the lead inherited from starter Gerrit Cole in the top half of the inning. Schugel gave up a two-run single to Paul Goldschmidt in his only inning of work.

Arizona starter Patrick Corbin (2-4) took the loss. He was responsible for both runners that scored on Harrison's double, which was hit off reliever Jake Barrett.

Cole hit a 409-foot, three-run homer in the third inning to left-center field.

Marlins 9, Rays 1: Jose Fernandez struck out 12 in seven innings Thursday and won his sixth straight start for visiting Miami in its victory over Tampa Bay.

Fernandez (7-2) struck out eight of the last 10 batters he faced and struck out every hitter in the Rays lineup at least once. The 23-year-old right-hander from Tampa gave up six hits in beating his hometown Rays for the first time in three tries.

Adeiny Hechavarria and Chris Johnson homered for the Marlins, who won three of four in their annual series against the Rays.

Hechavarria's third home run drove in the final two runs of a three-run second inning off Rays starter Drew Smyly (2-6), who gave up five runs on six hits while striking out four in six innings. Johnson made it 5-0 with his second homer an inning later, Johnson's first hit in 22 inter-league at bats.

Nadal pulls out of the French Open

Associated Press

PARIS — Nine-time French Open champion Rafael Nadal pulled out of the Grand Slam tournament on Friday, citing an injury to his left wrist.

He announced his withdrawal the day before he would have been scheduled to play in the third round.

The left-handed Spaniard wore a blue brace on his wrist during what he called "one of the toughest press conferences in my career."

Nadal, who owns a total of 14 Grand Slam titles, said he would not even have tried to compete at any other tournament with the injury, "but it's the most important event of the year for me."

He won his second-round match in straight sets Thursday, playing after getting an injection to numb the pain in his wrist.

But he said that he began "to feel more and more pain" overnight and could not move his wrist much Friday morning. Nadal added that he can no longer practice and wouldn't have been able to finish the tournament.

He said the problem is with the tendon sheath in his wrist and was told that there is no way he could be given five more painkilling injections — one before each possible match, were he to make it all the way to the final — over the next 10 days.

Losing Nadal drains the French Open of more star power, following the pre-tournament withdrawal of 17-time major champion Roger Federer because of a bad back.

Nadal has ruled the French Open in a way no other man ever dominated any Grand Slam tournament. He is 72-2 at Roland Garros, winning four consecutive titles from 2005-08 and another five in a row from 2010-14.

"He's our biggest champion here," tournament director Guy Forget said.

Nadal's only losses came in the fourth round against Robin Soderling in 2009, ending a 31-match winning streak in Paris, and in the quarterfinals against Novak Djokovic last year, ending a 39-match run.

Nadal, seeded fourth this year, said he arrived in Paris before the French Open with "a little bit of pain" but that it progressively worsened. He won each of his first two matches in straight sets, including 6-3, 6-0, 6-3 against 99th-ranked Facundo Bagnis of Argentina on Thursday.

That made Nadal's career record in major tournaments 200-30, a winning percentage of .870. He is the eighth man in the sport's history to reach 200 match wins.

With a rare five-set victory, 15th-seeded John Isner made it to the fourth round, equaling his best showing at the Grand Slam tournament.

Isner, the last American man in the draw, used 34 aces to beat 79th-ranked Teymuraz Gabashvili of Russia 7-6, (7), 4-6, 2-6, 6-4, 6-2 on Friday.

Isner began the day with a 5-14 career record in five-setters and trailed Gabashvili by two sets to one before coming back.

It's the second time in three years that Isner is into the round of 16. Next up for him is a match against No. 2 Andy Murray, a two-time major champion.

If Isner, who is based in Florida, can pull off that upset, he would get to the second Grand Slam quarterfinal of his career in 32 appearances. The only other time he made it that far was at the 2011 U.S. Open, losing at that stage to Murray.

Truex captures pole for Coca-Cola 600

Associated Press

CONCORD, N.C. — Martin Truex Jr. put himself in good position for another strong showing at the Coca-Cola 600, a race he thought he should have won last year.

Truex turned a lap of 192.328 to grab the pole away from Joey Logano on his final lap of qualifying Thursday night at Charlotte Motor Speedway. Logano, who had the top time in the first two rounds, will start alongside Truex on the front row Sunday night in the NASCAR Sprint Cup race.

"We put it all together when it counted," Truex said.

Truex was running strong last year

at the Coca-Cola 600, but Carl Edwards stayed on the track rather than pit and won, getting 62 laps out of his final tank of gas to win the 400-lap race.

It was a disappointing outcome for Truex, who wound up finishing fifth in 2015.

"I really thought we were going to go to victory lane but we lost on fuel mileage," Truex said.

Truex said he's happy with how he's been running this season and believes he has a good chance to make up for last season's disappointment.

It is Truex's second pole in the last three Sprint Cup races. He also started first at Kansas.

He has yet to win this season.

And he knows Logano will be tough to beat.

Logano has won the last two races at Charlotte, including the \$1 million All-Star race on Saturday night. He also won at the track in October.

"My confidence is high," Logano said. "The momentum is rolling. Maybe some of these rule changes have fallen into our hands as a team, or maybe in my lap as a driver. Overall it is working."

Ricky Stenhouse Jr. will start third, Denny Hamlin fourth and Brad Keselowski fifth. Greg Biffle was sixth-fastest in qualifying and Jimmie Johnson seventh. Sprint Cup points leader Kevin Harvick will start eighth, followed by Edwards and Trevor Bayne.