

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

## In ad, Marines seek a few good women

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A Marine in full combat gear moves through dark, frigid water, gripping a rifle, before plunging under barbed wire and through a submerged drainage pipe. It is only when the fighter shouts an order over the sound of explosions does the historic nature of the TV advertisement become clear: The Marine is a woman.

For a Corps that has struggled with the perception that it is the least welcoming of women among the military services, the new ad is part of a campaign to appeal to a new generation of Marines. It is also a bid for more female recruits for “the few, the proud,” particularly athletes capable of meeting the tough physical standards required.

“The water was 27 degrees and coated with a layer of thick ice,” said Marine Capt. Erin Demchko, describing the great difficulty of the gantlet, all while being surrounded by camera crews. “Giving the film production staff what they wanted, while maintaining my bearing as a Marine officer and trying not to look cold, was a challenge.”

Demchko, a deputy commander at Camp Courtney in Okinawa, Japan, is part of the

Marine Corps’ expanding effort to recruit women. The smallest military service has the lowest percentage of women, and wants at least 10 percent representation by 2019. While female Marines occasionally have appeared in ads and have been featured in online videos, this is the first time a woman is the focus of a national television commercial for the Corps.

The service is battling an image problem, especially after a recent scandal involving nude photos shared online. Many were accompanied by crude, derogatory and even violent comments about women. The Naval Criminal Investigative Service is investigating the matter and several Marines have been disciplined.

But the perception of the Marines as a male domain goes back further. They were the only service to seek an exception when the Pentagon moved to allow women to serve in all combat jobs. That request was denied in late 2015 by then-Defense Secretary Ash Carter.

Since then, 74 women have moved into combat jobs previously open only to men. In total, women make up about 8.3 percent of the 183,000-strong Corps.

The Marines want more. And the ad aims to increase awareness among women about new opportunities, said Maj. Gen. Paul Kennedy, head of Marine Corps Re-

cruiting Command.

The message is for potential recruits to “not think that we are only looking for a few good men, that we’re actually using all of our recurring efforts to find good women as well,” he said.

The Marines don’t expect instant results. Low unemployment rates, competition among employers, and the need to increase the overall size of the Marine Corps make recruiting women a challenge.

“We’re facing headwinds now that we didn’t have even a year ago,” said Kennedy, who huddled with counterparts from the other military services last week. “There’s a train wreck coming for some folks. They’re not getting tailwinds that they used to have — the high unemployment, the money that was associated with enlistment bonuses.”

Still, he said he expects female recruits to constitute almost 10 percent of the Marines entering the service this year.

The ad was released Friday. It shows a young schoolgirl interceding when students bully another girl. It then follows her as she plays rugby and trains and serves as a Marine. Titled “Battle Up,” the commercial seeks to show the Marines’ fighting spirit and how it carries from youth through combat missions.

## Trump targets new aircraft carrier catapult

The Washington Post

President Donald Trump set his sights on the Navy in a new interview, calling the service’s new digital catapult to launch planes off of aircraft carriers “no good” and saying the Navy needs to go back to “goddamned steam,” the method used for decades.

The comments, published Thursday by Time magazine, came during an interview Monday evening at the White House. Trump recounted a conversation he had March 2 while visiting the yet-to-be-commissioned aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford in Newport News, Va., and said he was told the catapult on it does not have enough power.

“It sounded bad to me. Digital. They

have digital. What is digital? And it’s very complicated. You have to be Albert Einstein to figure it out,” Trump said, according to Time.

“And I said — and now they want to buy more aircraft carriers,” the president continued. “I said, ‘What system are you going to be’ — ‘Sir, we’re staying with digital.’ I said, ‘no you’re not. (You’re) going to goddamned steam.’ The digital costs hundreds of millions of dollars more money and it’s no good.”

The new catapult to which Trump referred is called the Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System. It takes up significantly less space on a ship than steam systems and works by tapping into a redesigned turbine system that generates more

power than those on old carriers. The new digital system also is expected to be able to launch unmanned aircraft and require less maintenance, according to the Navy.

The Navy said Thursday that it was developing a response. A Pentagon official, speaking on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of speaking about the president, said Trump’s comments caught defense officials off-guard and are inaccurate.

“You can see elements of reality in what he said, but I think he may have spoken without having all of the information in front of him,” the official said. “I think he either has time-late information or the information he has is not correct.”

# Russian fighter jet buzzes US Navy plane

By COREY DICKSTEIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — A Russian fighter jet intercepted a U.S. Navy spy plane this week in neutral airspace over the Black Sea, flying within 20 feet of the American aircraft, a Pentagon spokesman said Friday.

Despite the unusually close encounter Tuesday, the commander of the P-8A Poseidon that was buzzed described the incident as “safe and professional,” said Navy Capt. Jeff Davis, a Pentagon spokesman.

Davis said he could not elaborate on what factors contributed to the commander’s assessment.

“Distance is one of several

variables that our commanding officers consider when they define what is safe and professional,” he said. “They also look at speed, altitude, rate of closure, visibility and other factors that impact whether an event is characterized as safe or unprofessional or a combination of those.”

The intercept occurred in international airspace. But the Russian government said the P-8A, which is a maritime reconnaissance plane, was nearing Russian airspace when it scrambled a Sukhoi Su-27 Flanker fighter to identify the American plane.

In a statement, the Russian Defense Ministry described the maneuver as a “greeting.”

“After approaching a plane at a safe distance, the Russian pilot visually identified the flying object as a U.S. surveillance plane P-8A Poseidon,” the Russian statement read. The statement added that the U.S. plane changed its course after the interaction.

The Pentagon did not confirm the direction change.

American and Russian planes and ships regularly interact in and over the Black Sea. Davis said the vast majority are deemed safe and professional; however, the Russians have been known to carry out provocative actions in the region.

In February, Russian fighter and surveillance aircraft buzzed the guided-missile destroyer

USS Porter in the Black Sea three times without turning on their radio transponders, which emit identification signals. The incidents were deemed unsafe and unprofessional.

In September, a Russian jet flew within 10 feet of a P-8A in another unsafe and unprofessional interaction over the Black Sea.

The two nations’ aircraft have recently interacted closer to the United States, as well. Last month, U.S. stealth F-22 Raptor fighters were scrambled to intercept Russian bombers and fighters in international airspace within 200 miles of the Alaskan coast. That interaction also was deemed safe and professional.

## Drills on Guam postponed after craft runs aground

*Associated Press*

NAVAL BASE GUAM — Military drills on Guam in which four countries were to practice amphibious landings and moving their troops have been postponed indefinitely after a French landing craft ran aground Friday.

The weeklong exercises involving the U.S., the U.K., France and Japan were intended to show support for the free passage of vessels in international waters amid concerns China could restrict access to the South China Sea.

The French landing craft ran aground just offshore and didn’t hit coral nor spill any fuel, said Jeff Landis, a spokesman for Naval Base Guam. No one was injured. Friday’s landing was meant to be a rehearsal for a drill at Tinian island on Saturday, Landis said.

U.S. Navy Capt. Jeff Grimes, chief of staff for Joint Region Marianas, said the authorities involved were working to assess the situation and didn’t know when the drills would resume.

“I have directed that we stop

all operations associated with this exercise until we conduct a further assessment of the situation as we gather all the facts,” Grimes said.

“NOAA in Honolulu is aware and is collecting information about the incident,” said Michael Tosatto, administrator of a National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration regional office.

The drills around Guam and Tinian islands were scheduled to include amphibious landings, the delivery of forces by helicopter and urban patrols.

Two French ships on a four-month deployment to the Indian and Pacific oceans were to be involved. Joining were Japanese forces, U.K. helicopters and 70 U.K. troops deployed with the French amphibious assault ship FS Mistral. Parts of the exercise were to feature British helicopters taking U.S. Marines ashore from a French vessel.

China claims virtually the entire South China Sea and has tried to fortify those claims by building islands on seven mostly submerged reefs.

## Spicer missing from briefings during key week for president

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — If you’ve been missing your daily dose of White House press secretary Sean Spicer, it’s because President Donald Trump’s chief spokesman has been serving the country in another way: He’s been on Navy Reserve duty.

Spicer’s commitment for monthly service occasionally pulls him away from his high-profile job as the public face of the Trump administration.

The obligation also kept Spicer away Wednesday, one of the most important days of Trump’s presidency: the day after Trump fired James Comey as FBI director. Trump dismissed Comey on Tuesday, which was the last day this week that Spicer briefed the White House press corps.

Deputy press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders has filled in during Spicer’s absence, which renewed speculation that Trump was giving the daughter of former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee a tryout with an eye toward possibly replacing Spicer with her.

A White House official denied

that Spicer’s job was in jeopardy, saying that using Sanders, 34, to cover Spicer’s absence is part of a broader plan to give her some on-camera briefing experience because she is Spicer’s chief deputy. The official requested anonymity to discuss internal White House planning.

Spicer also was on reserve duty April 4 and 5.

“Sean is actually on Navy Reserve duty, so you guys are stuck with me — today and tomorrow,” Huckabee Sanders said as she opened Thursday’s less formal, off-camera briefing, which is known as a “gaggle.” “So brace yourselves for a fun 24 hours.”

Spicer’s often-combative question-and-answer sessions with the reporters who cover Trump have become must-see TV. Since taking over as press secretary, he has made a number of gaffes at the podium that ended up shining the media spotlight on him, instead of on Trump and his policies.

Spicer, 45, joined the U.S. Navy Reserve in 1999. He was expected back at the podium Friday.



## Trump's lawyers: He's had no income from Russia for last 10 years

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Lawyers for President Donald Trump said Friday that a review of his last 10 years of tax returns did not reflect “any income of any type from Russian sources,” but the letter included exceptions related to previously cited income generated from a beauty pageant and sale of a Florida estate.

The letter represented the latest attempt by the president to tamp down concerns about Russian ties amid an ongoing investigation of his campaign's associates and Russia's meddling in the 2016 election.

The attorneys did not release copies of Trump's tax returns, so The Associated Press cannot independently verify their conclusions. Their review also takes into account Trump's returns from the past 10 years, leaving open questions about whether there were financial dealings with Russia in earlier years.

Trump has refused to release his income tax records, breaking with a practice set by his predecessors. The president has said he would release his returns when the IRS completes an audit. The tax returns, the attorneys say, largely reflect income and interest paid by the web of corporate entities that made up The Trump Organization.

In a letter released to the AP and dated March 8, the at-

torneys said there is no equity investment by Russians in entities controlled by Trump or debt owed by Trump to Russian lenders. But it did reflect some exceptions, including income from the 2013 Miss Universe pageant that was held in Moscow and a property sold to a Russian billionaire in 2008.

The White House said Trump asked his lawyers for the letter to outline information on any ties Trump might have to Russia. The letter was then provided to Sen. Lindsey Graham, who leads one of the congressional committees investigating Russia's interference in last year's election.

“I have no investments in Russia, none whatsoever,” Trump said Thursday in an interview with NBC News. “I don't have property in Russia. A lot of people thought I owned office buildings in Moscow. I don't have property in Russia.”

The president said he “had dealings over the years,” including the Miss Universe pageant and the sale of a home to “a very wealthy Russian.” “I had it in Moscow long time ago, but other than that I have nothing to do with Russia,” he said, referring to the pageant.

The letter, written by attorneys Sheri Dillon and William Nelson from the law firm of Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP, leaves open the possibility of other Russian ties while attempting to dismiss them.

## Trump tweets warning to Comey about media leaks

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump, in an apparent warning to his fired FBI director, said Friday that James Comey had better hope there are no “tapes” of their conversations. Trump's tweet came the morning after he asserted Comey had told him three times that he wasn't under FBI investigation.

“I said, ‘If it's possible, would you let me know, am I under investigation?’ [Comey] said you are not under investigation,” Trump said in an interview Thursday with NBC News. He said the discussions happened in two phone calls and at a dinner in which Comey was asking to keep his job.

Late Thursday, The New York Times cited two unnamed Comey associates who recounted his version of a January dinner with the president in which Trump asked for a pledge of loyalty. Comey declined, instead offering “honest.” When Trump then pressed for “honest loyalty,” Comey told him, “You will have that,” the associates said.

Even before Trump's provocative tweet, the White House was scrambling to clarify why Comey was fired. Trump told

NBC he had planned to fire Comey, regardless of whether top Justice Department officials recommended the step.

The shifting accounts of the decision to fire Comey added to a mounting sense of uncertainty and chaos in the West Wing, as aides scrambled to get their stories straight and appease an angry president.

On Capitol Hill, acting FBI Director Andrew McCabe strongly disputed the White House's assertion that Comey had been fired in part because he had lost the confidence of the FBI's rank and file.

“That is not accurate,” McCabe said. “Director Comey enjoyed broad support within the FBI and still does to this day.”

McCabe also pointed out the remarkable nature of Trump's version of his conversations with Comey. McCabe told a Senate panel it was not “standard practice” to tell an individual if they are or are not under investigation.

The ousted director himself is said to be confident that his own version of events will come out, possibly in an appearance before Congress, according to an associate who has been in touch with him since his firing.

## Ex-congresswoman could spend rest of life in prison for fraud

Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — Former U.S. Rep. Corrine Brown could spend the rest of her life in prison after being found guilty of taking money from a charity that was purported to be giving scholarships to poor students.

The Thursday verdict came after prosecutors outlined a pattern of fraud by Brown, 70, and her top aide that included using hundreds of thousands of dollars from the One Door for Education Foundation for lavish

parties, trips and shopping excursions. She was convicted of 18 of the 22 charges against her, including lying on her taxes and on her congressional financial disclosure forms.

“Corrupt public officials undermine the integrity of our government and violate the public's trust, and that is why investigating public corruption remains the FBI's top criminal priority,” FBI Jacksonville Division special agent in charge Charles Spencer said in a statement.

It was the final act in the downfall of Brown, who had represented the Florida

district that included Jacksonville since 1993. Brown, a Democrat, was one of the first three African-Americans to be elected to Congress from Florida since Reconstruction.

Since her indictment last summer, she had been publicly defiant of the government's charges, saying in a statement she was among black elected officials who have been “persecuted.” She had pleaded not guilty to all of the charges, including the fraud, but lost re-election last fall after her indictment.

## N. Korea sends protest to House over sanctions

Associated Press

TOKYO — A North Korean parliamentary committee sent a letter of protest to the U.S. House of Representatives Friday over its new package of tougher sanctions.

The sanctions were condemned as a “heinous act against humanity” by the foreign affairs committee of the North’s Supreme People’s Assembly, according to a state media report.

It was not immediately clear how the protest was conveyed because North Korea and the U.S. have no diplomatic relations and virtually no official channels of communication. The report, carried by the North’s Korean Central News Agency, said the letter was sent Friday.

The Republican-led House overwhelmingly voted May 4 to impose the new sanctions, which target North Korea’s shipping industry and use of what the bill called “slave labor.”

It’s not unusual for Pyongyang to condemn Washington’s moves to censure it, but direct protests to Congress are rare. Pyongyang normally expresses its displeasure through statements by the Foreign Ministry or other institutions, or through representatives at its United Nations’ mission in New York.

Koh Yu-hwan, a North Korea expert at Seoul’s Dongguk University, said it’s not unprecedented for the North to directly contact the U.S. legislature or government.

## Prosecutors told to seek more, harsher punishments

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Attorney General Jeff Sessions is directing federal prosecutors to pursue the most serious charges possible against the vast majority of suspects, a reversal of Obama-era policies that is sure to send more people to prison and for much longer terms.

The move has long been expected from Sessions, a former federal prosecutor who cut his teeth during the height of the crack cocaine epidemic and who has promised to make combating violence and drugs the Justice Department’s top priority.

“This policy affirms our responsibility to enforce the law, is moral and just, and produces consistency,” Sessions wrote in a memo to U.S. attorneys made public early Friday.

Advocates quickly criticized the move as a revival of the worst aspects of the drug war, which subjected nonviolent, lower-level offenders to unfairly harsh sentences that disproportionately hurt minority communities.

“It looks like we’re going to fill the prisons back up after finally getting the federal prison population down,” said Kevin Ring, president of Families Against Mandatory Minimums. “But the social and human costs will be much higher.”

The announcement is an unmistakable undoing of Obama administration criminal justice policies that aimed to ease overcrowding in federal prisons and contributed to a national rethinking of how drug criminals were prosecuted and sentenced.

Sessions contends a spike in violence in some big cities and the nation’s opioid epidemic show the need for a return to tougher tactics. He foreshadowed the plan early in his tenure, when he signaled his strong support for the federal government’s continued use of private prisons, reversing another Obama directive to phase out their use.

“We know that drugs and crime go hand-in-hand,” Sessions said in a Friday speech. “Drug trafficking is an inherently violent business. If you want to collect a drug debt, you can’t file a lawsuit in court. You collect it by the barrel of a gun.”

The policy memo says prosecutors should “charge and pursue the most serious, readily provable offense” — something more likely to trigger mandatory minimum sentences. Those rules limit a judge’s discretion and are typically dictated, for example, by the quantity of drugs involved in a crime.

The memo concedes there will be cases in which “good judgment” will warrant a prosecutor veering from that rule. And Sessions said it gives prosecutors “discretion to avoid sentences that would result in an injustice.”

But any exceptions will need to be approved by top supervisors, and the reasons must be documented, allowing the Justice Department to track the handling of such cases by its 94 U.S. attorney’s offices.

And even if they opt not to pursue the most serious charges, prosecutors are still required to provide judges with all the details of a case when defendants are sentenced, which could lengthen prison terms.

## All variations of name Caitlyn plunge in popularity

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Don’t call me Caitlyn.

A year after Caitlyn Jenner announced her new name and gender, the popularity of the name Caitlyn plummeted more than any other baby name, according to the Social Security Administration’s annual list of the most popular baby names.

In fact, the four names that dropped the most were all variations of the same name: Caitlin, Caitlyn, Katelynn and Kaitlynn.

“It was inevitable,” said Laura Wattenberg, founder of Babynamewizard.com. “Caitlyn was already falling in popularity. Now it is suddenly controversial.”

Each year, the Social Security Administration releases the top 1,000 baby names and uses the announcement to drive traf-

fic to its website, where workers can start tracking their benefits long before they retire.

Emma was the top baby name for girls for the third year in a row. It was followed by Olivia, Ava, Sophia and Isabella, the Social Security Administration announced Friday.

Noah was the top baby name for boys for the fourth year in a row. It was followed by Liam, William, Mason and James.

The agency also lists the baby names that increase — and decrease — the most in popularity.

All four versions of Caitlyn fell out of the top 1,000.

In 2015, the former Bruce Jenner, an Olympic gold medalist, shocked the world when she announced that she is now a transgender woman. The iconic cover of

Vanity Fair magazine was emblazoned with the quote, “Call me Caitlyn,” on top of a picture of a very feminine Jenner.

The issue sparked much debate and an outpouring of support for Jenner in a country that is still evolving in its views of gay marriage and equal rights for the LGBT community.

Wattenberg said it would be wrong to blame Caitlyn’s drop in popularity solely on a wave of homophobia. In general, she said, parents don’t want to give their children names that might attract controversy.

It’s one reason few parents name their children after politicians.

“Even parents who are huge Donald Trump supporters are unlikely to name their child Donald,” Wattenberg said. “In part, we just want to avoid controversy in picking names.”



# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Rescued miniature donkey gives birth

**PA** PHILADELPHIA — A starving and abandoned miniature donkey rescued from a Pennsylvania farm had a little secret for animal welfare workers: She was pregnant.

Sadie and a male mini-donkey named Romeo were rescued from a Huntingdon County farm in January, along with a cow, two beagles, chickens and roosters.

Workers at the Pennsylvania Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals said they had no idea when Sadie was due, but she gave birth to a male foal on Sunday. The baby has some health complications.

PSPCA is holding a naming contest to help raise funds for the foal's medical care. For \$5, the public can cast a vote and be entered for a chance to meet the baby and Sadie. Choices include: Lil' Sebastian; Georgie; Van; J.R. (short for Romeo Jr.); and Lucky.

## Body of child found under home identified

**CA** SAN FRANCISCO — The body of a girl who died in 1876 and was found last year inside a small metal casket under a San Francisco home has been identified.

The nonprofit Garden of Innocence said Tuesday that the child was Edith Howard Cook, 2, who died on Oct. 13, 1876.

The girl's remains were apparently left behind when about 30,000 people originally buried in San Francisco's Odd Fellows Cemetery were moved in the 1920s to Greenlawn Memorial Park in Colma.

A big break for researchers came when they found a map of the old cemetery at a UC Berkeley library and matched it to the Cooks' burial plot.

DNA taken from Edith's well preserved body matched Peter Cook, a Marin County resident and Edith's grandnephew.

## Vet reunited with love letter 72 years later

**NJ** WESTFIELD — A love letter lost in the walls of a New Jersey home has reached a World War II veteran 72 years after it was written.

Melissa Fahy and her father were renovating her Westfield home when they found the letter in a gap under the stairs. It was postmarked May 1945 and written by a woman named Virginia to her husband, Rolf Christoffersen, who was a sailor in the Norwegian Navy.

Fahy told WNBC-TV in New York she couldn't believe the love and admiration Virginia had for her husband.

She tracked down the couple's son, who read the letter to his 96-year-old father.

Virginia had died six years ago this weekend.

Fahy said, "I guess it's his wife coming back and making her memory alive again."

## Man on bus accused of cutting ladies' hair

**OR** PORTLAND — Police in Portland, Ore. arrested a man accused of secretly snipping off locks of women's hair on a public bus.

Jared Weston Walter, 30, was arrested Wednesday and booked on charges of harassment and interfering with public transportation. He was taken into custody after several people called 9-1-1 to report sightings of him in southeast Portland.

Walter is a registered sex offender and has a history cutting, gluing or masturbating into women's hair while riding on buses.

He has been previously convicted for similar activity.

After the latest incident earlier this month, the transit agency offered a \$1,000 award for information leading to Walter's arrest.

## Driver crashes into store to get beer

**OH** ROCKY RIVER — Police in suburban Cleveland said a half-naked man intentionally crashed his car into a closed convenience store to get beer.

Rocky River police said the 45-year-old driver was wearing nothing from the waist down when he crashed through a store wall early Sunday and told the worker he needed beer.

Police said the man barricaded himself in a beer cooler and told police to shoot him, but they subdued him with a stun device.

The driver was taken to a hospital, as was the store employee, who suffered leg and chest injuries.

The driver has been charged with impaired driving.

## Vandals cut trees at Trump-run golf course

**NY** NEW YORK — Four 30-foot trees have been cut down at a Trump Organization-run golf course in New York City.

The Daily News said a golf course manager discovered the damage Tuesday morning. Police recovered a chain saw near one of the severed trees.

The 18-hole Trump Golf Links at Ferry Point in the Bronx is owned by the city, but the Trump Organization maintains the contract to run it.

Advocates have objected to a proposal to extend the course into a 19-acre waterfront area that had been earmarked for future public park land.

The Trump Organization said part of the land would become a

wildlife sanctuary. It wants the redesign so major PGA tournaments could be held there.

## Vandalism found on Anne Frank memorial

**ID** BOISE — A swastika has been found drawn on the Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial in Idaho, but authorities are not sure if it is new or part of vandalism found earlier this week.

The Idaho Statesman reported the swastika was found Wednesday. On Tuesday, racist and anti-Semitic vandalism was discovered on the memorial.

The Wassmuth Center, whose offices stand next to the memorial, is raising money to replace the tablets, which were damaged during efforts to clean them.

A Boise Police Department spokeswoman said a detective has been assigned to the case but no has no leads or suspects.

## Man seeking pizza needs to be rescued

**AZ** FLAGSTAFF — Authorities said a man had to be treated for hypothermia and rescued from a snowy northern Arizona mountain, which he had hiked up while wearing only shorts and other light clothing in a quest for free pizza.

He was trying to qualify for a pizza promised by a local business to anyone who could make it to a radio tower on Mount Elden overlooking Flagstaff. The elevation of the mountain is more than 9,000 feet.

Coconino County sheriff's Cmdr. Rex Gilliland said the Forest Service lookout at the tower on Mount Elden overlooking Flagstaff provided shelter to the 30-year-old man. Gilliland said the mountain had several inches of snow from a storm.

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STARS AND STRIPES®

# San Antonio routs Houston to advance

Associated Press

HOUSTON — The San Antonio Spurs are thrilled to be in the Western Conference finals for the first time since winning the title in 2014.

But they won't have much time to celebrate with a series against the well-rested Golden State Warriors starting on Sunday.

In fact, they were barely going to give themselves two hours to bask in their 114-75 win over the Houston Rockets in Game 6 before looking ahead.

"We're just going to enjoy this one right now until midnight, at least," Danny Green said. "I think this one prepared us for the next one. They're a fast-paced team that likes to shoot on the perimeter. We have to communicate even better and be more perfect because it doesn't get any easier."

While San Antonio fought through six games with the Rockets, the Warriors have been off since wrapping up a sweep of the Utah Jazz on Monday.

Along with the fatigue factor, there are also questions about the their lineup heading in Game 1 after All-Star Kawhi Leonard sat out on Thursday night after rolling his left ankle in Game 5.

Coach Gregg Popovich didn't provide many details about Leonard's injury on Thursday. When asked if he protested when he chose to sit him, Popovich said: "He'd rather play." But it still seemed to be bothering him quite a bit after the game when he headed to the bus still walking with a noticeable limp.

The Spurs will certainly need his stellar defensive skills to contend with a Warriors team that not only swept the Jazz, but also eliminated the Trail Blazers in four games in the first round.

"We understand that the team we're now facing is the

most dangerous team in the league with a lot of weapons," Pau Gasol said. "You have to prepare for this team a different way. The challenges they present, in some ways, are similar to Houston as far as the ability to shoot the ball from the three-point line, but they have different personnel overall."

The Spurs know that limiting Golden State's three-point shooting will be a key in the next round, just as slowing Houston from long range was in the conference semifinals. Houston averaged 20.5 three-pointers in its two wins and just 13 in the four losses.

Leonard's ankle problem wasn't the only injury San Antonio dealt with in this series, as it came after the Spurs lost veteran Tony Parker to a season-ending quadriceps injury in Game 2.

Neither injury seemed to have a major impact on the team, except for the fact that it gave LaMarcus Aldridge a chance to emerge as a dominant scorer for the Spurs. The 11-year veteran, in his second season with the Spurs, averaged just 9.5 points in the first two games before averaging 23.5 in the last four, highlighted by a season-high 34 in Game 6.

"Once he got it going, we tried to keep going back to him," Patty Mills said of Game 6. "He was an absolute beast (Thursday), and that's who he is."

Aldridge is excited that he was able to play such a big role in helping the Spurs advance, but he isn't making too much of what will be his debut in the conference finals after failing to get out of the second round in his first six trips to the postseason.

"I just came here ready to play," he said. "Of course it's a good feeling to be going to the Western Conference finals. But I haven't thought about it. This team has worked hard all year and we've grinded and tried to get better, so I'm happy to finally win (the series)."

# NBA Draft combine lacking some luster

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Creighton forward Justin Patton has been fielding all kinds of questions at the NBA Draft combine.

For example, does he slow down or speed up at a yellow light? The Minnesota Timberwolves wanted to know.

"I said, 'It depends on where I'm going,'" he said.

That's a big unknown for a 7-footer who went from having one Division I scholarship offer to turning pro after his redshirt freshman season. He's projected as a middle or late first-round pick, and the combine sure is a big deal for him as he tries to boost his draft stock.

It just doesn't have quite the shine it did in the past, with the stars skipping it altogether, participating on a limited basis or showing up only to interview with teams.

Eight-time All-Star and 2014 MVP Kevin Durant even told ESPN on Wednesday that the top prospects should take a pass on the combine. He recalled a rough experience in 2007 when he was 19 and turning pro after one year at Texas.

Durant remembered strength coaches laughing when he couldn't bench press 185 pounds. He didn't do great in the vertical leap or sprint even though he was known for his superior athleticism. Durant told ESPN all he wanted to do was pick up a basketball and show his skills on the court.

If the combine hurt his stock, it didn't drop too far. Durant was drafted by the Seattle SuperSonics with the No. 2 pick after Portland took Greg Oden and went on to become one of his generation's best players.

But the combine isn't quite the star-studded showcase it used to be. Likely lottery picks Lonzo Ball, Josh Jackson, Jayson Tatum and Malik Monk are not attending.

"The league has done everything it can to try to promote all the players to be here, but the agents have control over the player," said John Paxson,

the Chicago Bulls' executive vice president of basketball operations. "As long as that's the situation, they can dictate what the player does or doesn't do in these settings."

Top players need to weigh the risks and rewards, of course. And along those lines, Kentucky coach John Calipari believes Durant has a point.

"If you think there's anything here that would hurt you, don't come," he said. "If you think there's anything here that would help you, come. If you have to play to help yourself, come."

Calipari said he has never advised a player to skip the event. But he has told them not to play, for example, if they have nothing to gain.

Paxson said he can understand top prospects skipping certain aspects of the combine. But he doesn't understand missing it entirely.

"To not go through medical and some of the athletic testing, you don't have that in football," he said.

Even so, there still is value in the combine even if the top prospects are skipping it. Teams get to see players in an intense setting that can't necessarily be replicated in workouts at their practice facilities. They're getting face time with prospects. And players looking to move up in the draft or into it are getting a showcase.

"I know that the league does a good job of evaluating (the combine)," Paxson said. "Every time we have a combine, they look at ways to improve it. They want it to be a valuable tool for us as well."

North Carolina's Justin Jackson isn't playing. But he's getting a chance to convey just who he is, to make connections and show just how important basketball is to him. He ranks it right behind his faith and family.

"I'm able to show myself, show who I really am and kind of start building relationships around the league," he said. "You walk into the lobby and you have no idea who might be in there."



# Sullivan able to keep Penguins focused

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — The Pittsburgh Penguins looked like they needed a day off. Maybe more than one.

And yet there the defending Stanley Cup champions were on Tuesday morning, dressed and skating barely 12 hours removed from a listless Game 6 loss to Washington that put Pittsburgh's bid for a repeat in serious peril.

The Penguins weren't there to get loose. They weren't there as punishment. Mike Sullivan had a point to make. Several actually. And the coach owner Mario Lemieux hired nearly 18 months ago to be the voice that cut through the noise figured it was time to remind his players of a few things.

Namely, to stop being passive bystanders while the Capitals attacked and attacked some more. So for more than half an hour Sullivan zipped around the ice at the rink named after his boss, whistle at the ready.

Intermittently he'd head to the whiteboard hanging against the glass then call his players over to join him so he could loudly — and repeatedly — make a point, his thick Boston accent ping-ponging off the walls and over the din.

"There's times where you need rest, there's time where you've got to work on some things and try and get better," forward Bryan Rust said. "And that was our goal (Tuesday) and we accomplished it."

The proof came in Game 7 on Wednesday night, a clinical 2-0 victory over the Capitals that sent Pittsburgh to the Eastern Conference finals against Ottawa. While Sullivan deflected any praise in the aftermath — preferring instead to pepper his answers with words like "leadership" and "character" and noting the spectacular play of goaltender Marc-Andre Fleury — the Penguins understand their ability to summon their best when they absolutely need it is due in no small part

to the guy with the immaculate suits, blunt demeanor and knack for saying the right thing at the right time.

"Xs and Os, he's one of the very best coaches I've played for," said 40-year-old forward Matt Cullen, who has bounced between seven teams during his 19-year career. "(As for) motivation, he does a heck of a job. He's got a real feel for the pulse of our group."

One that was visible at his first practice after taking over for Mike Johnston in December 2015. The Penguins and their star-powered lineup led by Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin were treading water. Sullivan wanted them to play faster. He wanted them to play smarter. He wanted them to be more accountable to each other. While general manager Jim Rutherford went about getting Sullivan the pieces he needed to — as Sullivan is so fond of saying — "play the right way," the coach turned the focus from the big picture to a

smaller one.

Just worry about today. Not about winning the Cup that won't be determined in six months. Not about their place in the standings. Not about the outside pressures that come when you happen to have two of the best players in the league on your roster. Just today.

It's a message he hasn't wavered from. Not after Pittsburgh brilliantly sprinted to the franchise's fourth Cup last June. Not during what could have been a difficult regular season as injuries devastated the blue line. Not after a 3-1 series lead against Washington fell apart amid a smattering of boos inside PPG Paints Arena.

Sullivan didn't panic. It's not his thing. While Washington took Tuesday off after its win, Sullivan put his players back to work.

"His ability to stay calm and refocus us is something I think our team feeds off of," defenseman Ian Cole said.

## McGirt, Canadian rookie Hughes share Players lead

Associated Press

PONTE VEDRA BEACH, Fla. — Mackenzie Hughes arrived at the TPC Sawgrass with no scar tissue and played his first round at The Players Championship with no bogeys.

Pretty simple, eh?

The Canadian rookie shook his head and laughed. Even after going bogey-free in his debut Thursday for a 5-under 67 to share the lead with William McGirt, Hughes saw enough of the Players Stadium Course to realize that surprises lurk around every corner.

"There's just not really a moment where you can let up," Hughes said.

No need explaining that to Adam Scott, who won The Players in 2004 and was off to a strong start on a steamy afternoon when he was 6 under and heading to the infamous par-3 17th with its island green.

First, he watched Masters champion Sergio Garcia hit a gap wedge that took one big hop, land just behind the cup and disappear for a hole-in-one. Scott followed by spinning a shot off the bank and into the water for a double bogey, and he compounded that with another double bogey.

"I played some good golf out there and unfortunately not on the last two," Scott said after settling for a 70. "It happens."

At least he had company.

Dustin Johnson's first wedge of the day hit the pin, caromed off the green and led to bogey. On a day when nothing seemed to go his way, the world's No. 1 player opened with a 71. Rory McIlroy went to tap in from 2 feet and missed it, and then had to make one twice that long for his double bogey on the 10th hole. He shot 73.

Through it all, Hughes was rock solid. Only twice did he

have par putts longer than 3 feet, and he made them both. The last piece of stress came on the final hole when trees blocked his way to the green. To chip out sideways would've risked chipping into the water. He found a 4-foot wide window in which he had to keep it under a branch and go over two more. It was a large enough gap and the perfect shot for a 6-iron.

"I was close enough to the trees. It paid off," said Hughes, who already has won (Sea Island) in his rookie season on the PGA Tour.

McGirt played in morning and made a pair of eagles on the back nine to atone in his round of 67.

Among those at 68 was Jon Rahm, another first-timer at this lucrative event who had one of four bogey-free rounds on the steamy day in north Florida. Even with a mild wind in the afternoon, just over a

third of the field broke par.

Fast starts and bad finishes were the norm, and not just for Scott.

Defending champion Jason Day ran off two straight birdies after making the turn and was in the lead at 5 under, which for the former world No. 1 was a peculiar position. He hasn't won since The Players last year. Day, however, made three bogeys over his last four holes and had to settle for a 70.

He was playing in the same group as Rickie Fowler, the 2015 champion who also got off to a fast start until one bad shot — a really bad shot — on his 15th hole at the par-4 seventh. From the middle of the fairway, Fowler blocked it so badly to the right that it hit a cart path and went deep into the pines. It took him two shots to get out and he made double bogey. Fowler also shot 70.

# Astros nail Ellsbury, win fourth straight

Associated Press

NEW YORK — In a game Houston ace Dallas Keuchel started, the best toss home definitely belonged to Jake Marisnick.

A defensive replacement in left field, Marisnick made a perfect throw to nail Jacoby Ellsbury at the plate for the final out and the Astros held off the New York Yankees 3-2 on Thursday night.

A matchup between teams with the best records in baseball came down to the final play, and the Astros were better — barely.

“I kind of started celebrating a little early, and then I stopped and watched what was happening,” Marisnick said.

Ellsbury's single with two outs in the ninth inning put runners at the corners, and the fleet leadoff hitter stole second. Gary Sanchez followed by grounding a sharp RBI single and Marisnick fired a strike on the fly to catcher Brian McCann to get the sliding Ellsbury.

“You have to take that shot,” Yankees manager Joe Girardi said. “That’s the right call.”

McCann pumped his fist after making the tag and Marisnick whooped it up with fellow outfielders George Springer and Josh Red-

dick. Marisnick came into the game in the seventh, taking over for Norichika Aoki.

“Right on the money,” McCann said. “I mean, couldn’t ask for a better throw. Right on the money.”

“Jake puts a lot of pride in his defense, in his game, and he works on that all the time. You see him out there working on the days he doesn’t play,” he said.

Keuchel (6-0) became the first six-game winner in the majors, helped by a home run from Carlos Correa. The Astros won their fourth in a row and improved to 24-11 — their top mark after 35 games since the franchise began playing in 1962.

Ken Giles wound up with his 10th save in 11 tries, saved by Marisnick.

“It’s a bang-bang play, and you tip your hat to Jake. He made an amazing throw to win the game for us,” McCann said.

Marisnick tapped his glove a couple times as he charged, took an extra step to steady himself and let loose.

“I think the biggest thing there is not to rush it,” Marisnick said. “Just kind of take your time with it and slow things down.”

Carlos Beltran and McCann were quiet at the plate in their return to Yankee Stadium,

the former New York power hitters going hitless in seven at-bats for Houston.

Michael Pineda (3-2) pitched into the seventh. He fell behind in the first when Correa lined a two-run drive over the wall in right-center, making the Astros star 6-for-9 with three homers against the right-hander.

Correa later singled and walked. After a slow start this season, he’s hitting .353 with four homers, 10 doubles and 17 RBIs in his last 17 games.

Keuchel kept up his resurgence, striking out nine in six innings. He earned the AL Cy Young Award in 2015, but dipped to 9-12 last season. Overall, he’s won eight straight dating to last August, matching a career high.

Keuchel once again throttled the Yankees, improving to 5-2 with a 1.24 ERA against them. Those totals include a win at Yankee Stadium in the 2015 AL wild-card game.

## Trainer’s room

**Yankees:** 1B Greg Bird (bruised ankle) was checked by a doctor and isn’t ready to begin baseball activities. He’s been on the DL since May 2.

# D-backs win behind Greinke’s near no-no

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Zack Greinke’s bid for his first career no-hitter was thwarted by Pittsburgh’s Gregory Polanco’s leadoff home run in the eighth inning and the Arizona Diamondbacks held on to beat the Pirates 2-1 on Thursday night.

Greinke (4-2), who dominated the Pirates with a vicious slider, allowed that one hit in eight innings. He struck out 11 and walked one.

Fernando Rodney pitched a scoreless ninth for his ninth save in 11 tries.

Greinke faced the minimum 21 batters through seven innings. Jordy Mercer led off the third with a walk but was thrown out trying to steal second.

Gerrit Cole (1-4) allowed two runs and seven hits in seven innings. He struck out five and walked one. Pittsburgh has scored five runs total in Cole’s last five starts.

**Rockies 10, Dodgers 7:**

Jeff Hoffman struck out eight to earn his first major league win, Carlos Gonzalez showed signs of breaking out of a slump with a two-hit, three-RBI night and host Colorado held off Los Angeles.

Ian Desmond and Nolan Arenado each added two doubles to help the Rockies extend their lead in the NL West to 2½ games over the Dodgers. At 23-13, the Rockies are off to the best start in team history.

**Red Sox 4, Brewers 1:** Mookie Betts’ three-run home run in the ninth inning lifted visiting Boston to a victory over Milwaukee.

It was Betts’ fifth homer of the season and third in his last four games, and helped Boston salvage one win in the three-game series in the Red Sox’s first trip to Milwaukee since 2003.

**Royals 6, Rays 0:** Major league ERA leader Jason Vargas went seven more scoreless innings, Salvador Perez had a two-run double during a five-

run eighth inning and visiting Kansas City beat Tampa Bay.

Vargas (5-1) scattered three hits and dropped his ERA from 1.19 to 1.01.

**Blue Jays 7, Mariners 2:** Steve Pearce hit a three-run home run, Justin Smoak had a solo homer and finished with four RBIs, and Toronto snapped visiting Seattle’s winning streak at four games.

Marco Estrada (2-2) allowed two runs over six innings for the Blue Jays, who have won four of five.

**Reds 3, Giants 2:** Zack Cozart had two extra-base hits, including an RBI double in the top of the eighth inning that scored the game-winner, as visiting Cincinnati defeated San Francisco.

The Reds won for the ninth time in 11 games and have won 15 of their last 20 games at AT&T Park going back to the 2012 NLDS.

**Tigers 7, Angels 1:** Justin Upton hit a three-run homer

and Michael Fulmer pitched seven innings of three-hit ball in Detroit’s victory over host Los Angeles.

The Tigers improved to 7-23 against Los Angeles since September 2012.

**Rangers 5, Padres 2:** Mike Napoli’s second homer was a game-ending three-run shot and host Texas beat San Diego.

The Rangers had been held scoreless by San Diego starter Clayton Richard until Napoli hit a 433-foot homer to left on the first pitch of the eighth inning.

**Twins 7, White Sox 6:** Eduardo Escobar hit a three-run homer, then added a fourth RBI with a double as visiting Minnesota outlasted struggling Chicago.

Brian Dozier and Miguel Sano crushed solo shots and Joe Mauer singled in a run for Minnesota, which hung on to deal the White Sox a season-high fifth straight loss after jumping out to a 6-0 lead in the second inning.