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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Ex-FBI head to lead Trump-Russia probe

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department appointed a special counsel to investigate allegations that President Donald Trump's campaign collaborated with Russia to sway the 2016 election, prompting the president to tweet Thursday that it is "the single greatest witch hunt of a politician in American history!"

The Justice Department on Wednesday appointed former FBI Director Robert Mueller to lead the investigation. Mueller will have sweeping powers and the authority to prosecute any crimes he uncovers.

The surprise announcement to hand the probe over to Mueller, a lawman who garners deep bipartisan respect, was a striking shift for Trump's Justice Department, which had resisted increasingly loud calls from Democrats for an outside prosecutor. It immediately escalated the legal stakes — and the potential political damage — for a president who has tried to dismiss the matter as partisan witch hunt and a "hoax."

In another Twitter post Thursday, Trump said, "With all of the illegal acts that took place in the Clinton campaign &

Obama Administration, there was never a special counsel (sic) appointed!"

He did not provide examples or evidence of any alleged "illegal acts." Trump later deleted and retweeted that statement to correct the spelling of "counsel."

The announcement, the latest in the shock-a-day Washington saga, was made by deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein. The White House counsel's office was alerted only after the order appointing Mueller was signed, said a senior White House official, who was not authorized to speak publicly by name and commented only on condition of anonymity.

In a written statement, Trump insisted anew there were no nefarious ties between his campaign and Russia.

"A thorough investigation will confirm what we already know — there was no collusion between my campaign and any foreign entity," he declared. "I look forward to this matter concluding quickly."

Mueller's broad mandate gives him not only oversight of the Russia probe, but also "any matters that arose or may arise directly from the investigation." That surely would include Trump's firing last week of

FBI Director James Comey.

Mueller, a former federal prosecutor at the Justice Department, was confirmed as FBI director days before the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks that ultimately would shape his tenure. The FBI's counterterror mission was elevated in those years, as the U.S. intelligence agencies adjusted to better position America to prevent another attack of such magnitude. He was so valued that President Barack Obama asked him to stay on two years longer than his 10-year term.

Comey succeeded him, appointed by Obama.

Mueller was appointed Wednesday by Rosenstein, who had faced criticism as the author of a memo that preceded Comey's firing. Rosenstein said the appointment was "necessary in order for the American people to have full confidence in the outcome."

Reactions from Congress were mainly positive.

House Speaker Paul Ryan said the appointment was consistent with his goal of ensuring that "thorough and independent investigations are allowed to follow the facts wherever they may lead."

Experts: More potent rifles, ammo must replace M4

BY ALEX HORTON

Stars and Stripes

It was 48 years ago next month when a young field artillery officer rolled over three of his soldiers killed by North Vietnamese troops to find a shocking sight: M16 rifles broken in a desperate attempt to fix a malfunction.

Army Capt. Robert Scales was awarded a Silver Star for coordinating fire against the enemy in that engagement, but for him, that firefight was less about battlefield heroism and more about the failures of the equipment that his men were issued.

"I never forgot that," he said.

Scales, who retired as a major general, recounted the

vivid tale before a Senate Armed Services subcommittee hearing Wednesday on the military's standard-issue M4 semi-automatic rifle and its 5.56 mm-caliber ammunition that he and critics have said for decades should be replaced to keep pace with modern weapons and body armor.

The M4 carbine is the standard rifle fielded since the mid-1990s and is used across the military as a replacement for the M16. The M4 trades shorter barrel length for less muzzle velocity and 50 meters less in effective range.

"The M4 rifle is a terribly flawed weapon," Scales said bluntly during his testimony, describing the central issue of

the reliability of the descendant of the M16 rifle that he carried in Vietnam.

The bolt is gas-operated and floats back and forth, allowing dirt, dust and sand to cause jamming, he told the lawmakers.

Other nations, including Russia, use closed bolts in their rifles that are far less likely to malfunction, Scales said. That matters in a firefight, he said, when a Russian infantryman in a sustained firefight can fire 140 rounds per minute with an AK-74 or other rifles — half the rate at which an M4 can fire reliably in a real scenario, Scales said.

Another issue is the ammunition, Scales said. The 5.56 mm NATO round — smaller than the typical 7.62 mm round fired

from rifles such as the AK-47 and the 5.45x39 round now used by Russia — lacks the mass to produce reliably lethal effects beyond 400 meters, he said.

Further blunting the round's ability to kill is the widespread use of modern body armor, which can withstand the 5.56 mm round, retired Army Lt. Gen. John Bednarek told lawmakers, as the round lacks the velocity over long distances and is designed to fragment on impact.

"We were shooting enemy wearing T-shirts and baggy pants" at the start of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars in 2002 and 2003, he said. "But now they're approaching [advanced] body armor."

Sawyer tapped to lead 7th Fleet

BY ERIK SLAVIN
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — A career submarine officer has been nominated to command the Navy's Japan-headquartered 7th Fleet.

Rear Adm. Phillip Sawyer would command operations over a wide swath of the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean upon confirmation by Congress. Sawyer, a Phoenix native, would also be promoted to vice admiral, according to a Defense Department statement issued Wednesday.

Sawyer is now deputy commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, headquartered in Hawaii. His experience includes command of Pacific Fleet's submarine forces as well as an earlier command of the Yokosuka-based submarine Group 7. His afloat commands include the Guam-based Submarine Squadron 15 and the submarine USS La Jolla.

Sawyer also served as vice commander of the Naval Mine and Anti-Submarine Warfare Command and has held a variety of shore-based roles. He graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1983 and earned a master's degree in engineering management from Old Dominion University. Current 7th Fleet commander Vice Adm. Joseph Aucoin is retiring, 7th Fleet officials said Thursday.

Aucoin joined the Navy out of the University of North Carolina in 1980 and became a flight officer the following year. He has commanded 7th Fleet since 2015.

slavin.erik@stripes.com

Ex-admiral apologizes to Navy, then gets 18 months in 'Fat Leonard' case

The Washington Post

SAN DIEGO — A former admiral was sentenced to 18 months in prison Wednesday for lying to federal agents about his part in the worst corruption scandal in Navy history, making him the highest-ranking officer convicted so far in an investigation that has ensnared more than 200 people.

Robert Gilbeau, 56, became the first active-duty admiral to be convicted of a felony when he pleaded guilty last year in U.S. District Court here. At a hearing Wednesday, his voice broke as he offered a public apology just before he was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Janis Sammartino.

"I am proud of my Navy career and proud to be an American," said Gilbeau, who has since retired. "To the Navy, I want to say I am sorry."

In a letter to the court, Adm. William Moran, the vice chief of naval operations, blasted Gilbeau, saying he had inflicted "immeasurable damage" upon the service and "grossly dishonored his uniform and betrayed his fellow shipmates, the United States Navy and his country."

An estimated 30 other admirals remain under scrutiny for possible criminal or ethical violations in the corruption case, Navy officials have said.

All have come under investigation for their ties to Leonard

Glenn Francis, a Singapore-based defense contractor who has pleaded guilty to bribing scores of Navy personnel with prostitutes, cash, luxury goods, top-shelf alcohol and extravagant meals — paid for by millions of dollars in illicit profits that he gouged from the Defense Department.

The scandal has rocked the Navy since the first arrests were made four years ago. Ten Navy officials have pleaded guilty and nine others have been charged with corruption-related offenses in federal court. Justice Department officials say the investigation continues to snowball, and more indictments are possible.

In addition, the Navy is pursuing its own investigations into about 200 uniformed personnel for possible violations of military law that could result in criminal or disciplinary proceedings.

In a plea bargain, Gilbeau admitted to lying to federal agents about the nature and extent of his relationship with Francis, a longtime Navy contractor known as "Fat Leonard." Prosecutors said the pair met 20 years ago during a port visit in Bali, Indonesia, and Francis immediately began supplying the officer with prostitutes, lavish dinners and stays in hotel suites.

Over the years, Francis learned that Gilbeau particularly liked to have sex with

Vietnamese women — two at a time — so he provided the Navy officer with pairs of prostitutes on at least three occasions, according to federal authorities and others familiar with the case.

Prosecutors also alleged that Gilbeau, a Navy Supply Corps officer, pocketed \$40,000 in cash kickbacks from Francis as part of a scheme to overcharge the Navy for pumping wastewater from its ships. Gilbeau has denied the accusation.

In a letter to the court, Gilbeau did not address his interactions with Francis but said his misconduct stemmed from post-traumatic stress, survivor's guilt and a head injury he suffered as a result of a mortar attack in Iraq in 2007. He was awarded the Purple Heart for his wounds.

"I am devastated by the situation I currently find myself in," he wrote. "I do not desire a defense of my charges based on mental illness, but I do ask that this horrible condition that I suffer is taken into account as a potential mitigating factor."

Gilbeau's attorneys said that he still receives intensive psychiatric treatment. To ease his anxiety, doctors prescribed him a therapy dog, a fluffy white Cavachon crossbreed named Bella. The 16-pound pooch accompanied Gilbeau into the courtroom Wednesday and was given its own chair at the defense table.

Navy fires USS Anchorage's 2 commanders amid propulsion system maintenance woes

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — The Navy has fired two commanders of a San Diego-based ship after maintenance problems were detected in the USS Anchorage's propulsion system.

The Navy said Capt. Jeff "Jenny" Craig and Lt. Cmdr. Joshua Johnson were relieved of duty Tuesday after authorities

found they did not follow procedures throughout the warship.

Neither Craig nor Johnson could be reached for comment.

Lt. Christina Sears said the firings stem from an "engineering incident" aboard the ship in March. She declined to give specifics or to say whether their actions led to damage of the ship.

Sears said the case is still under investigation.

Both commanders have been temporarily assigned to desk jobs.

Capt. Tom Workman will temporarily assume the position as commanding officer and Cmdr. Brian Bethea executive officer until permanent replacements are named.

Soldier accused in stolen Humvee case in S. Korea

BY YOO KYONG CHANG
AND KIM GAMEL
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — A U.S. soldier and six South Korean civilians have been accused of being part of a ring that stole three Humvees from a U.S. base in South Korea and tried to sell them, police said Thursday.

The soldier, identified only as a 47-year-old Korean-American man, allegedly conspired with the others to arrange for three Humvees to be stolen from the base in June and September of last year, police said.

The thefts were carried out by camouflaging the vehicles to appear as unused items, said Kim Dong Hwan, chief detective of the Seoul Metropolitan Police Agency's international crime investigation unit.

"The soldier insists that he was not trying to steal the vehicles with the rest of the guys," Kim told Stars and Stripes. "The Koreans kept denying what they did at first. But they've been saying lately that they attempted to sell the Humvees."

Kim said it was the first time police have uncovered a ring trafficking in stolen Humvees in South Korea.

The suspects — who also included a civilian contractor working on the base, three junk dealers, a film-prop maker and an intermediary — have been booked without detention.

They're under suspicion of

receiving stolen goods, larceny or trespassing on military facilities but have not been charged.

Kim declined to identify the suspects or give the name of the base, saying police were turning the case over to prosecutors on Thursday.

U.S. Forces Korea said it "takes all allegations of misconduct or criminal activity very seriously" but declined to comment on the Humvee case specifically, saying it's still under investigation. USFK's public affairs office referred queries to the Army Criminal Investigation Command, which did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

One of the Humvees was sold to the film-prop maker for nearly \$10,000, but the police retrieved the vehicle from him later, Kim said. Police caught the remaining suspects as they tried to sell the other two Humvees to Sri Lanka, Cambodia or Mongolia. The vehicles were found on one of the junk dealer's lots, he added.

Police believe the U.S. soldier and the Korean civilian employee told colleagues that the Humvees were unused items being sent to the Defense Logistics Agency but then shipped the vehicles to the South Korean suspects instead. Police said they worked with investigators from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the Defense Department.

NATO chief rules out combat role against ISIS

BRUSSELS — NATO's chief says members are discussing whether to join the international coalition fighting Islamic State but insists the alliance will not deploy combat troops.

Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said Thursday that "no decision has been taken. The discussion is going on."

He told reporters in Brussels that it "is absolutely out of the question for NATO to go into combat operations."

President Donald Trump is expected to pressure NATO to

do more to fight extremists in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan when he meets his allied counterparts in Brussels on May 25.

NATO supports the coalition with training and aerial surveillance. But members do not want NATO fighting ISIS, even though all are also individual members of the anti-ISIS coalition.

A top NATO general recommended Wednesday that the alliance join.

From The Associated Press

Marines are back in most violent Afghan province

The Washington Post

A Marine Corps task force newly deployed to Afghanistan's most violent province could need additional troops or other resources, depending on what policy decisions that Washington and Kabul make for Afghanistan, said the top officer in the task force.

Brig. Gen. Roger Turner, asked in an interview whether he needs additional troops, said that his unit has enough "capabilities, capacities and authorities" for its mission but that if the mission grows, "then we're not going to have enough to do what we need to do." His terminology describes not only the number of troops his unit has but the kinds of operations they are trained to do and what rules they must follow.

The comments come as the Trump administration weighs adding several thousand U.S. troops across Afghanistan to the 8,400 present to boost the abilities of Afghan security forces, which have suffered thousands of fatalities in each of the past few years. President Donald Trump is expected to make a decision on the plan this month, U.S. officials said.

Turner's unit, known as Task Force Southwest, numbers about 300 servicemembers and replaced an Army unit named Task Force Forge on April 29. The new mission returns Marines to a part of Afghanistan where more than 20,000 were based in 2010 and 2011 at the height of a troop surge that included more than 100,000 U.S. troops across the country.

Helmand has long been considered Afghanistan's most violent province and was the site of hundreds of Marine deaths between 2008 and 2014. Security has continued to deteriorate since the Marines left, a point

illustrated in March, when Afghan troops in the contested Sangin district moved their base of operations out of the district's center after months of conflict with Taliban fighters.

The Marine task force's headquarters is at Camp Shorab, an Afghan base that was once the site of a sprawling Marine installation known as Camp Leatherneck. Thousands of Marines worked from there as combat troops fanned out across Helmand in small formations, patrolling daily.

Turner, speaking from his headquarters Friday, said that none of his troops has seen any combat in their first few weeks deployed, but they are traveling from Camp Shorab regularly. Task force advisers also are based in Lashkar Gah, the provincial capital, and already have visited the headquarters of each brigade of Afghan troops with which the unit partnered.

"We're still seeing a lot of the same activity that we were seeing years ago from the Taliban. They are still scattering IEDs everywhere," the general said, referring to improvised explosive devices. "They still kind of indiscriminately target people. They arrest people, they put them in jails, and they extort their families and they extort the farmers for their poppy production and tax them."

The task force assists the Afghan army's 215th Corps and Afghan police from the 505th Zone, which combine to provide security in Helmand. U.S. military officials say the advising comes at the "corps level," focusing primarily on advising upper echelons of Afghan leaders in the region. The Trump administration and the Afghan government are mulling the placement of more U.S. advisers alongside Afghan officers who lead smaller formations.

Philippine jihadis resurgent amid low US military presence

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

The resurgence of a jihadi terrorist group in the southern Philippines could threaten regional security, a Southeast Asia security expert told lawmakers Wednesday.

While Abu Sayyaf has been contained far to the south, offers no services to locals and follows no “meaningful ideology,” it nevertheless has been making a comeback since 2014, Zachary Abuza, a professor at the National War College in Washington, told a subcommittee of the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee.

The Philippine Armed Forces has been unable to vanquish the al-Qaida-linked group “despite ample U.S. support, intelligence sharing and training since 2001,” he said. Abu Sayyaf now poses a threat to regional trade and commerce, Abuza said.

“Between March 2016 and April 2017, there have been 19 separate maritime incidents and hostage takings, including one attempted attack,” he said.

The group captured 70 sailors and fishermen — 36 of whom have not been released — from six countries during the incidents.

It is estimated Abu Sayyaf received \$7 million in ransoms last year, which is allowing them to rearm and recruit, Abuza said. That also has paid for bribes for members of the Philippine security forces, he said.

In 2001, Abu Sayyaf carried out a mass kidnapping on the Philippine island of Palawan. An American hostage was beheaded during the yearlong crisis, which ended with a U.S. missionary killed in the military assault to rescue the captives. Bombings and abductions for ransom were commonplace on the southern island of Mindanao.

The U.S. opened a so-called “second front” on terrorism in 2002 by rotating hundreds of troops through to assist with training and surveillance through the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines. The task force was deactivated in 2015 after 13 years as the threat of Abu Sayyaf diminished, although a small number of U.S. special operators remain there.

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, elected last summer on a wave of nationalism, has said he wants all American troops out of Mindanao. Abuza said that would “only make matters worse.”

There are now six separate “black flag” groups in the southern Philippines that have pledged loyalty to Islamic State, the jihadi group that has controlled portions of Iraq and Syria for several years.

“ISIS has sought to get these different groups under a single banner and command structure,” Abuza said.

Report: Flynn blocked move opposed by Turkey

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Days before President Donald Trump took office, incoming national security adviser Michael Flynn blocked a military plan against Islamic State that was opposed by Turkey, a country he had been paid more than \$500,000 to advocate for, the McClatchy news service reported.

According to the report, Flynn declined a request from the Obama administration to approve an operation in the ISIS stronghold of Raqqa, effectively delaying the military operation. The Trump team had been asked because the operation was likely to be carried out after Trump took office.

Flynn’s reasoning wasn’t reported, but

Turkey has long opposed U.S. military operations in cooperation with Kurdish forces.

At the time, Flynn had not yet registered as a foreign agent, nor had he disclosed that he had been paid to lobby on behalf of the Turkish government. Weeks after his firing, Flynn retroactively registered with the Justice Department.

Trump fired Flynn in February on other grounds — that he misled Vice President Mike Pence and other White House officials about his conversations with Russia’s ambassador to the U.S.

The military plan against the ISIS stronghold eventually was approved, but not until after Flynn had been fired.

Turkey criticized after attack on DC protesters

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. officials strongly criticized the Turkish government after video appeared to show its president’s security forces pushing past police and violently breaking up a protest outside their diplomatic residence in Washington.

Attacking the small group of protesters with their fists and feet, men in dark suits and others were recorded repeatedly kicking one woman as she lay curled on a sidewalk. Another wrenches a woman’s neck and throws her to the ground. A man with a bullhorn is repeatedly kicked in the face. In all, nine people were hurt.

The clash happened at the Turkish ambassador’s residence Tuesday as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan arrived after a White House meeting with President Donald Trump. Video shows people pushing past police to confront a small group of protesters across the street in Sheridan Circle.

On Wednesday, Turkey’s official Anadolu news agency labeled the protesters Kurdish “supporters of terror.” It said they chanted anti-Erdogan slogans, and that Erdogan’s team moved in to disperse them because “police did not heed to Turkish demands to intervene.”

In a statement, the Turkish Embassy blamed the violence on the demonstrators, saying they were “aggressively provoking Turkish-American citizens who had peacefully assembled to greet the President. The Turkish-Americans responded in self-defense and one of them was seriously injured.”

A Voice of America video showed police officers struggling to protect the protesters and ordering the men in suits to retreat. Instead, several of the men dodged the officers and ran into the park to continue the attacks.

Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser called it a “violent attack on a peaceful demonstration,” and said it “is an affront to D.C. values and our rights as Americans.”

“This is the United States of America. We do not do this here,” Sen. John McCain commented while retweeting the video. “There is no excuse for this kind of thugish behavior.”

Two men were arrested at the scene, and police intend to pursue charges against others involved, the Metropolitan Police Department said Wednesday.

There may be issues with diplomatic immunity, Police Chief Peter Newsham said at a news conference Wednesday.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man posing as worker accused of stealing

NH PLAISTOW — Police said a man donned an orange Home Depot apron and posed as an employee to steal air conditioners in New Hampshire. But a manager noticed the name on the garment didn't match that of any worker at the store.

Police arrested Bernardo Calana, 53, of Haverhill, Mass., on Saturday.

WMUR-TV reported Calana loaded two air conditioners into his pickup truck in Plaistow and went back inside. A manager noticed the apron with the name "Shannon" with flowers drawn on it and called police.

Calana later told police he didn't know anything about the air conditioners, but a Home Depot apron was found in his back pocket.

Marathon organizers apologize for error

ME BIDDEFORD — Organizers of a Maine marathon are apologizing for a course error that caused many runners to go an extra half-mile, costing some a chance to run in next year's Boston Marathon.

Officials with the Maine Coast Marathon said some runners in Sunday's race were mistakenly directed down a dead end before looping back, bringing their total distance to about 26.7 miles. The error caused some Boston hopefuls to post times that are unlikely to qualify.

The course was corrected but, because not all runners ran the extra distance, officials say they can't simply adjust the times.

Race director Charles Melton said they will offer refunds to those who missed qualify-

ing for Boston because of the mistake.

Woman charged with murder after dispute

IL CHICAGO — Authorities said a 24-year-old Chicago woman has been charged with first-degree murder after allegedly slamming an 18-year-old into a tree with her car after an argument.

Chynna Stapleton was ordered held without bail during a Monday court hearing.

Police said the incident happened around 11 p.m. May 12 on Chicago's South Side. The Cook County medical examiner said Tatyanna Lewis died from multiple blunt force injuries and ruled her death a homicide.

Authorities allege that after an argument, Stapleton got into a 2002 Jeep Liberty and chased Lewis onto a sidewalk and pushed her into a tree with the car.

Crocodile relocated over safety concerns

FL DRY TORTUGAS NATIONAL PARK — A crocodile that mysteriously appeared in the remote islands of Florida's Dry Tortugas National Park 14 years ago has been relocated to the Everglades after getting too friendly with food-bearing visitors.

The Miami Herald reported park staff and Florida wildlife officials lassoed the American crocodile named Cleatus, taped its mouth shut and loaded it into a sea plane Sunday. Cleatus was released Monday in Everglades National Park.

Tortugas park manager Glenn Simpson said they took the safety of tourists and the health of the croc into consideration before moving it.

Coroner: Healthy teen was killed by caffeine

SC COLUMBIA — A coroner said a healthy 16-year-old South Carolina high school student died from heart problems after drinking too much caffeine.

Richland County Coroner Gary Watts said Monday that Davis Cripe had no pre-existing heart condition that might have caused him to collapse and die in a classroom last month.

Watts said Cripe drank a large Mountain Dew, a latte from McDonald's and an energy drink in the two hours before his heart fell out of rhythm at Spring Hill High School near Chapin on April 26.

Watts said parents need to know that while a soda or a cup of coffee is OK for teens, large amounts of caffeine can be deadly.

Suspect arrested after man set on fire

CA SANTA PAULA — Authorities arrested a man on suspicion of setting another man on fire in a Southern California park.

Police in Santa Paula said witnesses reported that the victim had been lying on a park bench Saturday when someone beat him, poured a flammable liquid on him and then lit him on fire.

The man was taken to a hospital and later transferred to a burn center in Los Angeles. He suffered burns to more than half his body and was in critical condition Sunday night.

The Ventura County Star newspaper reported the attacker was seen leaving the park on a bicycle.

Witnesses led police to Jorge Chavez, 35, who could face charges including attempted murder. Investigators have not

given a possible motive.

Man who shot friend, took selfie sentenced

PA GREENSBURG — An 18-year-old western Pennsylvania man who authorities say shot a friend and then posed for a selfie with the dying teen has been sentenced to 15 to 30 years in prison.

The Pittsburgh Tribune-Review reported that Maxwell Morton, of Jeannette, told a Westmoreland County judge Monday that he didn't want to be remembered as a "savage" and conceded that the February 2015 death of Ryan Mangan, 16, was "messed up."

Morton was convicted in February of third-degree murder. He said the teens were playing with a handgun and he thought it wasn't loaded when he pointed it at Mangan and pulled the trigger.

University's 'Gum Tree' has been removed

IN MUNCIE — A tree at Ball State University that for more than a decade was decorated with used chewing gum has been cut down.

The Indianapolis Star reported that students over the weekend discovered a stump on the Muncie campus where the "Gum Tree" once stood.

Ball State spokeswoman Joan Todd said the tree was removed to make way for a new "walking mall" that was approved by the school's board following public discussion. The project is designed to improve pedestrian and bike access through the area.

Todd said it "certainly was not intended to upset anyone or be insensitive to anyone's feelings about the ... tree."

From wire reports

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Cavs open with rout of top-seeded Celtics

Associated Press

BOSTON — So much for the Cavaliers being rusty.

LeBron James embarrassed every defender Boston threw at him and Cleveland picked up where it left off following a long layoff, rolling to a 117-104 victory Wednesday night in Game 1 of the NBA Eastern Conference finals.

James had 38 points, nine rebounds and seven assists.

Kevin Love added a playoff career-high 32 points and had 12 rebounds to help the Cavaliers improve to 9-0 in the first three rounds of the playoffs. They opened 10-0 last season en route to their first NBA title.

"It was our two bigs that set the tone — Kev and Double-T (Tristan Thompson), they were phenomenal," James said. "I saw it in Kev this morning. I knew what type of game he was going to have. So he came through for us."

But there's no denying it has started with James, who has scored at least 35 points in five straight games.

Cavaliers coach Tyronn Lue said James' efficiency continued to make things easier for everyone on both ends.

"He's playing at a high level. And that's the reason why we're riding him so much," Lue said. "When LeBron's playing at that level other guys just have to be solid and we have a good chance to win."

Game 2 is Friday in Boston.

Coming off a 10-day break, James and Cavaliers raced to an early lead were never threatened.

"You can't dig yourself in a big hole like that against them," Boston coach Brad Stevens said.

James scored at will in the first half and the Cavs built a 26-point lead. Love opened up the floor for James, burying outside jumpers and forcing Boston to leave defenders one-on-one with James.

Avery Bradley and Jae Crowder led the Celtics with 21 points each. Isaiah Thomas had 17 points. Coming off a Game 7 victory over Washington on Monday night, Boston missed 11 of its first 14 shots.

"They were the better team tonight. They hit us first. They were more physical," Thomas said. "We can't let that happen again."

Love averaged a quiet 13.8 points in the first two rounds, then broke out against a Boston team that knocked him out of the

2015 playoffs when he became tangled with Kelly Olynyk and dislocated his shoulder.

The shoulder was working just fine Wednesday, and he scored in the paint and from the outside.

"We wanted to come in and set the tone and dictate the game. We felt like we did a good job doing that," Love said. "It wasn't just me. Everybody was moving the ball, passing the ball well."

The Celtics found some energy after halftime, closing the third quarter on an 11-3 run to pull to 92-75.

It didn't last long, though, as the Cavs quickly got the lead back up to 20.

James picked apart every defender that the Celtics threw at him in the first half.

He backed down defenders to set up 15-foot fade away jumpers. Other times, he simply took defenders off the dribble or sliced through double-teams on the way to layups.

Boston also seemed content to make every switch created by Cleveland screens, leading to some awkward matchups for James in the first half.

The Celtics couldn't get anything working when they had the ball, held to just 35 percent from the field in the first half and 2-for-16 from beyond the arc.

Since Game 5 of NBA finals, Cleveland has won a franchise-record 12 straight playoff games.

In other NBA news:

■ James has been named to the All-NBA first team for a record-tying 11th time, and Houston's James Harden is the lone player to be a unanimous first-team selection this season.

Joining Harden and James on the first team were Oklahoma City's Russell Westbrook, San Antonio's Kawhi Leonard and New Orleans' Anthony Davis. James and Westbrook each got 99 of a possible 100 first-team votes.

Harden made the first team for the third time. Westbrook, Leonard and Davis are now two-time first-teamers.

Golden State's Stephen Curry and Kevin Durant were second-team choices, joined by Milwaukee's Giannis Antetokounmpo, Utah's Rudy Gobert and Boston's Isaiah Thomas.

The third All-NBA team includes Chicago's Jimmy Butler, Golden State's Draymond Green, Toronto's DeMar DeRozan, Washington's John Wall and the Los Angeles Clippers' DeAndre Jordan.

Boston's draft win euphoria is short-lived

Associated Press

BOSTON — Suddenly, the Boston Celtics' future looks a lot better than their present.

A day after winning the NBA Draft lottery and earning the right to the No. 1 overall pick, the Celtics were reminded of the gap between them and the defending NBA champion Cavaliers when Cleveland opened the Eastern Conference finals with a 117-104 victory on Wednesday night.

LeBron James scored 38 points and Kevin Love scored 32 with 12 rebounds for Cleveland, which led by 22 at the half and extended it to 28 points in the third quarter.

"I just think that they were the more aggressive team with more energy, and they got us down from the beginning," said Celtics center Al Horford, who had 11 points and eight rebounds. "We can't allow a team of their caliber to build a lead like that in the first quarter. ... It's an uphill battle and we just got to be better to start the game."

It was the Cavaliers' 12th straight playoff win — one short of the NBA record. Game 2 is on Friday night before the series shifts to Cleveland for Games 3 and 4.

And if the Celtics don't play any better than they did in the first half of the opener, that could be it.

"I know that we have to play a lot better at the start," Celtics coach Brad Stevens said. "You can't dig yourself a hole like that against them."

It was the second straight time the Cavaliers visited Boston and faced little resistance. On April 5, with the No. 1 seed in the East up in the air, Cleveland won by 23.

Still, the Celtics wound up grabbing the top seed and home-court advantage through the East finals, and that gave them the right to host Games 1 and 2. But Cleveland erased that edge quickly.

"It's the mindset you have to have when you go on the road, for Game 1," James said. "You can't start the game off lax, or shooting a bunch of jump shots. That's my mindset."

"I have to be in attack mode, just put the pressure on the defense, see what happens. I was able to do that early."

The Celtics had just one day off after eliminating the Washington Wizards in Game 7 of the conference semifinals — but what a day it was. Holding the rights to Brooklyn's first-round draft pick from the 2013 trade that sent Kevin Garnett and Paul Pierce to the Nets, they won the lottery and will take the top pick for the first time since 1950.

Senators chase Fleury, rout Penguins

Associated Press

OTTAWA, Ontario — Mike Hoffman and his Ottawa Senators teammates heard all the chatter on social media about their style of play, which some perceived as “boring.”

Their response was emphatic.

Marc Methot, Derick Brassard and Zack Smith scored in a 2:18 span midway through the first period to chase Pittsburgh goalie Marc-Andre Fleury out of the game as the Senators beat the Penguins 5-1 on Wednesday night to take a 2-1 lead in the NHL Eastern Conference finals.

Hoffman opened the scoring 48 seconds in, and the Senators blew it open against the sluggish Penguins a few minutes later with the fastest three goals in team playoff history. Kyle Turris made it 5-0 late in the second period.

“If we played a run-and-gun game that maybe some people would rather watch, we probably wouldn’t be here,” Hoffman said after routing the defending Stanley Cup champs. “So we use our assets and that’s what works.”

Sidney Crosby ended Craig Anderson’s shutout bid with a power-play goal in the third. Pittsburgh has scored a goal in each game in the series, dropping the opener 2-1 in overtime and winning the second 1-0.

“It was a bad start,” Crosby said. “You don’t want to get down at any point, but to get down 4-0 is digging a pretty big hole.”

Anderson finished with 25 saves. Fleury allowed four goals on nine shots, and Matthew Murray made 19 saves in relief.

Game 4 is Friday night in Ottawa.

Coach Guy Boucher has in-

sisted on an extremely defensive style from the day he took over the Senators last May. It took until December for the team to fully embrace it, but that’s when everyone knew where they needed to be on the ice and what their responsibility was.

“At this level, you do what the coach says,” said Hoffman, who also played for Boucher in the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League. “We’re workers here. We don’t decide which system is put in place. We just have to go out there and execute it and do our job.”

“That’s what we’re here to do.”

Hosting their first Eastern Conference finals game in 10 years, the Sens came out flying. Hoffman got it going by capitalizing on Turris’ shot that bounced awkwardly wide of the goal. Hoffman stuffed the shot, standing to the left of the goal,

just between the post and right pad of Fleury.

Brassard got the first of three when he snatched Erik Karlsson’s dump-in and swung wide of the Pittsburgh goal. Bobby Ryan eventually gained possession down low and found Methot with a crafty pass. While his initial shot was stopped, the rebound bounced off Penguins defenseman Ian Cole and into the net. It was the second goal of the playoffs for Methot after he went scoreless in 68 games during the regular season.

Brassard added his fourth of the postseason less than two minutes later, taking advantage of the Senators’ offensive zone pressure before slipping behind the aging Mark Streit for the shot that beat Fleury.

“We’re not bothered by what’s said about our team,” Brassard said. “Our focus is on what we need to do.”

Almost Dreaming is 4-5 Preakness favorite

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — The two best horses in the Preakness will be eyeball to eyeball coming out of the starting gate. There’s no avoiding each other for Kentucky Derby winner Always Dreaming and rival Classic Empire.

Always Dreaming is the early 4-5 favorite for the race Saturday at Pimlico, where he’ll break from the No. 4 post. Classic Empire is the 3-1 second choice and will be right next door in the No. 5 hole.

“Hopefully, they both have good trips, break good and it could be interesting,” said Mark Casse, who trains Classic Empire. “They could go at it right from the start.”

Four of Always Dreaming’s rivals are back to take him on in the second leg of the Triple Crown. Altogether, he’ll face nine other horses in the 1³/₁₆-mile race worth \$1.5 million.

Thirteen winners have started from the No. 4 post, most recently Curlin in 2007.

“It’s fine,” said Todd Pletcher, noting that Always Dreaming had the No. 4 post in the Florida Derby and No. 5 in the Kentucky Derby, two of his four victories this year. “He’s usually a very good horse coming away from the gate.”

Post positions were drawn Wednesday on a steamy, unseasonable 92-degree day.

If Always Dreaming and jockey John Velazquez win Saturday, next up would be the Belmont Stakes on June 10. American Pharoah swept the Derby, Preakness and Belmont two years ago, ending a 37-year Triple Crown drought.

Classic Empire finished fourth in the Kentucky Derby after getting bounced around and having a rough early trip two weeks ago.

“We just want a fair shot at it,” said Casse, who believes his horse didn’t get to show his best effort after getting slammed coming out of the starting gate on a sloppy track that day.

Classic Empire won the Breeders’ Cup Juvenile last year, when he was voted 2-year-old male champion. Casse insists the Preakness isn’t about revenge, although he likened his horse to Rocky Balboa.

“The champ’s been knocked down and he’s going to come back and try to take back the crown,” Casse said. “It’s got nothing to do with revenge because Always Dreaming did nothing wrong. He’s the champ and we’re just going to go after him.”

Casse likes the neighboring posts.

“We want people to watch,” he said. “If

we can’t win, I want Always Dreaming to win because this sport is so important to me. It’s always nice to have a horse going for the Triple Crown. If we can’t win, I hope he does.”

Always Dreaming and Classic Empire are the only two horses with single-digit odds in the field.

Lookin At Lee, the second-place finisher in the Derby, is the 10-1 third choice. He drew the No. 9 post.

Cloud Computing, one of five new shooters in the Preakness, is the 12-1 fourth choice. He will break from the No. 2 hole.

There’s a pair of 15-1 shots: Gunnevera (seventh in the Derby) and Conquest Mo Money, whose owners paid \$150,000 to supplement their horse.

Hence, the 11th-place finisher in the Derby is listed at 20-1 on the morning line.

The field is rounded out by a trio of 30-1 shots: Multiplier, Senior Investment and Term of Art.

Calumet Farm is bringing back Hence for another try at Always Dreaming. The storied Kentucky stable also has Term of Art, trained by 2012 Preakness winner Doug O’Neill.

Trainer Steve Asmussen will saddle two starters: Lookin At Lee and Hence.

Young's pinch-hit single lifts Red Sox

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Chris Young waited a long time for his opportunity Wednesday night and made the most of it.

Young drove in the tiebreaking run with a pinch-hit single in the 13th inning, and the Boston Red Sox rallied past the St. Louis Cardinals 5-4 to sweep their two-game interleague series.

"In that situation, you get a runner in scoring position and you're just trying to find a way to put the bat on the ball," Young said. "We battled and our bullpen did an amazing job to give us the opportunity to win the ballgame and we're grateful for that."

Jackie Bradley Jr. hit a two-run homer in the seventh off starter Mike Leake to begin Boston's comeback from a four-

run deficit. The Red Sox tied it in the eighth against reliever Trevor Rosenthal when Xander Bogaerts hit an RBI triple and scored on Andrew Benintendi's sacrifice fly.

Mitch Moreland doubled with two outs in the 13th and Bradley was intentionally walked before Young singled to left-center off Sam Tuivailala (2-1).

"This win felt big, the way we had to get it," Young said. "It was just one of those we had to persevere and we fought for."

Fernando Abad (1-0) tossed two scoreless innings for the win, and Ben Taylor got three outs for his first major league save.

"This one tonight was a lot of grit, a lot of character, a lot of competitive at-bats late in the game," Red Sox manager John Farrell said. "Jackie with the big two-run homer that kind

of got us off nothing because Leake was very good. This was big for us, particularly tonight. This is a big win. It's a huge shift. I think anytime you get this deep into an extra-inning game when you're depleting your bullpen, to come away with a win, they feel like two at times."

Dexter Fowler hit a leadoff homer for the Cardinals, who had won eight of 10. It was his fifth home run this season and the 22nd leadoff shot of his career.

Boston improved to 3-17 when trailing after seven innings, while St. Louis fell to 19-1 when leading after seven.

The Cardinals had 12 hits but did not muster one in the final five innings.

"Not a lot of opportunities," manager Mike Matheny said. "They came in throwing the

ball well out of the bullpen and we just couldn't put hits on top of each other."

St. Louis scored three times in the second. Rookie outfielder Magneuris Sierra had an RBI single, extending his hitting streak to seven games. Kolten Wong followed with an RBI double, and Tommy Pham's run-scoring groundout made it 4-0.

Bradley cut it to 4-2 with a drive to center field, his second homer in two games and fourth this year.

Leake allowed two runs and seven hits over seven innings, striking out five without a walk.

Red Sox right-hander Rick Porcello, who lost five of his previous six starts, gave up four runs and nine hits in six innings with six strikeouts and three walks.

Kershaw earns 20th win against rival San Francisco

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Clayton Kershaw took a share of the major league lead with his seventh win and earned career victory No. 20 against the rival Giants, helping the Los Angeles Dodgers avoid a sweep by beating San Francisco 6-1 on Wednesday.

Kershaw (7-2) struck out five in seven shutout innings and retired the first 10 batters he faced before Justin Ruggiano's fourth-inning single. The left-hander moved into a tie for most wins with Houston's Dallas Keuchel.

Yasmani Grandal hit a two-run double in the first and Yasiel Puig singled in a pair of runs in the sixth as the Dodgers jumped on Johnny Cueto (4-3), who lost for the first time at home this season.

Kershaw allowed three hits and didn't walk a batter for the fourth time in 2017 as the Dodgers snapped their three-game skid and ended the Giants' season-best five-game winning streak.

Kershaw's 20th victory against the Giants came in his 39th outing and 38th start of the rivalry — and he's 12-4 with a 1.29 ERA at AT&T Park. He has allowed one or fewer walks in all but one of his starts.

Astros 3, Marlins 0: Lance McCullers paid tribute to the late Jose Fernandez and pitched like him, allowing no earned runs for the third start in a row, and visiting Houston completed a three-game sweep.

McCullers (4-1) wore cleats with Fernandez's initials and uniform number. Their friendship began when they were high school pitchers in the Tampa area, before Fernandez became the Marlins' ace and then died in a boating accident last September.

Diamondbacks 5, Mets 4 (11): At Phoenix, Chris Herrmann homered off Rafael Montero leading off the 11th inning, sending New York to its season-high seventh straight loss.

Rays 7, Indians 4: Corey Dickerson hit a three-run shot

— his third homer in two days — and Alex Cobb controlled host Cleveland over seven innings as Tampa Bay completed its most successful road trip in a year.

Pirates 6, Nationals 1: At Pittsburgh, Gerrit Cole shut down the best offense in the majors, holding Washington to three hits in seven innings to win for the first time in a month.

Tigers 5, Orioles 4: Tyler Collins snapped an 0-for-30 skid in style, hitting two home runs for Detroit in a victory over visiting Baltimore.

Yankees 11, Royals 7: Aaron Hicks hit a three-run homer to cap a five-run fourth inning, and New York piled up 16 hits against host Kansas City.

Cubs 7, Reds 5: Anthony Rizzo and Kyle Schwarber drove in two runs apiece, and Chicago handed sloppy visiting Cincinnati its season-high fifth straight loss.

Braves 8, Blue Jays 4: Kurt Suzuki hit a three-run homer to cap a six-run first inning, and

host Atlanta held off Toronto in a testy game after Freddie Freeman left with an injury.

Rangers 9, Phillies 3: Andrew Cashner finally won in his home state, pitching seven solid innings to help host Texas match the longest winning streak in the majors this year at eight games with a victory over Philadelphia.

Brewers 3, Padres 1: Jett Bandy singled in the go-ahead run with one out in the ninth inning and Milwaukee beat host San Diego to take over first place in the NL Central.

Mariners 4, Athletics 0: Christian Bergman pitched two-hit ball into the eighth inning for the best start of his career, Jean Segura extended his hitting streak to 16 games with a two-run single and Seattle blanked visiting Oakland.

Angels 12, White Sox 8: Mike Trout homered for the fifth time in six games, Cameron Maybin had three more hits and host Los Angeles completed a three-game sweep of Chicago.