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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

'Material issue' found in Reagan sea trials

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS

Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — America's only forward-deployed aircraft carrier's upcoming deployment will be delayed because of a "material issue," the Navy said Thursday.

The USS Ronald Reagan returned to its Yokosuka homeport Thursday after completing a week of pre-deployment sea trials. That same day, the service announced that carrier-landing practice would be delayed, partly to address an issue that arose on the ship over the past week.

"USS Ronald Reagan successfully completed Sea Trials

on [Thursday]. However, during operational testing and verification of all systems during Sea Trials, a material issue was identified that requires repair," said Lt. Cmdr. Matt Knight, a Task Force 70 spokesman.

"The repair will result in a delay to the scheduled departure date for USS Ronald Reagan and Carrier Strike Group 5."

Knight did not provide further details about the issue, including how long the delay was expected to last.

A separate Navy statement issued Thursday announced that carrier-landing drills for Carrier Air Wing 5 pilots were being delayed for "operational

reasons." The day-and-night training that enables them to meet qualifications was originally scheduled to take place May 3-13, mostly at Iwo Jima — a remote island known in Japan as Iwo To.

After the land-based training, the pilots were to conduct day and night landings on the Ronald Reagan, Knight told Stars and Stripes in an email last month.

The majority of the training is still expected to take place on Iwo Jima when new dates are announced, the Navy said.

Aircraft involved include F/A-18E and F/A-18F Super Hornet strike jets, EA-18G Growler electronic warfare planes, E-

2D Advanced Hawkeye early warning aircraft and C-2A Greyhound transports.

During the sea trials, the Ronald Reagan's crew practiced high-speed turns and precision anchoring and tested the ship's self-defense weapons system.

Capt. Buzz Donnelly, the Ronald Reagan's commanding officer, said the ship "performed remarkably well."

"The crew's training and preparation was a primary factor during all of the evolutions, and they should feel very good about the fact that they came in well-prepared and executed as well as they did," he said in a Navy statement.

Loss of data forces Marines to make changes

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE

Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The Marine Corps has changed the way it handles personal information after a servicemember lost a disk containing the data of 164,000 people who registered a vehicle for Okinawa base access between January 2007 and September 2017.

On Sept. 22, an airman with Okinawa's Joint Services Vehicle Registration Office at Camp Foster handed the disk to an Air Force security officer from Kadena Air Base. That security officer was tasked with bringing the disk — which was not password protected or encrypted — to Kadena security forces' headquarters, where the data were to be uploaded into the Air Force system. The disk was never seen again.

It contained names, Social Security numbers, driver's license information, ID numbers,

physical descriptions of personnel, vehicle identification numbers and plate numbers, service branch and duty information for servicemembers, dependents, civilian federal employees, contractors and local national master labor contractors.

While the Marine Corps said there are no signs the disk was sold, stolen or found by someone with nefarious intentions, the affected people — including some retired from government service — have been asked to safeguard their identity and credit.

Numerous changes to the way personal data is stored and distributed by the U.S. military on Okinawa have been made; however, a report on the incident provided to Stars and Stripes by the Marine Corps suggests it was preventable, and that unsafe practices have knowingly been used for years.

The data were haphazardly handled on removable media

devices, and there were no standard operating procedures for passing the data between services. Servicemembers didn't know how to password-protect disks containing sensitive data.

While the Marine Corps system that contained the data was encrypted, there was no centralized system accessible by all service branches, making the rudimentary passing of disks between servicemembers necessary.

The Marine Corps acknowledged as far back as 2010 that the system needed to be modernized and all service branches given access to its database, but none of the branches or commands servicing Okinawa did anything beyond a few preliminary meetings.

The disk — which contained information from the Marine Corps Installations Pacific's Joint Vehicle Registration and Licensing Database — was created Sept. 21 by a registration

office employee, according to the report.

Other service branches did not have access to the Marine system, so the disks were used monthly to update Air Force, Army and Navy law enforcement at bases around the island. Disks were passed to servicemembers from the other bases who would harvest the data and return the disks.

The Sept. 21 disk was handed off the next day and was reported lost five days later.

"Immediately after the loss of the CD was discovered, the U.S. military began a comprehensive search and conducted an inquiry into our own processes for collecting, storing and transporting personal information," a Marine Corps statement said. "There is no evidence that the CD was stolen or that the information on the CD has been misused in any way."

CENTCOM deputy tapped to lead PACAF

BY WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — U.S. Central Command's deputy commander has been nominated to head the Hawaii-based Pacific Air Forces, the Pentagon said Wednesday.

Lt. Gen. Charles Brown Jr., if confirmed, will be promoted to general and also become executive director of Pacific Air Combat Operations Staff at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii. He would replace Gen.

Terrence O'Shaughnessy, who is awaiting final confirmation by the full Senate to take the helm of U.S. Northern Command.

Brown would command roughly 46,000 military and civilian personnel based primarily in Hawaii, Alaska, Japan, Guam and South Korea. About 1,700 airmen are deployed at any given time in the region. About 320 fighter and attack aircraft are assigned to Pacific Air Forces, with another 100 aircraft rotating on deployments to Guam.

Brown was commissioned in 1984 and obtained a master's in aeronautical science in 1994 from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, Fla. He has commanded a fighter squadron, the U.S. Air Force Weapons School and two fighter wings, including the 8th Fighter Wing, dubbed the "Wolf Pack," at Kunsan Air Base, South Korea.

Prior to his assignment at MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., Brown headed U.S. Air Forces Central

Command from June 2015 to July 2016. In that role, he led the aerial campaign against the Islamic State, which held territories in Iraq and Syria. He has more than 2,900 flight hours, including 120 combat hours, in everything from F-16 fighters and B-1B bombers to C-130J cargo planes, the Air Force said.

Among his decorations are the Bronze Star and the Legion of Merit with three bronze oak leaf clusters.

Jeepneys are going electric in Philippines

BY SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

The days of the Philippines' iconic Jeepney vehicles may be numbered — at least the version familiar to American servicemembers and veterans who've spent time in the islands.

The Philippine government, eager to cut traffic congestion and pollution, has ordered the gas-guzzling Jeepneys to be phased out. The vehicles, which evolved from Jeeps left behind by U.S. forces at the end of World War II, are ubiquitous in the islands with their brightly painted bodywork and distinctive radiator grills.

An initial batch of modern electric Jeepneys is due to start serving metropolitan Manila next month, the Manila Standard newspaper reported last week. Similar vehicles are already on the roads in other parts of the country.

A ride in a traditional Jeepney across Angeles City costs about the equivalent of a quarter, said John Gilbert, 70, a former Army noncommissioned officer living in the Philippines. These days, it's possible to travel around nearby Clark Air Base in the vehicles.

Gilbert said he rode in an

electric Jeepney on a recent trip to Cebu.

"They're clean, quiet and don't produce quite the same smells although they probably will over time," he said of the new vehicles.

Growth of the Philippines' economy means more cars on the roads and the spread of traffic from Manila to other cities and towns. Electric Jeepneys, which carry more passengers, will help cut congestion, Gilbert said.

But the change isn't welcomed by everyone. Jeepney drivers, who typically own and operate their own vehicles, have protested the government's plans.

Electric Jeepneys cost more than most of the drivers can afford, and the change will force them to become contract employees rather than independent business owners, Gilbert said.

"The future is clearly the non-polluting electric higher capacity vehicles, but it has not been embraced by all," he said.

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Taliban resume attack on capital of key province

BY J.P. LAWRENCE

Stars and Stripes

Fighting resumed in the capital of strategically important Farah province Wednesday night as Taliban attacks prompted gunbattles and two U.S. drone strikes.

The clashes late Wednesday have subsided, and the city of 55,000 people is currently under government control, a coalition spokesman said early Thursday.

During the attack, the Taliban targeted the local police chief's office, residents and officials told Kabul's TOLO news channel. They said three suicide bombs were detonated near the police station and other government buildings.

The Taliban confirmed that their fighters had withdrawn Wednesday morning, only to return hours later with a renewed assault.

Some Taliban fighters hid in people's houses, while others retreated from the city, said Khair Mohammad Noorzai, Farah provincial council member.

Afghan security forces searched houses but had to defuse booby traps left behind by the guerrillas, Noorzai said.

The Education Ministry said schools in Farah would remain closed until security improves.

The attack was the first on a provincial capital this year. The Taliban now control much of Farah province, a key drug route between the border with Iran and Taliban-held areas of Helmand province in the south. Capture of the provincial capital would block the region's main highway to Kabul.

The attacks on Farah are similar to Taliban offensives that captured the provincial capital of Kunduz in 2015, said Thomas Ruttig, co-director of the Afghanistan Analysts Network. For five months, militants staged constant attacks from the outskirts of Kunduz before a final rush to take the city.

"The Taliban have positioned themselves in Farah city's suburbs for a long time, at least since 2016," he said. "Their latest approach might be to expand from there into the cities themselves, as Afghan cities look more like villages in their outskirts, and the divide between city and countryside is not that clear."

Hiding in the suburbs also means airstrikes against Taliban positions could lead to more civilian casualties, Ruttig added.

Afghan and coalition forces said airstrikes Tuesday night had driven the Taliban from Farah.

Ash plume rises as Kilauea erupts

Associated Press

HONOLULU — Hawaii's Kilauea volcano erupted anew before dawn Thursday, shooting a steely gray plume of ash from its summit about 30,000 feet into the sky that began raining down on a nearby town.

The explosion came shortly after 4 a.m. following two weeks of volcanic activity that sent lava flows into neighborhoods and destroyed at least 26 homes.

The explosion probably lasted only a few minutes, and the ash accumulations were minimal, with only trace amounts expected near the volcano, said Mike Poland, a geophysicist with the U.S. Geological Survey.

Some people in the community closest to the volcano slept through the explosion.

Kanani Aton, a spokeswoman for Hawaii County Civil Defense, said she spoke to several

relatives and friends in the town called Volcano.

"They said they slept through it. They didn't hear it," Aton said.

Robert Hughes owns the Aloha Junction Bed and Breakfast, about a mile and a half from the crater. He said he did not hear anything either and is in an area that did not get any ash.

So far, he said, Thursday has been a "nice rainy day."

His business has been hit hard by the volcano, once an attraction for visitors. He said he's lost hundreds of reservations and had just three guests Thursday, when he previously had been serving 12 to 14 at a time.

One of the guests was a news reporter. The other two were from Italy.

"In the old days, people used to love to come see the volcano.

They'd even take their little postcards, burn one corner in the lava flow, mail then off, stuff like that," he said. "Now they're acting like it's all super-dangerous and everything, but it just kind oozes out."

The crater sits within Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, which has been closed since May 11 because of the risk of a more violent eruption.

Officials have said the eruption isn't likely to be dangerous as long as people stay out of the closed park.

Kilauea is one of the world's most active volcanoes. An eruption in 1924 killed one person and sent rocks, ash and dust into the air for 17 days.

Scientists warned on May 9 that a drop in the lava lake at the summit might create conditions for an explosion that could fling ash and boulders the size of refrigerators into the air.

Trump's payment to Cohen raises ethics issues

Associated Press

NEW YORK — President Donald Trump revealed in his financial disclosure Wednesday that he reimbursed personal attorney Michael Cohen as much as \$250,000 for unspecified "expenses," with no mention of a \$130,000 payment to porn actress Stormy Daniels to keep quiet about a sexual tryst she said they had.

The head of the nation's ethics office questioned why Trump didn't include this in his previous year's sworn disclosure and passed along his concerns to federal prosecutors.

"I am providing both reports to you because you may find the disclosure relevant to any inquiry you may be pursuing," David Apol, acting director of the Office of Government Ethics, wrote to Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein.

Apol wrote that he considers Trump's payment to Cohen to be a repayment on a loan and that it was required to be included in Trump's June 2017 disclosure.

But Trump attorney Rudy Giuliani told Fox News' Laura Ingraham he didn't think the repayment "had to be disclosed at all because I think it was an expenditure that he reimbursed."

He also said the president was "fully aware" of his decision to reveal the fact that Trump had reimbursed Cohen in a previous Fox News appearance and "endorsed the strategy."

But ethics experts say that if that payment was knowingly and willfully left out, Trump could be in violation of federal ethics laws.

"This is a big deal and unprecedented. No president has been previously subject to any referral by (Office of Government Ethics) to DOJ as a result of having failed to report an item on their public financial disclosure report," said Virginia Canter, a former ethics official in the Clinton and Obama White Houses who is now with the watchdog group Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington.

Trump criticized for referring to immigrants as 'animals'

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — While railing against California for its so-called sanctuary immigration policies, President Donald Trump referred to some people who cross the border illegally as "animals" — drawing a sharp rebuke from Democratic leaders for the harsh rhetoric.

Trump's remark at a meeting with local leaders was in response to a complaint about gang members.

"We have people coming into the country, or trying to come in — and we're stopping a lot of them," Trump said during the immigration round table after a sheriff commented about gangs. "You wouldn't believe how bad these people are. These aren't people. These are animals."

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., responded on Twitter to the president, saying, "When all of our great-great-grandparents came to America they weren't 'animals,' and these people aren't either."

Trump was joined at the Wednesday White House meeting by mayors, sheriffs and other local leaders from California who oppose the state's immigration policies and who applauded his administration's hard-line efforts.

"This is your Republican resistance right here

against what they're doing in California," said Assemblywoman Melissa Melendez, coopting a term used by Democrats opposed to Trump's presidency. She, like others, said the president and his policies were far more popular in the state than people realize.

They were criticizing legislation Gov. Jerry Brown signed into law last year that bars police from asking people about their immigration status or helping federal agents with immigration enforcement. Jail officials can transfer inmates to federal immigration authorities if they have been convicted of one of about 800 crimes, mostly felonies, but not for minor offenses.

Brown insists the legislation, which took effect Jan. 1, doesn't prevent federal immigration officials from doing their jobs. But the Trump administration has sued to reverse it, calling the policies unconstitutional and dangerous. Some counties, including San Diego and Orange, have voted to support the lawsuit or have passed their own anti-sanctuary resolutions.

Republicans see backlash to the law as a potentially galvanizing issue during the midterm elections, especially with Trump's anti-immigrant base. And Trump has held numerous events in recent months during which he's drawn attention to California's policies.

Mom's bail set at \$495K in Calif. abuse case

Associated Press

FAIRFIELD, Calif. — Prosecutors allege in court documents filed Wednesday that the 10 children rescued from a Northern California home were punched, kicked, strangled, shot with a BB gun and subjected to waterboarding by their father and their mother did nothing to stop it.

The details of the alleged abuse were included in a motion to increase the bail of Ina Rogers, 31, who was charged with nine counts of felony child abuse Wednesday in Solano Superior Court. Rogers did not enter a plea, but has previously denied allegations her children were harmed. She also faces 1 count of child neglect involving all 10 children.

"On a continuous basis the children were getting punched, strangled, bitten, shot with weapons such as crossbows and BB guns, hit with weapons such as sticks and bats, subjected to 'waterboarding' and having scalding water poured on them," Solano County Deputy District Attorney Veronica Juarez wrote in the bail request.

On Wednesday, Judge William J. Pendergast set bail at \$495,000 for Rogers, saying she "may not be a danger to the public at large, but these charges make clear she is a danger to the children."

Since announcing Monday that they had removed the children from the home where they say torture was carried out "for sadistic purposes," prosecutors have refused to discuss further details of the allegations against Rogers and her husband, Jonathan Allen, 29. He has pleaded not guilty to nine counts of felony child abuse and seven counts of felony torture. He is being held on \$5.2 million bail. The motion states that when Fairfield Police arrived at the two-story house in a suburb of San Francisco on March 31, they found the children "huddled together on the living room floor" in a home littered with feces and trash.

Election hack puts focus on paperless voting machines

Associated Press

ATLANTA — As the mid-term congressional primaries heat up amid fears of Russian hacking, an estimated 1 in 5 Americans will be casting their ballots on machines that do not produce a paper record of their votes.

That worries voting and cybersecurity experts, who say the lack of a hard copy makes it difficult to double-check the results for signs of manipulation.

"In the current system, after the election, if people worry it has been hacked, the best officials can do is say 'Trust us,'" said Alex Halderman, a voting machine expert who is director of the University of Michigan's Center for Computer Security and Society.

Georgia, which holds its primary Tuesday, and four other states — Delaware, Louisiana, New Jersey and South Carolina — exclusively use touchscreen machines that provide no paper records that allow voters to confirm their choices.

Such machines are also used in more than 300 counties in eight other states: Arkansas, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Texas, according

to Verified Voting, a nonprofit group focused on ensuring the accuracy of elections.

In all, about 20 percent of registered voters nationwide use machines that produce no paper record.

Many election officials in states and counties that rely on those machines say they support upgrading them but also contend they are accurate. In many jurisdictions, the multi-million-dollar cost is a hurdle.

The focus comes as states gear up for the first nationwide elections since Russian hackers targeted 21 states ahead of the 2016 presidential contest. U.S. intelligence agencies have said that there is no evidence any vote tallies were manipulated, but Russians and others are intent on interfering in American elections again.

Last week, the Senate Intelligence Committee issued a report that recommended replacing machines that don't produce a paper record of the vote.

Some states already have taken that step or are doing so.

Virginia last year banned paperless touchscreen machines two months before the state's gubernatorial election. This year, Kentucky ordered that all

new machines produce a paper trail.

Congress has allocated \$380 million to help states with election security upgrades, but that is just a fraction of what would be needed to replace all paperless machines.

Louisiana is soliciting bids to replace the state's nearly 10,000 such machines ahead of the 2020 election, though all the money has yet to be allocated. Funding also is an issue in Pennsylvania, where Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf has ordered that counties planning to replace their electronic voting systems buy machines that leave a paper trail.

"It's important because everybody needs to have confidence in the voting process," Wolf said. "And given what is alleged to have happened in 2016, I think there's some concern that maybe people aren't as confident as they should be."

The rest of the country uses either paper ballots that are filled out by hand and then read by an optical scanner, or a touchscreen machine that prints out a ballot so voters can verify their selections before inserting it into another machine to record their votes.

2017 saw fewest US births in 30 years

Associated Press

NEW YORK — U.S. birth rates declined last year for women in their teens, 20s and — surprisingly — their 30s, leading to the fewest babies in 30 years, according to a government report released Thursday.

Experts said several factors may be combining to drive the declines, including shifting attitudes about motherhood and changing immigration patterns.

The provisional report, based

on a review of more than 99 percent of the birth certificates filed nationwide, counted 3.853 million births last year. That's the lowest tally since 1987.

Births have been declining since 2014, but 2017 saw the greatest year-to-year drop — about 92,000 less than the previous year.

That was surprising, because baby booms often parallel economic booms, and last year was a period of low unemployment and a growing economy.

But other factors are likely at play, experts said.

One may be shifting attitudes about motherhood among millennials, who are in their prime child-bearing years right now. They may be more inclined to put off child-bearing or have fewer children, researchers said.

Another may be changes in the immigrant population, who generate nearly a quarter of the babies born in the U.S. each year.

Also, use of IUDs and other long-acting forms of contraception has been increasing.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Cookie dough spill causes sticky commute

NC WILMINGTON — A truck carrying cookie dough created a sticky situation when it lost some of its load on a North Carolina highway.

Pender County officials told news outlets the truck's cargo was sent onto U.S. Route 17 northeast of Wilmington. The spill happened shortly before noon Tuesday and delayed traffic into the evening rush hour.

Firefighters posted a photo on Facebook of the more than a dozen yellow containers on their sides. It is unclear where the truck came from or where it was going.

Cops: Man injured while trying to blow up bus

MA METHUEN — A man was injured by what police call a "fireball" while trying to blow up an old vehicle in Massachusetts.

NBC 10 Boston reported the explosion happened when an unidentified man tried to blow up an old bus on his property in Methuen. Police say a "fireball" erupted from the vehicle. A bomb squad and hazmat team searched the area for the man, and found him with burns to his face and head. He was taken to an area hospital.

State police are investigating why the man tried to blow up the bus.

800-pound zoo animal escapes enclosure

RI PROVIDENCE — An 800-pound animal described as a "goat-antelope" that escaped its enclosure at a Rhode Island zoo was back in by the time the zoo opened for visitors.

The takin escaped Tuesday morning and was returned to

its enclosure an hour later at the Roger Williams Park Zoo in Providence.

A zoo spokeswoman said it started when a veterinary team approached the takin for a routine hoof procedure. The animal charged the heavy reinforced doors multiple times, finally breaking through onto zoo grounds.

The horned animal named Har-Lee was sedated and taken back to its enclosure.

One animal keeper and one veterinary intern were treated on the scene for minor injuries.

Police: Alligator used to threaten kidnapped man

CT BRIDGEPORT — Police in Connecticut arrested a man they said placed a 3-foot alligator on top of a man in an extortion attempt.

The Connecticut Post reported that Isaias Garcia, 30, of Garland, Texas, was held on \$250,000 bail after pleading not guilty to several charges including kidnapping and threatening.

Authorities said a 21-year-old man called his aunt April 6 to say he had been kidnapped and his abductor was demanding \$800. The aunt contacted police who told her to get proof her nephew was OK. Police said she received a photograph of her nephew face down in a bathtub, the open-mouthed alligator on top of him.

2 police dogs chosen for hero awards

NY NEW YORK — Two police dogs, including one that made the ultimate sacrifice, have been named recipients of American Kennel Club hero awards.

The organization announced Tuesday that it has chosen K-9 Dexter of San Diego and the late K-9 Rony of Houston, both

Belgian Malinois, for Paw of Courage awards.

Dexter was stabbed several times while answering a February 911 call. He has recovered from a broken rib and ruptured spleen and has returned to duty. Rony suffered multiple leg fractures while chasing a car-theft suspect in the woods, also in February. He had to be euthanized.

College student wins job building Lego models

OH COLUMBUS — A college student won the job of master builder at a Lego center opening in central Ohio later this year.

University of Akron student Maxx Davidson, 22, beat more than 70 other contestants in a Lego building competition in Columbus in early May.

Davidson will now help create life-size Lego models of notable Ohioans and other landmarks at the new Legoland Discovery Center in Columbus. It's set to open Sept. 21 at the Easton Town Center mall.

Buried treasure found in NYC backyard

NY NEW YORK — A couple of urban island-dwellers have found buried treasure in their backyard — but so far the pirates are nowhere in sight.

WCBS said a safe containing about \$52,000 worth of property — including diamonds, gold, jade and wet cash — was uncovered on Staten Island.

Matthew and Maria Colonna Emanuel always thought the rusting hulk of metal jutting out beneath some trees was just a cable box. They were having some trees replaced when the mystery unfolded. The safe also held a paper with an address.

Matthew Emanuel knocked on their neighbor's door and

asked if they'd ever been burglarized.

Bingo. The police report dates to 2011. They returned the safe's contents to their neighbors.

Woman brings brownies with laxatives to work

MI SALINE — Police said a 47-year-old Michigan woman has lost her job after police determined she put laxatives in brownies intended for a send-off for a departing co-worker.

The Ann Arbor News reported police responded May 3 to an engineering and manufacturing business in Saline after the company got a tip from an employee. Saline police Chief Jerrod Hart said the company confiscated the brownies before they could be eaten.

Hart said the Adrian woman initially denied putting laxatives in them, but admitted to baking in a cube of laxatives after being told investigators would test them. Her name wasn't released.

700-year-old oak tree knocks hole in house

MS D'IBERVILLE — A massive live oak tree that stood for seven centuries has split, sending around four tons of wood toppling onto a family home in Mississippi.

The Sun Herald reported no one at Barbara Taylor's home was injured, although the house itself now features a gaping hole. Taylor's friend James McKinley told the newspaper that local arborists verified the tree's age.

University of South Mississippi landscape superintendent Loren Erickson has told the newspaper that live oaks are prone to losing their heavy branches during rainy spells.

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Preakness favorite Justify draws 7 post

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — Having the Preakness favorite has never bothered Bob Baffert before, and it doesn't bother him with Justify.

Coming off an impressive victory in the Kentucky Derby, Justify is the 1-2 morning-line favorite for Saturday's second race in a field of eight horses. Derby runner-up Good Magic is the second choice at 3-1, but Justify is the horse to beat with the chance to give Baffert his seventh Preakness winner and a shot at a second Triple Crown in four years after American Pharoah did it in 2015.

Baffert is 4-0 in the Preakness with the Derby winner and doesn't see any reason Justify doesn't have another big run in him.

"I like being the favorite," Baffert said Wednesday. "I don't want to be 50-1. I like knowing that I have a chance to win. When you come in and you're like, 'Well, I don't know, we're going to need the Stanford marching band to interfere a little bit,' then you don't feel that well. I just feel that when you know that there's a chance you can pull this off and when you can win on the big arena, that's what it's all about."

Justify already won on horse racing's biggest stage when he held off a hard-charging Good Magic to capture the Derby on a muddy track at Churchill Downs. Rain is expected at Pimlico Race Course in the days leading up to the Preakness and on race day, which could set up a similar scenario to how jockey Mike Smith took Justify out to the lead before the final turn and pulled away.

"I think it's less pressure for us because the Kentucky Derby, for me, it was so special," Baffert said. "Coming in here I feel the same as I did when I won it with the other ones."

Baffert won the Derby and Preakness with Silver Charm in 1997, Real Quiet in 1998, War Emblem in 2002 and American

Pharoah three years ago.

Justify will face three other challengers from the Derby — Good Magic, Lone Sailor and Bravazo — and four horses who skipped it to point to the Preakness — Quip, Tenfold, Sporting Chance and Diamond King.

After Justify and Good Magic, No. 1 Quip is third at 12-1. No. 2 Lone Sailor is 15-1, No. 6 Tenfold and No. 8 Bravazo are 20-1 and No. 3 Sporting Chance and No. 4 Diamond King are 30-1 on the morning line.

If Justify runs his best race, the rest of the field could be running for second place.

"He's the best horse," said D. Wayne Lukas, who trains Bravazo and Sporting Chance. "He looks terrific, he's doing well. I watched him all week. He's going to be very, very hard to handle."

Quip is the new shooter best positioned to give Justify a run after winning the Tampa Bay Derby. Elliott Walden of WinStar Farm, which co-owns Justify and Quip, showed his allegiance at the draw by wearing a "Justify" hat and hopes the favorite wins for obvious reasons.

"It would point him toward the Triple Crown," Walden said. "But if for some reason he stubs his toe, we feel real good about Quip's chances to be the horse to upset him, if that happens."

The odds are against that, unless a bruised heel Justify was treated for acts up after training on an off track at Pimlico. He arrived Wednesday about 90 minutes before the post-position draw, and got acquainted with the track for the first time Thursday morning.

Justify showed no signs of being troubled by the heel bruise that was discovered the day after he won the Derby on May 5 by 2½ lengths.

Baffert said: "I think it's behind us. He had that one day, but then after that he's been really good on it. I'm not really worried about it."

Briefly

Browns next up for HBO's 'Hard Knocks'

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Ready or not, the Cleveland Browns are getting their close-up.

Coming off a historic, dismal 0-16 season, the Browns have been chosen to appear on HBO's popular "Hard Knocks" series, which gives NFL fans a behind-the-scenes look at training camp.

The Browns have turned down previous opportunities to be on the award-winning series. But with renewed optimism around Cleveland following the recent draft, and the selection of quarterback Baker Mayfield, the team is granting HBO unlimited access to its upcoming camp.

Cleveland is the 13th franchise to participate in "Hard Knocks," which began in 2001 with the Baltimore Ravens. The Tampa Bay Buccaneers were featured last summer.

Although they've won only one game the past two seasons under coach Hue Jackson, the Browns see the show as a possibility to highlight some of their younger players and put a positive spin on their rebuild.

And for HBO, Mayfield's quest to win the starting job is just one of several juicy story lines.

"NFL Films has always been exceptional at bringing fans closer to the game and they do an outstanding job with every show they produce, including HBO's Hard Knocks," Browns owners Dee and Jimmy Haslam said. "We really felt like it was our turn this year and the timing was right."

HBO's cameras are certain to focus on Mayfield, the brash Heisman Trophy winner from Oklahoma the Browns chose over other quarterbacks. Mayfield is expected to back up Tyrod Taylor this season, but their competition could make for the kind compelling TV that has made the series a must-watch for football junkies.

The series debuts Aug. 7.

Halep's hold on No. 1 boosted by Keys' injury

ROME — Simona Halep's hold on the No. 1 ranking received a boost when American opponent Madison Keys withdrew from their third-round match at the Italian Open on Thursday due to a right rib injury.

Halep needed to reach the quarterfinals and progress further than No. 2 Caroline Wozniacki to hold onto the top spot, and she accomplished the first task.

Wozniacki was facing 15th-seeded Anastasiya Sevastova in a late match on the red clay of the Foro Italico.

Keys also withdrew from the doubles competition, where she was partnered with Venus Williams.

Calhoun expects to coach DIII school

WEST HARTFORD, Conn. — Hall of Fame coach Jim Calhoun says he expects to be coaching at the tiny Division III University of Saint Joseph in the fall, but still has some contractual issues with UConn to work out before that can be possible.

The 76-year-old met with the media Wednesday to discuss his new program. He has recruited about a dozen players so far in his official role as a consultant at Saint Joseph, a former all-women's school that began admitting male students for the fall semester.

Calhoun retired in 2012 after a 40-year coaching career, leading UConn to three national championships in 26 seasons there. He has been working for the Huskies in an advisory role ever since.

Calhoun says he wants to be involved at both schools and hopes to have something finalized next month that will allow him to get back to coaching.

Marchessault leads Knights to win again

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Jonathan Marchessault vowed after the Golden Knights' morning skate to come out swinging in Game 3 of the Western Conference final, looking to avoid a back-and-forth affair with the Winnipeg Jets.

He didn't disappoint.

For the second straight game, Marchessault scored two goals—including one just 35 seconds into the game—to lead Vegas to a 4-2 victory Wednesday night, helping the expansion Golden Knights to a 2-1 series lead.

Vegas, two wins from advancing to the Stanley Cup final, improved to 5-1 at home in the playoffs and host Game 4 on Friday night.

"We worked all year to get in a position like that," Marchessault said. "We definitely can't take it for granted. They got to come out like their season's on the line, so we've got to be ready to push back and get some energy off the crowd."

Marchessault added an empty-net goal with 3 seconds left, becoming the first player in league history to score in the first and last 60 seconds of the same Stanley Cup playoff game, according to the NHL. He leads Vegas with 17 points (eight goals, nine assists) in the postseason, and needs two goals to tie the NHL record for the most by a player in his club's first postseason appearance.

James Neal and Alex Tuch also scored for Vegas, while Marc-Andre Fleury stopped 33 shots.

Mark Scheifele scored both of Winni-

peg's goals and has a playoff-leading 14 goals in 15 postseason games. Connor Hellebuyck had 26 saves for the Jets, who arrived in Las Vegas having outscored their opposition 23-15 in road games during the playoffs.

"A few miscues and they made us pay for it; that can't happen," Scheifele said. "We can't sulk on this too long. We've got to pick ourselves up tomorrow and be ready for a big game on Friday."

Scheifele is correct, with history against the Jets, who are trailing in a series for the first time this postseason. Teams with a 2-1 lead in the conference final (or NHL semifinals) have won the series 35 of 43 times (81.4 percent) since 1975.

"That's an important challenge," Jets coach Paul Maurice said. "We're going to have to be able to handle that. It would be rare that you lead the series straight through. We want to make sure we deal with our loss, don't carry it too heavily and then come up with our finest game of the post-season."

The problem for Winnipeg is stopping a Golden Knights team that is finally seeing production from the depth of its lineup.

While Marchessault got things going early to give the Golden Knights a 1-0 lead, their second line of Neal, Tuch and Erik Haula continued to heat up.

After Scheifele tied the game in the second period, Neal answered 12 seconds later after Haula dished a perfect pass to give the Knights a 2-1 lead. Tuch notched his fifth goal of the playoffs after Neal fed him with a nifty pass from behind the net.

"They played on the road trip, they just didn't have many chances to score and I thought they were more involved in the offense and they were skating, and they played really well," Vegas coach Gerard Gallant said about his second line.

Scheifele's second goal of the game 18 seconds into the third seemingly sparked the Jets, but they couldn't solve Fleury, who made several huge saves late in the game to preserve Vegas' lead.

After stonewalling Tyler Myers' breakaway attempt with 11:50 left in the game, he stymied Scheifele's back-to-back shot with 9:30 remaining. Less than two minutes later, he smothered the puck with a slew of players piled near the crease.

"He's made unbelievable saves," Gallant said of Fleury. "They were obviously important at a key time for us. That's Fleury. He's been great all playoffs, he's been great all year for us. He's a guy that has fun out there. I'm sweating on the bench yelling my head off and I look down there and he's just having fun."

Winnipeg pulled Hellebuyck with 1:03 left, but Marchessault's empty-netter with 3 seconds left sealed the win.

"I didn't imagine it in October and November, but come around January, we knew we had a good hockey team," Gallant said. "I didn't know if we'd go this far right now, but I knew we had (as good) a chance as anybody else. Early January, around the All-Star game, I was a strong believer in our team. I knew we were going to battle well, compete well and no one was going to push us over, that's for sure."

Rockets rout Warriors behind balanced attack

Associated Press

HOUSTON — The Houston Rockets were the best team in the NBA in the regular season.

They played like it Wednesday night, using a balanced scoring attack to rout the Golden State Warriors 127-105 and even the Western Conference finals at one game apiece.

James Harden and Eric Gordon each scored 27 points on a night Houston had five players score 16 points or more.

"We can beat anybody, anywhere at any time playing the way we play," coach Mike D'Antoni said.

The Rockets didn't trail after the first quarter and led by dou-

ble digits for most of the night. They head to Oakland, Calif., for Game 3 on Sunday night feeling much better after rebounding from a deflating 119-106 loss in the series opener.

P.J. Tucker added a playoff career-high 22 and Trevor Ariza had 19 as both bounced back after struggling in Game 1. Tucker had just one point in that game and Ariza scored eight, but was limited on defense after collecting his fifth foul early in the third quarter.

"I never worry about my offense ... it's all on defense," Tucker said. "If we get stops we'll be able to run. It changes the game and it changes the way we play and we know

that."

Kevin Durant had 38 points after scoring 37 in the opener, but Stephen Curry and Klay Thompson combined for just 24 points after the pair went for 46 in Game 1.

Houston wasn't able to slow down Durant, but did a much better job of limiting open three-pointers by Thompson and Curry, and the two made just 3 of 12 attempts.

"They were desperate tonight and played like it, and we weren't and it showed," Golden State coach Steve Kerr said.

The Warriors made three free throws to get within 11 early in the fourth quarter before the Rockets scored the

next 11 points, with threes from Gordon, Tucker and Harden to make it 111-89 with about 6½ minutes to play.

Durant made a basket after that, but Houston scored the next eight points to extend the lead to 119-91 with about five minutes left.

The Warriors got frustrated in that stretch, with Durant getting a technical for shoving Harden in the back and Draymond Green pushing Ariza out of bounds seconds later. It was then that Kerr sent all of his starters to the bench for good.

"We got outplayed the whole game ... we got it handed to us," Kerr said.

Verlander hurls shutout against Angels

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Justin Verlander is not prone to sentimentality.

More excited about getting out of a jam than getting his 2,500th strikeout, Verlander put both his flair for the moment and his enduring greatness on full display Wednesday night in a classic masterpiece on the mound.

The right-hander threw a five-hitter for his first shutout in three years and Evan Gattis hit a two-run homer as the Houston Astros beat the Los Angeles Angels 2-0.

"Pretty much a clinic on how to pitch," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "I mean, it's just an epic performance by a really good pitcher. It's fun to win a series, especially against a team like this. Even more sweet when one of your best carries you on his back."

Verlander (5-2) was superb in ending his two-game skid, finishing with seven strikeouts to reach 2,500 for his career. He walked one and lowered his ERA from 1.21 to 1.05.

It was the fourth time this season he's

gone at least six innings without giving up a run.

With his supermodel wife, Kate Upton, applauding in the crowd, Verlander threw 118 pitches in his 24th career complete game and first since 2016 with Detroit. Two runners were on when he retired Zack Cozart on an infield popup to polish off his eighth major league shutout and first since 2015 with the Tigers.

Gattis' fourth home run came off hard-luck loser Garrett Richards (4-2) in the second inning after a two-out throwing error by Cozart at third base. Gattis has three home runs in his last five games.

That was enough for Verlander, who did not allow a runner past first base for the first seven innings. Andrelton Simmons singled in the second and Albert Pujols singled in the fourth.

The Angels finally put pressure on the Astros' ace in the eighth. Ian Kinsler got a one-out single and Kole Calhoun hit a ground-rule double, putting two runners in scoring position. But then Verlander threw a called third strike past pinch-hitter Luis

Valbuena and got Mike Trout to ground out softly on a check-swing.

After escaping the jam unscathed, Verlander pumped both arms and then his right fist.

"Here's the game right here. Can you get out the best player in the world? Yeah, I was pretty excited about it," Verlander said.

Trout went 0-for-4. Shohei Ohtani was 0-for-4 with three strikeouts, going down swinging on three pitches to start the ninth for Verlander's 2,500th strikeout. But it wasn't time to reflect, not for the intensely focused Verlander with Pujols coming up.

"I don't know if 2,500 punches is the one to do that," Verlander said. "I know I'm creeping up on 200 wins, so maybe that's an opportunity to really kind of sit down and think about the gravity of some things, but it's something I'm working on."

Pujols singled with two outs and Verlander walked Andrelton Simmons before retiring Cozart.

"Verlander, when he smells the end of a game, that's when he really turns it up," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said.

MLB roundup

Dodgers' skid reaches six games at Miami

Associated Press

MIAMI — The Miami Marlins pulled even with the Los Angeles Dodgers in the standings Wednesday night, which shows how sour the season has gone for the defending National League champions.

Los Angeles erased a four-run deficit and still endured its sixth loss in a row when J.T. Realmuto's tiebreaking homer in the sixth inning helped Miami win 6-5.

"It's the same story: We just didn't get it done," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said.

Miami clinched the series after another last-place team, Cincinnati, swept a four-game set at Los Angeles last week. The Dodgers and the rebuilding Marlins have identical 16-26 records.

Rangers 5, Mariners 1: Bartolo Colon laughed off having Jean Segura's line drive hit him in the stomach, allowing four hits in 7²/₃ shutout innings and giving Texas a win

over host Seattle.

Colon (2-1), who turns 45 on May 24, struck out two, walked none and threw 71 of 96 pitches for strikes.

Red Sox 6, Athletics 4: Xander Bogaerts hit a three-run homer, J.D. Martinez added a two-run shot and Boston avoided its first series sweep this season by beating visiting Oakland.

Braves 4, Cubs 1: Ronald Acuna Jr. drove in Ozzie Albies with the tiebreaking run in the eighth inning to send host Atlanta past Chicago.

Phillies 4, Orioles 1: Nick Pivetta (3-2) tied a career-high with 11 strikeouts, and Cesar Hernandez homered as visiting Philadelphia (24-16) climbed eight games over .500 for the first time since the end of the 2011 season.

Pirates 3, White Sox 2: At Pittsburgh, pinch-hitter Josh Bell singled off Joakim Soria (0-2) to break a 2-2 tie in the seventh.

Pittsburgh has won seven of eight and improved to 10-2 in interleague play this season. Chicago has lost eight of nine and 13 of 15. A major league-worst 10-29, the White Sox have matched their worst start since 1948.

Indians 6, Tigers 0: Trevor Bauer (3-3) struck out 10 in eight innings and allowed four hits as visiting Cleveland avoided a three-game sweep.

Cardinals 7, Twins 5: Dexter Fowler reached base four times and drove in two runs in his return to the lineup for visiting St. Louis, Matt Carpenter had three hits after being demoted to seventh in the batting order, and Tommy Pham added two hits, including his eighth homer of the year.

Blue Jays 12, Mets 1: J.A. Happ (5-3) reached three times and allowed only two runners over seven innings, and Toronto got its first road victory at the Mets after going 0-12.

Happ struck out 10 while

pitching two-hit ball. The left-hander also singled twice and walked in his first multihit game since 2011, when he had two hits for Houston at Citi Field.

Rays 5, Royals 3: C.J. Cron homered and scored three runs, and visiting Tampa Bay completed a three-game sweep of woeful Kansas City.

Brewers 8, Diamondbacks 2: At Phoenix, Travis Shaw, Domingo Santana, Christian Yelich and Tyler Saladino homered in the first four innings off Matt Koch (2-2), who allowed all eight runs.

Reds 6, Giants 3: Scooter Gennett homered a half-inning after the second baseman saved two runs with a diving catch on a difficult popup, helping Cincinnati avoid a sweep. Adam Duvall hit a three-run homer in the first, and Jared Hughes (2-2) pitched two scoreless innings as visiting Cincinnati won for the seventh time in nine games.