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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Obama vowed to end 2 wars, may leave 3

The Washington Post

President Barack Obama's decision to expand the U.S. war effort in Iraq and Syria is a reflection of the conflicting pressures on a commander in chief who doubts that military force alone can end the conflicts in those countries, but who also feels compelled to act in the face of a humanitarian catastrophe and a growing threat to the United States.

The president on Friday said that he was sending about 50 special operations troops to northern Syria to work with Kurdish and Arab fighters battling the Islamic State group. The deployment, though small, marks the first full-time deployment of U.S. forces to the dangerous and chaotic country.

The troops will be accompanied by more U.S. attack planes, based across the border in Turkey, and plans for more joint raids — led by Iraqi counterterrorism forces — to capture and kill Islamic State leaders.

The troops, planes and plans for more raids represent an “intensification” of the president's existing strategy, said senior administration officials. Few of those officials, however, suggested that the moves would be enough to break open the stalemated conflict or to produce sudden battlefield gains.

“This is a very complex battle space, and we're not directly involved in the way we've been in the past,” said a senior administration official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

Without a clear, overarching strategy to resolve the conflict, “we're looking at things in a granular way,” the official said. The goal for now is simply to incrementally reinforce those areas that are working and to abandon initiatives that are not.

‘Theory of the case’

Obama began his second term having brought one war in Iraq to an end and pledging to bring home America's ground troops from a second in Afghanistan. To that end, he set hard limits on U.S. deployments and firm time frames for the withdrawal of U.S. forces.

Before deploying forces, Obama would regularly demand that his commanders explain the “theory of the case” behind the moves. The phrase is evocative of the president's legal training and his deep

skepticism that U.S. military power can bring lasting change to broken societies. He wanted assurances that the operations would work as intended as well as coherent explanations of how and when they would end.

As he nears the end of his presidency, Obama faces the prospect that he will leave office with ground forces deployed to three combat zones.

Last month, the president said he would keep 5,500 ground troops in Afghanistan to advise the struggling Afghan army and to pursue the remnants of al-Qaida. In Iraq and Syria, the president has incrementally boosted the U.S. force, beginning an initial deployment of several hundred troops to Iraq in 2014, after Iraqi army forces in Mosul were overrun by Islamic State fighters. The president sent 450 more American trainers and advisers after Iraqi forces were routed at Ramadi by a much smaller Islamic State force in the spring.

Those forces were supposed to work with the Iraqi army and local tribal fighters to plan an offensive on Ramadi that has largely stalled. “We have four axes converging on Ramadi, and on any given day, none of them makes any movement at all,” said a senior U.S. official involved in the war planning.

Frustrated with the lack of progress, Obama in July made a rare visit to the Pentagon to push Defense Secretary Ash Carter and his top commanders for options to increase the intensity of U.S. military operations without putting U.S. troops in a direct combat role.

More ambitious and costly measures such as no-fly zones or buffer zones that would require tens of thousands of ground troops to effectively protect civilians were rejected. Democratic presidential front-runner Hillary Rodham Clinton has said that she favors a no-fly zone in Syria. Other riskier proposals, such as the introduction of Apache helicopters or combat advisers who would move closer to the front lines and call in airstrikes or bolster the Iraqi attack on Ramadi, weren't explicitly rejected but were deemed unnecessary for now.

The president's final decision balanced his desire for the United States to do more with his determination to keep American forces from being pulled too deeply into conflicts in which U.S. effectiveness was limited or where there were no clear military solutions.

The 50 special operations troops and the new attack planes heading to Syria and Turkey will bolster Kurdish and Syrian Arab forces that were able to make surprising gains during the summer with the backing of U.S. warplanes.

“The success in northern Syria wasn't the result of any strategic planning,” said a senior defense official who tracks operations in the region. “Really, it was an opportunity that fell into our laps.”

Syrian Arab and Kurdish forces have fought to within 30 miles of Raqqa, the Islamic State's de facto capital. With additional American help, U.S. officials said the fighters could isolate the city, cutting its supply lines running up to the Syrian border.

Obama's caution criticized

Over the longer term, U.S. officials said that a loose coalition of Syrian Arab, Turkmen and Kurdish fighters might be able to dislodge the Islamic State from a 68-mile stretch of the border, creating a space where refugees can find haven. The hope is that the coalition also can begin to provide some level of governance and take part in diplomatic negotiations to replace Syrian President Bashar Assad.

But even the most optimistic U.S. officials said such an outcome could take years.

In the near term, administration officials expressed cautious optimism that the combination of more U.S. air power, a bigger Iraqi push against Islamic State forces in Ramadi along with Kurdish and Syrian Arab efforts in Raqqa and along the border could shift the momentum on the battlefield.

So far, it's a strategy that hasn't drawn much support in Washington. Republicans and some Democrats, who have been pressing Obama to do more, criticized the president's caution.

“His incremental, step-by-step approach is an effort to manage risk and keep tight reins on the mission, but ultimately it could mean that the whole is less than the sum of its parts,” said Michele Flournoy, the chief executive officer of the Center for a New American Security, who was among Obama's top choices to be defense secretary last year before Carter was selected.

“If he took these actions all at once, it could have a greater impact,” she said.

Essex group, 15th MEU on to the Pacific

BY CHRIS CHURCH
Stars and Stripes

MANAMA, Bahrain — The Essex Amphibious Ready Group and 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit departed the 5th Fleet area of responsibility Sunday en route to the Pacific, to be replaced by the Kearsarge Amphibious Ready Group and the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit.

Since arriving in June, the Essex group — the multipurpose amphibious assault ship USS Essex, the amphibious transport dock USS Anchorage and the amphibious dock landing ship USS Rushmore — has spread its assets across the region. During one six-week period, personnel from the group were deployed to 11 countries, and the ships were separately in the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Aden and off the Kenyan coast, said Lt. Col. Steve Kahn, operations officer for the Marine Expeditionary Unit, which is attached to the ready group. In addition to launching strikes against the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria, the Essex group conducted joint operations and exercises with coalition partners, the Navy said.

The region is a vital transit route for one-fifth of the world's oil supply. Maritime operations have picked up pace during the past year, with U.S. ships heavily involved in the U.S.-led campaign against the Islamic State and monitoring moves by Iran and the situation in Yemen.

Although the Essex group was spread out at times, commanding officer said it could converge quickly if needed.

"There is no other nation in the world that could aggregate as much combat power as we can aggregate in as little time," Capt. Clint Carroll said.

The Essex group is scheduled to return to its home port, San Diego, next month after continuing operations with the 7th Fleet in the Pacific. The Kearsarge group arrived Saturday.

Russian airline cites external impact as cause of crash

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG — Only an external impact could have caused a Russian plane to dive into the Egyptian desert, killing all 224 people on board, Metrojet airline officials said Monday, adding to a series of confusing statements from investigators that left unclear why the plane broke up in mid-flight.

"We rule out a technical fault of the plane or a pilot error," Alexander Smirnov, deputy general director of Metrojet, told a news conference Monday in Moscow. "The only possible explanation could be an external impact on the airplane."

Russian aviation authorities were quick to chide the company for jumping the gun on the investigation, calling its comments premature.

Smirnov said the plane

dropped 186 mph in speed and about 5,000 feet in altitude one minute before it crashed Saturday.

When pressed for more details about the type of impact and what could have caused it, Smirnov insisted that he was not at liberty to discuss details because the investigation was ongoing. He also did not explain whether he meant something had hit the plane or that some external factor had caused the crash.

Smirnov described the A321-200 as a reliable aircraft that would not fall into a spin even if the pilots made a grave error because its automatic systems would correct crew mistakes.

The Airbus A321-200 was flying at 31,000 feet over the Sinai Peninsula when it crashed just 23 minutes after taking off from the Egyptian Red Sea resort of

Sharm el-Sheikh en route to St. Petersburg.

Asked about Metrojet's claim of an external impact, the head of the Russian aviation agency, Alexander Neraedko, decried Metrojet's comments as "premature and not based on any real facts." He urged aviation experts "to refrain from drawing conclusions" at this stage of the probe.

Viktor Yung, another deputy director general of Metrojet, said the crew did not send a distress call and they did not contact traffic controllers before the crash. His comments directly contradicted those of an Egyptian official, who said previously the pilot radioed that the plane was experiencing technical problems and he intended to try to land at the nearest airport.

Obama signs 2-year budget, debt deal

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama on Monday signed into law a bipartisan budget bill that avoids a catastrophic U.S. default and puts off the next round of fighting over federal spending and debt until after next year's

presidential and congressional elections.

Obama praised the rare bipartisan cooperation behind the deal, saying the two-year agreement puts the government on a responsible path.

"It should finally free us from the cycle of shutdown

threats and last-minute fixes and allows us to, therefore, plan for the future," Obama said in brief remarks as he signed the bill.

Tuesday was the deadline for averting a default on U.S. financial obligations by raising the debt limit.

Flooding forces restrictions at Sigonella

Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — Flooding near the Sicilian city of Catania forced the nearby U.S. Navy base in Sigonella to close schools and to cancel nonessential services Monday.

Heavy rain on Sunday left 6 to 8 inches of standing water near the base's Marinai housing complex.

Italian authorities closed highway SP-105/106 in the direction of NAS 1, one of two sites that make up Naval Air Station Sigonella. The highway remained open in the other direction, toward NAS 2, where the base flight line is located, although standing water made passage difficult in some parts, the base reported.

Nonessential base personnel

were told not to report to work early Monday, and the base also closed Sigonella Middle-High School, located on NAS 1. Infant day care and school-age child care were still available at NAS 1.

Officials in Catania already had closed city schools and prohibited motorcycle riding due to flooding from Sunday downpours.

Royals rally, end 30-year title drought

Associated Press

NEW YORK — They worked all season to take one more step in the World Series. Eric Hosmer wouldn't wait any longer.

Hosmer's daring dash forced extra innings, and those bound-and-determined Kansas City Royals rallied yet again to beat the New York Mets 7-2 in 12 innings early Monday for their first championship since 1985.

One agonizing win from ecstasy last season, this time the Royals reign after their latest incredible comeback and a go-ahead hit in Game 5 from Christian Colon, maybe the most unlikely player in uniform.

So go ahead and crown 'em, Kansas City! The job is finally done.

"From Day One, there was no doubt in my mind that they wouldn't accomplish it. There was no doubt in their mind that they wouldn't accomplish it," manager Ned Yost said. "It's just a special, special group that doesn't come around very often."

Down 2-0 in the ninth, Kansas City fought back against two of the top arms on the pitching-rich Mets: Matt Harvey and Jeurys Familia. And the Royals did it not with home run power but instead a sprint home by Hosmer, a three-run double by Lorenzo Cain, a couple of crucial steals.

Consistent contact, keep the line moving.

"I couldn't have written a better script," Yost said.

That's how Series MVP Salvador Perez and the Royals became the first team since the 2002 Angels to come from behind in all four World Series wins, according to STATS.

That's how they washed out the bitter taste of last year's Game 7 loss to San Francisco at home, an October heartbreak that drove the Royals to their sin-

gular focus all season.

Never waver. Win it all this time. Wipe the pain away.

"Kansas City is No. 1. Who cares about what happened last year?" Perez said.

To get back where they were last fall — 90 feet from tying the Giants in the ninth inning — the Royals played more than 50,000 pitches of baseball and flew nearly 30,000 miles while crisscrossing the country.

Now, this group of homegrown favorites who revitalized a floundering franchise, Mike Moustakas and Alex Gordon and Hosmer to name a few, can finally rest and rejoice.

Not to be forgotten, major contributions from new additions assembled by general manager Dayton Moore like Ben Zobrist, Johnny Cueto, Kendrys Morales, Chris Young and Alex Rios.

All together, they take their place in Royals history alongside George Brett, Bret Saberhagen, Willie Wilson and those unexpected champs from 30 years ago.

And next up, Tuesday's parade in Kansas City to celebrate the club's second title, capped with a party at historic Union Station.

With no margin for error, Harvey put the Mets' last hope in his hands and hung on as long as he could. After eight scoreless innings, he pushed to pitch the ninth and finally faltered.

"Obviously, I let my heart get in the way of my gut. I love my players. And I trust them," manager Terry Collins said. "It didn't work. It was my fault."

New York slugger Yoenis Cespedes exited with knee pain but Curtis Granderson hit a leadoff homer, his third long ball of the Series, and the Mets managed a 2-0 lead against heavy-hearted Royals starter Edinson Volquez, pitching one day after returning from his father's funeral.

But for these resilient Royals, no deficit is too large, no time in the game too late.

"We never quit. We never put our heads down," Perez said. "We always compete to the last out."

Perez looped a leadoff single in the 12th off losing pitcher Addison Reed, and pinch-runner Jarrod Dyson stole second. One out later, Colon stepped in as a pinch-hitter for his first plate appearance since the regular-season finale Oct. 4.

Hardly rusty, he lined a 1-2 pitch into left-center and pounded his chest at first base.

Alcides Escobar added an RBI double, and Cain's bases-loaded double off Bartolo Colon broke it open.

Royals reliever Luke Hochevar, drafted No. 1 overall by the team in 2006, pitched two hitless innings for the win.

All that was left was for Wade Davis to close it out. He threw a called third strike past Wilmer Flores to end it and tossed his glove high in the air as the Royals rushed toward the mound to celebrate.

Out in the Midwest, fireworks popped from Missouri to cities all over Kansas. Thousands of fans crammed into the Power & Light District in Kansas City, celebrating as though it was New Year's Eve.

At Citi Field, hundreds of Royals fans dressed in blue descended toward the Kansas City dugout to cheer their champs. Perez received his MVP award after the catcher hit .364.

Later, the Mets came back onto the field to salute a smaller pocket of fans who stuck around for one last chant of "Let's go, Mets!"

It was the eighth comeback victory for Kansas City this postseason, matching a mark also held by the 1997 Marlins and 2002 Angels, STATS said. The tenacious Royals trailed by at least two runs in a record seven of those games — including when they staved off elimination by overcoming a 6-2 deficit in the eighth inning of an AL playoff game in Houston.

Fired up all night, Harvey was at 102 pitches following a 1-2-3 eighth and stalked briskly back to the dugout with one purpose in mind. There, cameras caught him telling Collins — in no uncertain terms — he was going back out for the ninth.

"I wanted it bad. The way the game was going, the last thing I wanted to do was not finish what I started," Harvey said. "I poured my heart out and gave everything I had."

Collins relented, and a huge roar went up as Harvey bounded off the bench and sprinted to the mound, looking for his second complete game in the majors. But he walked Cain on a full-count slider, and Hosmer hit an RBI double.

Harvey was pulled for Familia, and Hosmer advanced on Moustakas' ground-out to the right side.

So up stepped Perez with the potential tying run 90 feet away, same as last year when he fouled out against Giants ace Madison Bumgarner to end the World Series.

This time, Perez got jammed and hit a slow grounder to third baseman David Wright, who froze Hosmer with a glance and threw across the diamond for the second out.

Hosmer, however, bolted for the plate when Wright released the ball. First baseman Lucas Duda fired wide of catcher Travis d'Arnaud — a good throw probably would have been in time — and Hosmer made a headfirst dive home with the tying run.

Hosmer celebrated with excited teammates, while Familia was saddled with his third blown save of the Series, though two were the result of shaky defense.

"They definitely put their foot on the gas the entire series on the basepaths, and this is just another example," Wright said.

Gordon clinches spot in Chase's final four

Associated Press

MARTINSVILLE, Va. — As the adoring crowd lingered in the darkness at Martinsville Speedway, Jeff Gordon took a moment to soak it in.

In a 23-year career that is one long highlight reel, his victory Sunday overwhelmed the NASCAR great. He had just earned a spot in the championship race, a chance to race for an elusive fifth title. It was, in his mind, "one of my finest moments I've ever had."

So Gordon, who at 44 years old celebrated his ninth Martinsville win by jumping along the track like a little boy on Christmas morning, climbed into the grandstands to share the emotion of the victory with the fans.

"I don't know what it feels like to be a rock star, but that's as close as it can get," Gordon said. "That's a rock star moment right there."

He has Matt Kenseth to thank for this storybook ending to his career.

Kenseth intentionally wrecked Joey Logano — payback from an incident three races ago — to take the race leader out with 47 laps remaining. Logano had the dominant car, and Kenseth, who was in an earlier wreck with Brad Keselowski, came back on the track 10 laps down and

drove Logano into the wall.

Logano had led 207 of the 500 laps and was furious. His father, Tom, had to be pushed into the team hauler by the crew chief as the crowd cheered wildly in support of Kenseth.

Although NASCAR chairman Brian France has championed on-track incidents, Kenseth could be sanctioned because he was not racing for the win.

"I think what was disappointing ... a driver that's not competing for a win, in fact, was many laps down when that happened, in our minds, that's a little bit different than two drivers really going after it coming out of turn four for a win," said Steve O'Donnell, head of NASCAR's racing operations.

Denny Hamlin, who last week accused Kevin Harvick of deliberately causing an accident to preserve his spot in the Chase for the Sprint Cup championship field, said the level of aggression is out of hand. He's teammates with Kenseth, and both were eliminated from title contention last week.

"It's a no-holds-barred, Wild, Wild West," Hamlin said. "The structure in which we have around us is not very strong as far as an authority figure saying, 'No, you cannot do that anymore.'"

"I love Brian France, but when he says that drivers are

'doing what they have to do,' it seems like he's promoting this type of racing. That's tough to crown a true champion when things go like this."

Kenseth downplayed the incident, deadpanning it was a result of an earlier incident with Keselowski, who had led 143 laps as the two Team Penske teammates were the class of the field. Instead of celebrating a win and a spot in the Nov. 22 finale at Homestead-Miami Speedway, Logano is last in the eight-driver field and Keselowski is sixth.

There are two races remaining for the rest of the final four to be set, and Logano has a lot of work to do to make it back to the finale for the second year.

Kenseth tried hard to dismiss the incident Sunday as a byproduct of earlier contact with Keselowski — a wreck that sent both Kenseth and Keselowski to the garage. But he was summoned to the NASCAR hauler after the race for a meeting that his crew chief and car owner Joe Gibbs attended.

The four-time NASCAR champion Gordon won for the first time this season and first time in 39 races. It was his 93rd career victory, ninth at Martinsville, and put him in position to ride into retirement with the long coveted fifth title. His last title was in 2001.



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Manning, Broncos top Pack

Associated Press

DENVER — In only the fourth meeting of teams 6-0 or better, Peyton Manning tied Brett Favre's NFL record with his 186th regular-season win and Denver rattled Aaron Rodgers into one of the worst games of his career in the Broncos' 29-10 victory over the Green Bay Packers on Sunday night.

Wearing the blue jerseys they did in beating the Packers for their first Super Bowl win in 1997, the Broncos piled it on in the fourth quarter, when DeMarcus Ware sacked Rodgers and the ball ended up in the end zone for a safety.

The Broncos improved to 7-0 for the first time since 1998, when they won the Super Bowl after finishing 14-2.

Rodgers was 14 of 22 for just 77 yards for the Packers (6-1) — the lowest of his career in a game where he wasn't knocked out by injury.

Although neither quarterback threw for a touchdown, Manning was 21 of 29 for 340 yards. The Packers had only 140 yards of total offense to Denver's 500.

Saints 52, Giants 49: Drew Brees passed for career highs of 511 yards and seven touchdowns, and recently signed Kai Forbath kicked a 50-yard field goal as time ran out, giving host New Orleans the victory in a game with a record 13 scoring passes.

Eli Manning connected on a career-high six touchdown passes, three to fellow New Orleans native Odell Beckham Jr., but New York fell for the second time in three games.

The 101 points tied for third most in NFL history. The teams combined for 1,030 yards.

Bengals 16, Steelers 10: Ben Roethlisberger's return wasn't enough to prevent visiting Cincinnati from getting off to their best start in franchise history.

Andy Dalton threw a touchdown pass with 2:57 to go, and the Bengals picked off Roethlisberger twice in the fourth

quarter.

Seahawks 13, Cowboys 12: Russell Wilson had a scoring pass for the game's only touchdown and directed a late drive to the winning field goal, leading defending NFC champions Seattle back to .500 after an 0-2 start.

Host Dallas lost its fifth straight without Tony Romo in Dez Bryant's return from a five-game absence with a broken right foot.

Buccaneers 23, Falcons 20 (OT): Bouncing back after blowing a 17-point lead, visiting Milwaukee got a 31-yard field goal from Connor Barth in the extra period to beat mistake-prone Atlanta.

Matt Ryan tied the game for the Falcons on an 8-yard pass to Julio Jones with 17 seconds left in regulation.

Jameis Winston led an impressive drive on the first possession of OT, converting three times on third down before the drive stalled when he short-hopped a pass into the end zone for an open Adam Humphries. Barth made his third field goal of the game.

Cardinals 34, Browns 20: Carson Palmer threw for four touchdowns, three in the second half, and for 374 yards as visiting Arizona rallied.

Palmer had two TD passes in the third quarter when Arizona overcame a 20-10 halftime deficit. His third TD of the second half, a 6-yarder to Larry Fitzgerald, gave Arizona a 31-20 lead.

Michael Floyd had a 60-yard TD catch and tight end Troy Niklas had two short TD receptions as the Cardinals overcame four turnovers and won in Cleveland for the first time since 1985.

Vikings 23, Bears 20: Adrian Peterson ran for 103 yards and Blair Walsh kicked a 36-yard field goal as time expired.

Minnesota had dropped seven straight at Soldier Field, and it looked like the streak would reach eight when Jay Cutler rolled to his right and plowed over safety Harrison Smith for a 4-yard touchdown with just under five minutes remaining. But two late scores lifted Minnesota to its

third straight win.

Ravens 29, Chargers 26: Justin Tucker kicked a 39-yard field goal on the final play. Joe Flacco threw for 319 yards and ran for a score to help host Baltimore snap a three-game skid and hand San Diego its fourth straight defeat.

The victory came at a price: Receiver Steve Smith tore his right Achilles tendon in the third quarter and is lost for the season. After being tackled at the end of an 18-yard gain, the 36-year-old Smith had to be helped off the field and could not put any weight on his right leg.

Rams 27, 49ers 6: Todd Gurley rushed for 133 yards on 20 carries, topping 100 yards for the fourth straight start to open his career, and host St. Louis had three sacks and a safety.

Gurley, who had a 71-yard touchdown run, is the first rookie to open his career with four consecutive 100-yard games, according to STATS, with data available since 1991.

Raiders 34, Jets 20: Derek Carr threw for 333 yards and four touchdowns to help host Oakland pick apart New York's vaunted defense.

Latavius Murray ran for 113 yards, Andre Holmes caught two touchdown passes and Charles Woodson intercepted his league-leading fifth pass of the season to give the Raiders their first winning record this late in the season since 2011.

Texans 20, Titans 6: Brian Hoyer threw for 235 yards and two touchdowns, and host Houston tied a franchise record with seven sacks.

A 21-yard touchdown reception by DeAndre Hopkins put Houston on top in the second quarter and the Texans didn't trail after that. Nate Washington's 42-yard TD catch extended the lead.

Zach Mettenberger threw for 171 yards with an interception in his second straight start in place of rookie Marcus Mariota, who is out with a knee injury.

Heat rally to rout Rockets

Associated Press

MIAMI — Udonis Haslem didn't play a single second for the Miami Heat on Sunday night.

Instead, he dominated halftime. Haslem's fiery speech — replete with some profanity from the tri-captain and a couple of bottles getting angrily spiked into the red locker room carpeting for emphasis — led to a Miami turnaround, the Heat outscoring Houston by 41 points in the final 23 minutes and rolling past the Houston Rockets 109-89.

"Absolutely awesome," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said about the speech. "That's what leaders do. By the time I got in there, he was already halfway through it and there wasn't much that was needed to be said after that."

Miami was down 65-44 early in the second half. The Heat outscored Houston 65-24 the rest of the way.

Hassan Whiteside had 25 points and 15 rebounds, Wade scored 20 points and Luol Deng scored 14 for Miami — which enjoyed its biggest comeback win since a 27-point rally at Cleveland late in the 2012-13 championship season. Tyler Johnson scored 11, Chris Bosh had all 10 of his in the fourth and Justise Winslow added 10 for the Heat.

Marcus Thornton scored 21 points for Houston, and James Harden had 16 on 2-for-15 shooting — 0-for-10 from three-point range. The Rockets have dropped each of their first three games by exactly 20 points each.

Mavericks 103, Lakers 93: Dirk Nowitzki scored 25 points and visiting Dallas held off a late rally by winless Los Angeles.

The Mavericks opened the game with a 15-0 blitz that included two three-pointers each by Wesley Matthews and Nowitzki — the latter has made more three-point shots than any 7-footer in league history (1,580).

Thunder 117, Nuggets 93: Kevin Durant scored 25 points to help host Oklahoma City beat Denver.

Durant made 8 of 11 field goals and all six of his free throws to help new coach Billy Donovan remain unbeaten in the NBA.

Bulls 92, Magic 87: Pau Gasol and Nikola Mirotic each scored 16 points and Chicago withstood a late surge from visiting Orlando.

Orlando cut the lead to two with just under 3 minutes left before Chicago's Jimmy Butler jumped to intercept a pass and squelch the comeback bid.

Hawks 94, Hornets 92: Kent Bazemore scored 20 points, Al Horford added 16 points and 12 rebounds and Atlanta held on to beat host Charlotte for the second time in three days.

The Hornets had a chance to tie the game at the buzzer, but Kemba Walker's 17-footer from the left wing hit the back rim and bounced out.

Spurs 95, Celtics 87: LaMarcus Aldridge had 24 points and 14 rebounds, Kawhi Leonard added 19 points and San Antonio beat host Boston.

Manu Ginobili scored 13 points and Boris Diaw had 10 for the Spurs.

Raptors 106, Bucks 87: Dwane Casey got his franchise-record 157th win as coach of Toronto with a victory over visiting Milwaukee.

The milestone came in his 315th game with the Raptors, besting the previous record held by current Minnesota Timberwolves coach Sam Mitchell.

Fleischmann's two lift Canadiens

Associated Press

MONTREAL — It doesn't matter who is in goal for the Montreal Canadiens with the offense taking care of business on the other end of the ice.

Tomas Fleischmann scored twice and added an assist and David Desharnais had a goal and two assists to lift the Canadiens to a 5-1 win over the Winnipeg Jets on Sunday night.

It marked the 12th time in 13 games this season that Montreal (11-2-0) has scored at least three goals in a game and the sixth time it has scored at least four.

"Any goalie isn't going to complain about the team scoring goals," said rookie goaltender Mike Condon, who made 18 saves for his fourth win in four starts. "We play good defensively and that translates into offense. I'm very fortunate for that and it's very fun to watch."

Condon was the unexpected starter after it was announced Sunday morning that Carey Price would miss the next week with a lower-body injury.

"I'm not going to try and be Carey. I don't think anyone can," the 25-year-old Condon said. "I'm just going to try and keep the spot warm for him."

The Jets couldn't generate much against the Canadiens and saw their two-game

winning streak snapped.

"We weren't very good," Jets coach Paul Maurice said. "They were really good. I can't tell you if they were really good because we were really bad or vice versa. We just didn't have any jump, and that's it."

Paul Byron's second short-handed breakaway goal in two games got the offense going for Montreal, which remains unbeaten at home this season (5-0).

Fleischmann made it 2-0 with 3:34 remaining. Desharnais carried the puck into the Jets' zone along the right side and held off a defender as he cut in front. Hutchison made the save on Desharnais' shot but Fleischmann picked up the rebound and tucked it past the goalie's left side.

Fleischmann scored his second of the night just 35 seconds into the second period. Quick puck movement got the puck out of the Canadiens' end and up to the winger, whose snap shot from the right circle beat Hutchison.

"Just pretty good support on the ice," Fleischmann said of his line's success, picking up where it left off after a seven-point night in Calgary on Friday. "We help each other. It's a simple formula but it works for us."

Ducks 4, Predators 2: Chris Stewart

had a goal and two assists, Frederick Andersen stopped 40 shots for host Anaheim.

Rickard Rakell, Sami Vatanen and Andrew Coglianor also scored to help the Ducks snap a five-game skid (0-4-1) and get their second win in 11 games (2-8-2).

Sabres 2, Islanders 1: Sam Reinhart broke a tie with 6:16 remaining to rally visiting Buffalo past the Islanders.

Matt Moulson also scored in the third period and Linus Ullmark stopped 29 shots to help the Sabres win their second straight and third in their last five.

Lightning 4, Hurricanes 3: Ryan Callahan and Steven Stamkos scored in the second period to help visiting Tampa Bay snap a four-game losing streak.

J.T. Brown and Tyler Johnson scored in the third as the Lightning beat the Hurricanes for the 10th time in the last 12 meetings. Andrei Vasilevsky finished with 31 saves.

Sharks 4, Avalanche 3: Brent Burns broke a tie with 1:39 left to help San Jose beat host Colorado.

Burns made it 3-2 when he came down the right boards and sent a snap shot through traffic and past goalie Semyon Varlamov. The goal was upheld under review.