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'JUST A NORMAL DAY'

USS Lassen CO discusses South China Sea transit

BY TARA COPP
Stars and Stripes

ABOARD THE USS THEODORE ROOSEVELT, South China Sea — A few days before the USS Lassen challenged China's territorial claims in the South China Sea, the bridge was chatting by radio with their shadowing Chinese destroyer, talking about pizza.

The Chinese Luyang 1-class ship, similar in size and makeup to the Lassen, had approached a few days earlier and tagged along as the Navy ship approached a string of disputed islands that China has expanded and developed with runways and other facilities.

The Lassen was on a mission to show that the 12 miles of water extending from those islands are — and will remain — international territory. As it approached and entered what China claims as its maritime exclusion zone around Subi Reef, repeated queries came from the Chinese ship about its intentions.

It was a transit that made headlines and escalated the disagreement over China's increasing aggression in the South China Sea, where an estimated 30 percent of global trade transits. Diplomacy has since failed to ease the tensions, with the U.S. vowing to continue such freedom of navigation cruises and the Chinese warning there are limits to

what it will accept.

But in the days leading up to that sail and after, the two Chinese and American ships were just operating as they do every day in this vast sea — two crews maintaining cordially professional relations, which when you are this far from home, often means talking about what's for dinner.

"Every day a U.S. ship is down here, we interact with the Chinese," said Cmdr. Robert Christopher Francis, who took command of the Lassen in May and immediately went on patrol.

From June to August, the ship spent most of its time around the Spratly Islands but not inside the contested 12-mile radius of any of the disputed islands that China claims. They had regular interactions with Chinese military craft, fishing vessels and merchant ships.

"We are probably looking at around 50 interactions with Chinese ships or aircraft in that period," Francis said. "And so it's another day in the South China Sea."

With the Chinese shadow ship, Francis said interactions, in English, were cordial before and after the approach within six to seven miles of Subi Reef.

"Lot of times as sailors when we are out there [there's] not a lot going on," he said. "It's not uncommon for one of my officers of the decks to pick up the radio and start talking about stuff with the Chinese sailors.

"We picked up the phone and just talked to him about 'What are you guys doing this Saturday? We got pizza and wings. What are you guys eating? We're planning for Halloween.'"

Francis said the banter is meant to show "we're sailors just like them, we have families just like them."

Francis said the Chinese crews would chat about their families and make other small talk.

"Obviously not operational details," he said. "Places they've visited. And it's pretty interesting."

But Francis knew the reason for this cruise wasn't everyday stuff, and as the ship neared Subi, the tenor from the Chinese vessel changed: "You are in Chinese waters. What is your intention?"

Francis, speaking Thursday aboard the USS Theodore Roosevelt as it cruised through the South China Sea with Defense Secretary Ash Carter on board, said the Lassen responded over and over that his ship was operating in accordance with international law.

The sail was not as tense as has been reported, Francis said.

"It's not like we were going to general quarters, all battle stations manned ready to shoot missiles," he said. "It was just a normal day."

VA looks outside its own walls, seeks private help for veterans

BY DIANNA CAHN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — With too many wounded servicemembers struggling to get timely and consistent mental health care at the Department of Veterans Affairs, the agency has been forced to look outside its own walls to get them the help they need.

Toward that goal, the VA is in talks to become involved formerly in a unique network

of private hospitals across the country that will offer free outpatient mental health care to thousands of veterans.

The Warrior Care Network was founded by the nonprofit Wounded Warrior Project with a \$70 million grant. It will launch in early 2016 at four major medical centers to diagnose, rehabilitate and design modes of care for suffering veterans. The clinicians will share their case studies and research to

document best treatments for veterans from such mental wounds as mild traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress.

It could be "a game-changer for veterans," said Jeremy Chwat, chief strategy officer at Wounded Warrior Project. "The reason we pursued this, in large part, is that in findings year over year in our survey, warriors are struggling to access mental health care on a daily basis," he said.

If bomb felled Russian jet, conflict is in new phase

Associated Press

BEIRUT — At this stage, there is no hard evidence. But reports from the U.S. and Britain suggesting an Islamic State group bomb might have caused the Russian plane crash in Egypt is raising the alarm among experts, who say such an act would be a frightening

ANALYSIS change in tactics by the extremist group.

In addition to the British and American statements, Russian officials halted flights to Egypt pending an investigation into the crash of an Airbus A321-200 on Saturday in Egypt's chaotic Sinai Peninsula, 23 minutes after takeoff.

If a bomb did bring down the airliner, it would underscore the failure so far of the U.S.-led coalition to deter the jihadis — despite the recent addition of Russia to the seemingly formidable forces arrayed against them.

While the Islamic State group claimed responsibility for deadly attacks that struck tourists in Tunisia, and Shiite mosques in oil-rich Sunni Gulf countries — claims that have not been proven — it so far has refrained from spectacular, al-Qaida-style attacks on airliners. It has focused instead on seiz-

ing and expanding territory in Syria and Iraq, and establishing branches in other countries like Egypt and Libya.

And while some attacks in the West may have been inspired by the group, there has been no clear evidence that any of them were planned or directed by the group, itself.

"The Sinai attack would be a first, and would signal that the Islamic State has become both capable of and interested in joining the dreadful ranks of global terrorism," concluded an analysis by The Soufan Group, a private geopolitical risk assessment company.

Given the Islamic State militants' success in creating mayhem in the region through its brutal tactics and ferocious fanaticism, such a metamorphosis would be a major challenge for security services around the world.

The Islamic State group said the attack was retaliation for Russia's air campaign against it and other groups in Syria, where Moscow wants to preserve the rule of President Bashar Assad. The group warned Putin that they would also target him "at home."

The Islamic State group's insistent series of responsibility claims suggests it is trying to boost its global credentials.

Citing climate, Obama rejects Keystone XL

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama rejected a presidential permit Friday for the controversial Keystone XL pipeline, citing concerns about its impact on the climate.

"America's now a global leader in taking serious action to fight climate change," Obama told reporters, standing in the Roosevelt Room beside Vice President Joe Biden and Secretary of State John Kerry. "And frankly, approving this project would have undercut that global leadership. And that's the biggest risk we face,

not acting."

He said now was the time to act to "protect the one planet we've got while we still can."

In the roughly seven-minute statement, Obama rejected the idea that the project would either lower oil prices or improve America's energy security.

The decision to deny TransCanada Corp. a cross-border permit for a 1,179-mile pipeline between Hardisty, Alberta, and Steele City, Neb., puts an end — at least for now — to a seven-year fight over a project that came to symbolize what Obama could do unilaterally to keep fossil fuels in the ground.

From The Associated Press

Academy professor files suit against Navy

Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — A civilian professor at the U.S. Naval Academy is suing the Navy, accusing it of violating his First Amendment right to free speech and chilling academic freedom.

Attorneys for Bruce Fleming said Thursday that the professor was denied merit pay and \$7,000 in summer funding based on a 2014 reprimand. It stemmed from a 2013 classroom discussion, when Fleming prompted his students to consider the academy's sexual assault program and the potentially one-sided burdens it put on men, at a time when the academy was part of the national debate over how to stop sexual assault in the military.

"Professor Fleming's speech touched on matters of significant public concern, and not only private concern," says the lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court in Baltimore. "His statements were made for legitimate pedagogical purposes, and fall within the core of the

First Amendment's protection of academic freedom."

Cmdr. John Schofield, a spokesman for the academy, declined to comment on an ongoing legal matter.

Two female students disagreed with Fleming's comments in class. After Fleming sent emails to them and other students about what was said, the two students complained to sexual assault prevention officials.

Fleming was cleared in an initial investigation. A second investigation by a more senior academy official led to the reprimand. It found the professor's initiation of conduct cases against the two students amounted to retaliation.

The lawsuit alleges complaints lodged with the sexual assault prevention office "were made in bad faith and with the specific intent to have the academy censor and punish Professor Fleming for daring to criticize the (Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program.)"

F-15s arrive in Turkey for air defense mission

BY JOHN VANDIVER
AND JENNIFER SVAN

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — The first wave of U.S. Air Force F-15s arrived in Turkey on Friday, injecting new air-to-air combat power in a battle space where Russian jets are plying the same airspace as U.S. fighters targeting Islamic State militants.

Six F-15Cs, based out of RAF Lakenheath in the United Kingdom, are in place at Incirlik Air Base, the strategic hub in southern Turkey that has

emerged as a key launching point for airstrikes in neighboring Syria, U.S. European Command announced. However, the main mission for the F-15Cs will be guarding Turkish airspace, which Russian fighters violated on multiple occasions in October, EUCOM said.

Last week, the Obama administration announced it would deploy about 12 F-15s to Turkey. The remaining six aircraft, likely to be F-15Es used mainly for ground strikes, also are expected to arrive soon at Incirlik.

Bengals rip Browns, go to 8-0

Associated Press

CINCINNATI — Three touchdown catches on three different routes. Tight end Tyler Eifert got a lot of attention with his latest impressive game.

So did the rest of his team.

Eifert caught three touchdown passes from Andy Dalton on Thursday night, leading the unbeaten Bengals to a 31-10 victory over Johnny Manziel and the Cleveland Browns that put Cincinnati in totally new territory.

The Bengals are 8-0 for the first time. The eight straight wins are a club record for one season. And they're in control of the AFC North at the season's midpoint.

"It seems like every week it's a first-time ever," receiver Marvin Jones said. "It's all good. We've got to be 9-0 next and keep it moving."

For the Browns (2-7), it's become monotonous. They've lost six of seven and can't even get out of their own way at pivotal times.

"Our mistakes just caught up to us," coach Mike Pettine said.

Dalton made hardly any of those in a game that had special significance. Last year, he also faced the Browns at Paul Brown Stadium on Thursday night and had his worst game, throwing three interceptions and finishing with a passer rating of 2.0.

This time, he was nearly flawless. Dalton went 21-for-27 for 234 yards with a passer rating of 139.8. When he arrived for his postgame interview, he didn't even wait for the first question.

"A little different from last year, huh?" Dalton said, his eyes widening.

The quarterback also played lead blocker on Mohamed Sanu's 25-yard reverse for a touchdown, although the play worked so well that there was nobody for him to touch.

By contrast, Manziel managed only one good half. He led the Browns on a 92-yard touchdown drive — their longest since 2013 — just before halftime, cutting the lead to 14-10. In the second half, the Browns managed only 32 yards and two first downs.

"I'm pretty upset," said Manziel, who finished 15-for-33 for 168 yards and was sacked three times, all in the fourth quarter. "We had momentum coming into the second half. We just didn't do enough."

Five things to take away from the Bengals' win:

Rare air: The Bengals became the 33rd team in NFL history and the 22nd during the Super Bowl era to open 8-0. Their next game is Monday night at home against Houston (3-5), followed by a trip to Arizona (6-2) for a Sunday night game.

"It's huge to put ourselves in the position we're in, to stay undefeated," Dalton said. "Not a lot of teams have been 8-0 before. We understand that. It's hard to do."

Tough tight end: Eifert finished with five catches for 53 yards and scored on catches of 9, 2 and 19 yards. His nine touchdown catches tie the club record for a tight end and give him the NFL lead in that category.

"It doesn't matter," said Eifert, who's second on the team with 35 catches for 434 yards. "I can't control how many balls I get thrown or anything like that, but I can put myself in the best position."

Manziel's day: Johnny Football got a rematch against the team that taunted and then tormented him in his NFL debut last December, a 30-0 Bengals win. Coach Marvin Lewis referred to him as "a midget" leading up to the game, and several players mocked his "money-rubbing" gesture while frustrating him. Instead of mocking him this time, they chased him around before ultimately shutting him down in the second half.

"I think it was just inconsistent," Pettine said of his performance. "I thought he did some good things, but I just thought in the second half, especially after we fell behind, he was trying to make too many big plays instead of just taking completions."

Bad series: Browns defensive end Randy Starks got a 15-yard penalty for taunting after making a tackle and was offside on Cincinnati's failed fourth-down pass play during a Bengals touchdown drive that made it 14-3.

Burfi's day: Bengals LB Vontaze Burfict hurt his left knee — the one that was operated on twice last season — but returned the next series. He also ran into a scoreboard video camera in the back of the end zone while defending one play, knocking it over. The camera operator was examined, returned to his post and finished the game.

Holtby, Capitals top Bruins

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Braden Holtby stopped 28 shots, Alex Ovechkin scored his seventh goal and the Washington Capitals handed the Boston Bruins their first road loss of the season, 4-1 on Thursday night.

John Carlson had a goal and an assist for the Capitals, whose 9-3-0 record matches the best start in franchise history.

Holtby notched shutouts in all three games between the teams last season. A power-play goal by Jimmy Hayes in the first period ended the streak.

Ovechkin tied the game at 1 with the 482nd goal of his career, one short of Sergei Fedorov for most among Russian-born players in NHL history.

Brooks Laich and Karl Alzner scored a goal each for the Capitals.

Blue Jackets 3, Kings 2: Brandon Dubinsky had a goal and an assist and visiting Columbus overcame a shotless second period to hold off Los Angeles for its fourth victory in six games under coach John Tortorella.

Sergei Bobrovsky made 31 saves to help the last-place Blue Jackets win their second straight game in California.

Canadiens 4, Islanders 1: David Desharnais and Brendan Gallagher scored 1:33 apart in the third period to lift host Montreal to the victory over New York.

Dale Weise and Tomas Plekanec also scored for Montreal.

Sharks 5, Panthers 2: Patrick Marleau scored a highlight-reel goal for his 997th career point and host San Jose beat Florida.

Brent Burns, Joonas Donskoi, Marc-Edouard Vlasic and Chris Tierney also scored for the Sharks.

Lightning 4, Sabres 1: Steven Stamkos, Tyler Johnson and Nikita Kucherov scored in the first period and visiting Tampa Bay beat Buffalo for the seventh straight time.

Tampa Bay's early barrage chased goaltender Linus Ullmark, and Andrei Vasilevski made 30 saves for the Lightning.

Senators 3, Jets 2 (SO): Mika Zibanejad scored the shootout winner, Craig Anderson made 38 saves and host Ottawa beat Winnipeg.

Cody Ceci and Bobby Ryan scored in regulation for the Senators.

Flames 2, Flyers 1 (OT): Mikael Backlund scored 35 seconds into overtime and also had an assist to give host Calgary the victory over Philadelphia.

With the Flames breaking in on a 2-on-1, Johnny Gaudreau's shot was stopped by Michal Neuvirth. But the rebound popped straight out, hit Backlund's leg as he skated toward the crease and went in.

Predators 3, Wild 2: Cody Hodgson scored the tiebreaking goal late in the third period to lift visiting Nashville over Minnesota.

Coyotes 4, Avalanche 2: Nicklas Grossmann had two goals, Mike Smith stopped 26 shots and host Arizona held on against Colorado.

Dallas can't blame skid entirely on Romo

Associated Press

IRVING, Texas — Jason Witten was as happy as anyone to have Tony Romo back on the practice field, even though the Dallas tight end won't see his quarterback in a game for at least two more weeks because of a broken left collarbone.

As for leaning on Romo's five-game absence to explain the five-game losing streak that goes along with it, Witten says forget it.

"Of course we're missing key players, yeah," Witten said. "But that's not a crutch to what we want to do as an offense. We stay together, and we believe we can accomplish that."

Technically, the Cowboys (2-5) won without Romo because they finished off a 20-10 win at Philadelphia after he got hurt in the third quarter in Week 2. But Dallas hasn't won an entire game without him going into the rematch with the Eagles (3-4) on Sunday night.

Matt Cassel lost the past two after Brandon Weeden went 0-3. The last time the Cowboys won a meaningful game without Romo? Try 2008, with Brad Johnson in a 13-9 midseason victory over Tampa Bay when Romo was out with a broken pinkie.

Dallas won that game with just 172 total yards, and winning a game with defense

was one of the ideas this time around.

But the few times a mostly sputtering offense has come through, the defense hasn't made the critical stop. Even after playing well for most of last weekend's 13-12 loss to Seattle, the Cowboys let Russell Wilson direct a winning drive to a field goal late in the fourth quarter.

Then there was the time the defense didn't even get a chance after a tying touchdown.

Dallas let former teammate Dwayne Harris return a kickoff for a touchdown in the fourth quarter of the New York Giants' 27-20 victory.

Essentially, it's hard to figure out how to view the losing streak: through critical breakdowns, or through the absence of Romo and All-Pro receiver Dez Bryant, who missed five games with a broken right foot before returning against the Seahawks.

"I think you just have to be objective about what's gone on," said coach Jason Garrett, whose previous longest losing streak in five years as coach was two games. "There's been a lot of really good things over the course of this, but obviously it's not good enough."

Romo did some light throwing on the side at Wednesday's practice, but wasn't as active Thursday. Garrett said even if Romo were eligible to play, he wouldn't be ready because the bone on his non-

throwing shoulder is still healing.

By next week, there could be more of an attempt to get the 35-year-old involved in practice, although Garrett seems hesitant to take many reps away from Cassel as long as he's the starter for the upcoming game. Same with offensive coordinator Scott Linehan.

"There was no big plan this week other than to throw enough to see how it feels, get a lot of conditioning work with the strength guys," Linehan said. "We're focused a lot on this week and what we're doing that way. But Tony's getting himself ready to go when he's allowed to go."

The Cowboys need to win the next two for the most realistic hopes of defending their NFC East title. But the other division rivals keep losing, too.

So it's possible that a loss to the Eagles could mean Dallas is back in Tampa Bay, facing a win-or-else scenario on the same field where Johnson won with Romo sidelined seven years ago.

"The only way you can look at it is we've got to win," receiver Cole Beasley said. "We've got to focus on this next game and just worry about winning this one. Then we'll worry about the next one."

Notes: RB Trey Williams was signed off Washington's practice squad after former starter Joseph Randle was waived. Williams is likely to be inactive behind Christine Michael and Rod Smith.



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No. 2 Baylor holds off Kansas St.

Associated Press

MANHATTAN, Kan. — Jarrett Stidham knew his lack of experience was probably a big reason Baylor was only ranked sixth in the initial College Football Playoff poll this week.

In his first start, the freshman showed he can keep the high-powered Bears humming.

Stidham threw for 419 yards and three scores in place of the injured Seth Russell, Corey Coleman caught two touchdown passes and No. 2 Baylor held on for a 31-24 victory over pesky Kansas State on Thursday night to prove it isn't going anywhere.

"I think that motivated the whole team, but especially Jarrett," Baylor running back Devin Chafin said about the rankings. "We definitely came out here with a chip on our shoulder."

Russell broke a bone in his neck two weeks ago against Iowa State and had surgery last Friday, and many wondered how the Wildcats made sure Stidham's debut wasn't easy, the reigning Big 12 co-champions kept their playoff hopes alive.

"We feel like our team is a team of survivors," Baylor coach Art Briles said. "We've got a lot of guys who have been through a lot. A lot of coaches who have been through a lot."

They went through a lot Thursday night, too.

Kansas State closed to 31-24 on Joe Hubener's touchdown pass to Deante Burton with 4:07 left, and Chris Callahan's

missed field goal with 51 seconds remaining gave the Wildcats a chance.

But on their next play, Hubener threw a lateral to wide receiver Cody Cook, who then threw down the sideline. The sometimes-quarterback's pass was picked off by Terrell Burt, who managed to get his right foot down inbounds, and the interception stood after an official's review.

Baylor (8-0, 5-0) dropped Kansas State (3-5) to 0-5 in conference play for the first time since 1989, the first season for coach Bill Snyder on the sideline.

"We have to do something about being a good football team. The capabilities are there," he said. "I've always believed that, but you have to do something with it. That means you have to develop it. That falls into my lap. I have to help those young guys understand what it takes in order to get off the mat and win a ballgame. I haven't done that yet."

Hubener ran for 153 yards and two touchdowns, but he was just 12 of 21 for 151 yards with an interception. Charles Jones added 76 yards rushing for Kansas State.

Coleman finished with 11 catches for 216 yards, and has a nation-leading 20 TD catches this season, making life a little easier on his 19-year-old quarterback from Stephenville, Texas.

Stidham completed his first three passes to lead Baylor on an 81-yard scoring drive to open the game. And after the Wildcats answered with a methodical, 88-yard march that took 10 minutes, Stidham hit KD Cannon with another 55-yard touchdown strike.

Meanwhile, the beat-up Wildcats kept

making too many mistakes.

Hubener fumbled the ball away deep in Baylor territory early in the second quarter, then threw an interception into double coverage on the next possession. Penalties, blown blocking assignments and dropped passes kept scuttling otherwise promising drives.

The Bears seemed to put the game out of reach when Stidham threw a short TD pass to Coleman in the third quarter, and Callahan hit a 39-yard field goal in the fourth. But Kansas State kept right on fighting, getting a 34-yard TD run from Hubener before his touchdown toss to Burton.

It wasn't until one last mistake on a trick play that the Wildcats' fate was sealed.

"Coming to into this game, my mindset and the whole team's mindset was, 'Hey, we got a chance,'" Kansas State linebacker Elijah Lee said. "We don't have nothing to lose, and we want to show that we can compete whether our record is bad or good."

Baylor was ranked sixth in this week's initial playoff ranking, due partly to a soft early schedule but also the uncertainty at quarterback. And while Stidham was far from perfect — he did have a delay of game penalty — he proved to be capably in control most of the game.

That bodes well for a season-defining stretch beginning Nov. 14 against 14th-ranked Oklahoma, and continuing with back-to-back games at No. 12 Oklahoma State and No. 5 TCU.

"People," Stidham said, "don't need to be counting us out."

Prescott, Bulldogs top Mizzou

Associated Press

COLUMBIA, Mo. — De'Runnya Wilson bided his time. Whenever Missouri went to man-on-man coverage against the Mississippi State wide receiver, he was ready.

"My feet get sweaty, my eyes get blurry, I know the ball's going to come to me," Wilson said after making the most of his chances in the 24th-ranked Bulldogs' 31-13 victory on Thursday night.

"So, I just try to execute."

Dak Prescott threw four touchdown passes and Mississippi State got 100-yard receiving games from Wilson and Fred Ross in the rain.

"I've said it year-round," Prescott said of Wilson. "I'll take him vs. any cornerback one-on-one, at any time."

The Bulldogs kicked it into gear after a heavy downpour stopped at halftime, turning a one-point game into a runaway with a 17-point third quarter that included two of Prescott's TD throws.

"I'm juiced, man," coach Dan Mullen said. "We work hard to try and get some wins and when you get them, I love it."

Wilson had four catches for 102 yards with two touchdowns, giving him a conference-leading eight on the year. Ross and Fred Brown had one each for Mississippi State (7-2, 3-2 Southeastern Conference), which has won four in a row to stay in contention in the SEC West.

The Bulldogs pulled away without left tackle Rufus Warren, who injured his left leg late in the first half and was carted off at halftime and at the end of the game, too. Mullen said he didn't think Warren was seriously hurt.

Prescott became the 10th player in SEC history with 10,000 yards of total offense after entering the game needing just 65, and he became the sixth player in history to account for 100 touchdowns.

He was 27-for-40 for 303 yards, the most allowed by Missouri's strong defense all season, and led the Bulldogs in rushing with 47 yards on 14 carries.

Russell Hansbrough's 14-yard run late in the first half gave Missouri (4-5, 1-5) its first touchdown in four games. Kentrell Brothers forced a fumble and blocked a punt to set up a pair of field goals in the first half for the Tigers. They have lost four in a row for the first time since 2004.

"Nothing changes; you work your butt off," coach Gary Pinkel said. "There's not magic dust; it doesn't happen."

The attendance of 58,878 was Missouri's worst this season, dragged down by the school's struggles and the stormy conditions.

"I think it's just tough for a lot of us because we made a lot of mistakes," said linebacker Michael Scherer, beaten for a touchdown pass on the opening drive. "We made way too many mistakes."

Freshman quarterback Drew Lock, the starter throughout the losing streak, was 11 of 26 for 107 yards and was sacked five times. Maty Mauk, who began the season as the starter, was suspended for the second time this season on Sunday for a violation of team policies.

Pinkel said Lock did some good things, "but I'm not going to go through an evaluation of our QBs."

Rose leads Bulls past Thunder

Associated Press

CHICAGO — The Chicago Bulls let the lead slip away. Derrick Rose wouldn't let the game get away, too.

Rose came up big down the stretch to score 29 points and Jimmy Butler added 26 to lead the Bulls to a 104-98 victory over Kevin Durant and the Oklahoma City Thunder on Thursday night.

Whether he can consistently play like a superstar still remains in question. But Rose sure looked like his old MVP self as he scored 10 points over the final 3½ minutes to lift the Bulls after they blew a 10-point lead in the fourth quarter.

"For him to have a game like this, I know this is a huge confidence booster," coach Fred Hoiberg said.

Oklahoma City tied it with just over 5 minutes left in the game. But Rose's performance in the closing minutes helped offset Durant's 33 points and lifted the Bulls after they got blown out 130-105 in Charlotte two nights earlier.

Chicago was clinging to a 98-96 lead when Rose buried consecutive jumpers to make it a six-point game with just over a minute remaining.

After Durant hit a jumper, Pau Gasol nailed a sweeping hook with 38.4 seconds left, sealing the win for the Bulls.

Rose, still wearing a face mask after missing almost the entire preseason because of a fractured left orbital, found his rhythm after three straight single-digit scoring games. Butler set a career-high with 21 first-half points and hit four 3-pointers in the game, and the Bulls got back to winning after getting squashed by Charlotte 130-105 on Tuesday night.

"That game was embarrassing a little bit," Rose said. "Looking at film after it happened, we were frustrated. We

felt like we let each other down. After the way we practiced yesterday, we could tell we got that competitive spirit again."

Russell Westbrook had 20 points and 10 assists for Oklahoma City while Serge Ibaka scored 17. But the Thunder, playing their fourth game in five nights, came up short down the stretch again and dropped their third straight. They blew a late, eight-point lead in a 105-98 loss to Toronto on Wednesday night.

Heat 96, Timberwolves 84: Dwyane Wade, showing no ill effects from a migraine headache two days ago, scored 25 points to lead visiting Miami.

Chris Bosh had 16 points and 12 rebounds for the Heat, who were playing one day after reserve guard Gerald Green was hospitalized for unspecified reasons. Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said Green's condition had improved by Thursday, but it remained unclear why he was hospitalized and how long he will be away.

Hornets 108, Mavericks 94: Al Jefferson scored a season-high 31 points on 15-for-18 shooting and Marvin Williams added 17 points and 12 rebounds for visiting Charlotte, which pulled away in the third quarter.

Deron Williams led the Mavericks with 15 points, while Dirk Nowitzki, Zaza Pachulia and Dwight Powell added 14 each.

The victory was the first in Dallas following 11 defeats for the franchise that began as the Charlotte Bobcats in 2004-05.

The Mavericks had run off 14 straight home wins over Charlotte's two NBA teams since the original Hornets won at Reunion Arena in January 1998.

Trail Blazers 115, Grizzlies 96: Damian Lillard scored 27 points, including 14 in the third quarter, to lead host Portland.

It was the second game of a back-to-back for the Trail Blazers, who have strung together a modest three-game winning streak. C.J. McCollum added 20 points and a career-high five assists.

Courtney Lee led the Grizzlies with 18 points while Zach Randolph, who played for the Blazers for the first six years of his career, had 16 points and 10 rebounds.

Lillard hit seven 3-pointers, including one that put Portland ahead 95-71 early in the fourth quarter.

The Blazers were coming off a 108-92 victory over Utah on Wednesday. Lillard and McCollum combined for 62 points against the Jazz.

The Grizzlies, in the midst of a five-game road trip, were routed by reigning NBA champion Golden State 119-69 on Monday, but rebounded to beat Sacramento 103-89 on Tuesday.

Jazz 96, Nuggets 84: Gordon Hayward scored 20 points, including seven in the fourth quarter, and visiting Utah pulled away late.

Danilo Gallinari had 18 points to lead Denver while Will Barton added 12.

Utah outshot Denver 43.5 percent to 38.9 percent.

Rodney Hood and Hayward hit successive three-pointers as part of a 12-0 run carrying the Jazz to a 90-73 lead with 4:17 left.

Trevor Booker added 13 points and Rudy Gobert had eight points and 16 rebounds for the Jazz.