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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Rebels persist despite airstrikes

Associated Press

REYHANLI, Turkey — Despite a month of heavy battering by Russian airstrikes, Syria's rebels so far have been able to fend off offensives by government forces trying to retake territory from the rebel's heartland. The fierce fighting shows how even greater backing from Syrian President Bashar Assad's international allies is not swiftly tipping the conflict in his favor.

Assad's military has launched assaults on several fronts in the north and northwest in recent weeks, supported by Russian airstrikes pummeling rebel positions that government forces are trying to retake. Assad's

troops have also been backed by the tougher fighters of Lebanon's Hezbollah guerrilla army and combat advisers from Iran's elite Revolutionary Guard.

The rebels say they have been able to hold out because of support from their own allies: an increasing flow of American anti-tank TOW missiles that have allowed their fighters to blunt attempted advances by Assad's forces. Despite more than 1,000 combat sorties by Russian aircraft hitting more than 2,000 targets, government forces' gains have been minimal.

"We don't deny that the airstrikes are effective, but they (troops) will not advance on the ground," Lt. Col. Fares al-

Bayoush, commander of the 1,300-strong Fursan al-Haq Brigade, told The Associated Press, speaking in the Turkish border city of Reyhanli.

The TOW missiles have been instrumental, he and other commanders said. The United States has been supplying the missiles to select rebel factions, part of its program alongside Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar to boost the insurgency.

Al-Bayoush, a defector from Assad's army, said his fighters have a constantly replenished supply and use them not only against tanks but also against troop formations and other positions. "We fire 15 TOWs and we get 15 TOWs in return," he said.

Weather caused Nepal crash

The San Diego Union-Tribune

A Marine Corps investigation has determined that four Camp Pendleton, Calif., Marines killed in a helicopter crash in Nepal were probably the victims of weather in the extreme conditions of the Himalayas.

The UH-1Y Huey helicopter was flying Nepalese earthquake victims to Kathmandu when the aircraft was lost May 12.

It was from Camp Pendleton's Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 469.

In addition to the four-person crew, it was carrying two Marine Corps correspondents, two Nepalese soldiers and five injured civilians.

All were killed on impact.

The investigation results, released Friday, said the helicopter crew chose the most direct route back to base — likely because of concern for one or more of the injured civilians.

The pilot had requested that an ambulance meet the helicopter when it landed in Kathmandu because two of the civilians were in "urgent" condition.

"The chosen course required a brief period over unfamiliar terrain with unstable meteorological conditions. It is believed that the aircraft ... was enveloped by rapidly developing clouds or lifted into a cloud by rising air currents," an investigation summary provided by the Marine Corps says.

The Marines killed in the crash were Capt. Dustin R. Lukasiewicz from Nebraska, Capt. Christopher L. Norgren from Kansas, Sgt. Ward M. Johnson IV from Florida, Sgt. Eric M. Seaman from California, Cpl. Sara A. Medina from Illinois and Lance Cpl. Jacob A. Hug from Arizona.

Noise on jet's cockpit recording

Associated Press

SHARM EL-SHEIKH, Egypt — A noise was heard in the last second of the cockpit voice recording from the Russian plane that crashed last week in Egypt's Sinai, killing all 224 people aboard, the head of the Egyptian investigation team said Saturday.

Ayman el-Muqadem told a news conference in Cairo that an analysis of the noise was underway to identify its nature. He said the way the debris was scattered over a wide area indicated the Airbus A321-200 broke up in mid-air, but initial observations don't shed light on what caused it.

U.S. and British officials have cited intelligence reports as indicating that the Russian flight from the Sinai resort town of Sharm el-Sheikh to St. Petersburg, Russia, was brought down on Oct. 31 by a bomb on board.

Also on Saturday, Egypt's foreign minister complained that Western governments had not sufficiently helped Egypt in its war on terrorism and had not shared relevant intelligence with Cairo.

Sameh Shoukry, speaking at a press conference, said that "European countries did not give us the cooperation we are hoping for."

Egypt's past calls for assistance and coordination on terrorism issues from "the countries that are now facing the danger" had not been dealt with seriously, he said.

Shoukry also complained that Western nations that have suspended flights to Sharm el-Sheikh did not share with Cairo the relevant intelligence upon which they based their decisions.

Shoukry told reporters that Egypt "expected that the information available would be

communicated to us instead of being broadcast" in the media.

The foreign minister's comments came as Egypt launched an investigation into the staff and ground crew at the Sharm el-Sheikh airport, according to Egyptian airport and security officials.

The officials told The Associated Press on Saturday that authorities were questioning airport staff and ground crew who worked on the Russian flight and had placed some employees under surveillance. The officials all spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the media.

The crash one week ago dealt another blow to Egypt's battered tourism sector, which has yet to fully recover from years of political turmoil. Russians constitute nearly a third of all tourists who visited Egypt in the past year.

Carson defends story about West Point offer, calls media unfair

Associated Press

PALM BEACH GARDENS, Fla. — Criticizing the news media as unfair, Republican presidential candidate Ben Carson is defending his past descriptions of receiving a scholarship offer for the U.S. Military Academy at West Point even though it does not offer scholarships, and he never applied for admission.

Questions about Carson's assertions about his personal history, including his claim that he was a troubled youth beset at times by violent behavior, and his inaccurate pronouncements about historical events have gained attention as he has risen in the polls.

"I think what it shows, and these kinds of things show, is there is a desperation on behalf of some to try to find a way to tarnish me," Carson said Friday night during a news conference outside West Palm Beach, Fla. "Because they have been looking through everything. They have been talking to everyone I have ever known and everybody I have ever seen. There has got to be a scandal."

Carson is a newcomer to national politics and has developed a passionate following based in part on his inspirational personal story and devotion to Christian values. The only African-American in the Republican 2016 class, he grew

up in inner-city Detroit and often speaks about his childhood brushes with violence and poverty.

Following a story published by Politico on Friday, his campaign sought to clarify Carson's story about his interest in attending West Point in his book, "Gifted Hands," in which he outlines his participation with the Reserve Officers' Training Corps, commonly known as ROTC, while in high school.

"I was offered a full scholarship to West Point," Carson wrote in the 1996 book. "I didn't refuse the scholarship outright, but I let them know that a military career wasn't where I saw myself going."

Campaign spokesman Doug Watts said Carson was "the top ROTC student in the city of Detroit" and "was introduced to folks from West Point by his ROTC supervisors."

"They told him they could help him get an appointment based on his grades and performance in ROTC. He considered it, but in the end did not seek admission," Watts said.

Students who are granted admission to West Point are not awarded scholarships. Instead, they are said to earn appointments to the military academy, which come with tuition, room and board and expenses paid, in exchange for five years of service in the Army after graduation.

China, Taiwan presidents meet in Singapore

SINGAPORE — The leaders of Taiwan and China shook hands Saturday at a historic meeting marking the first top-level contact between the formerly bitter Cold War foes since they split amid civil war 66 years ago.

Chinese President Xi Jinping and Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou came together on

neutral ground in the Southeast Asian city-state of Singapore, walking toward each other in a hotel ballroom in front of a backdrop of yellow — a traditional color of Chinese emperors — and flanked by palm trees.

The two men smiled broadly as they shook hands. No national flags were present — a necessary work-around to overcome China's refusal to recognize Taiwan's sovereignty or its government's formal legitimacy.

From The Associated Press

DOD set to release options for closing Guantanamo prison

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon's plan outlining the long-stalled effort to close the Guantanamo Bay detention center, expected this week, includes details suggesting that the Centennial Correctional Facility in Colorado is one suitable site to send detainees who officials believe should never be released, administration officials said.

The plan represents a last-gasp effort by the Obama administration to convince staunch opponents in Congress that dangerous detainees who can't be transferred safely to other countries should be housed in a U.S.-based prison.

According to administration officials, the plan makes no recommendations on which of seven U.S. sites is preferred and provides no rankings. But it lists prison sites in Colorado, South Carolina and Kansas that a Pentagon assessment team reviewed in recent months and mentions advantages and disadvantages for the facilities. Those elements can include the facilities' locations, costs for renovations and construction, the ability to house troops and to hold military commission hearings, and health care facilities.

The Centennial facility has advantages that could outweigh the disadvantages there, according to officials, but no details were available and no conclusions have been reached. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss the matter publicly.

Any decision to select a U.S. facility would require congressional approval — something U.S. lawmakers say is unlikely. At the same time, dangerous

prisoners are not new to Colorado. The Supermax in Florence, which has been dubbed "Alcatraz of the Rockies," already holds convicted terrorists, including Unabomber Ted Kaczynski and Zacarias Moussaoui, one of the conspirators of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

The Pentagon plan also lays out the broader effort to reduce the detainee population at Guantanamo, through transfers to other countries. The center now holds 112 detainees, and 53 are eligible for transfer. The rest are either facing trial by military commission or the government has determined that they are too dangerous to release but are not facing charges.

In order to approve a transfer, Defense Secretary Ash Carter must conclude that the detainees will not return to terrorism or the battlefield upon release and that there is a host country willing to take them and to guarantee they will secure them.

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., has asked for an administration plan for the shutdown of Guantanamo. The Pentagon's assessment team visits during the past few months were part of the effort to provide options for the relocation of Guantanamo detainees.

The facilities reviewed by the assessment team were the U.S. Disciplinary Barracks and Midwest Joint Regional Corrections Facility at Leavenworth, Kan.; the Consolidated Naval Brig, Charleston, S.C.; the Federal Correctional Complex, which includes the medium, maximum and supermax facilities in Florence, Colo.; and the Colorado State Penitentiary II in Canon City, Colo., also known as the Centennial Correctional Facility.

Walker, No. 23 Temple top SMU

Associated Press

DALLAS — Freshman Jager Gardner had zero yards rushing for the season when he took a handoff 94 yards away from the end zone on Temple's second offensive play.

So naturally, top running back Jahad Thomas knew exactly what was going to happen.

"It's crazy because I actually called it the play right before, 'I feel like he's going to pop this,'" Thomas said. "And then he did it."

P.J. Walker followed the longest run in Temple history with four touchdown passes and a scoring run of his own, and the 23rd-ranked Owls pulled away from SMU 60-40 on Friday night.

Temple (8-1, 5-0 American Athletic), coming off a close high-profile loss to No. 8 Notre Dame at home, had its most points since beating Holy Cross 63-34 on Sept. 29, 1973.

Walker's final touchdown pass was a 75-yarder to Ventell Bryant the first play after Matt Davis pulled the Mustangs (1-8, 0-5) to 38-31 on a 30-yard scoring toss to Jeremiah Gaines early in the fourth quarter.

"It's not our best football game, and our goal is to always play really great football," Temple coach Matt Rhule said. "We didn't play great football tonight, and that starts with me."

SMU was competitive for third time in three games against ranked teams

under first-year coach Chad Morris, and made things really interesting with nine quick points to get within 45-40 midway through the fourth quarter.

After Temple's Nick Sharga was called for holding in the end zone on a punt to give the Mustangs a safety, Braeden West returned the subsequent free kick 80 yards for a touchdown, weaving between tacklers before breaking free near midfield.

"I think as you look at the story of the season, I know the record says what you are," Morris said. "When you consider our strength of schedule and who we've played ... I think it says a whole lot about our guys. They've got a lot fight in them. We're close."

The Mustangs had one chance for a go-ahead score, but linebacker Tyler Matakevich knocked down Davis' fourth-down pass in SMU territory with 2:41 remaining.

Walker followed with a clinching 36-yard touchdown run, and Sean Chandler finished the scoring with a 41-yard interception return in the final minute.

Gardner got most of the carries in the first quarter, but Rhule said it was because he earned the chance to start, not because Thomas was nursing a rib injury coming off the 24-20 loss to the Irish.

After starting the game with minus-1 yard for the year and getting a 1-yarder before the long run, Gardner finished with 110 yards on just six carries.

"I'm just going with the flow of the game," Gardner said. "My time will come.

I'm still a freshman."

Thomas, who didn't get a carry until the second quarter, had a touchdown to give him at least one in all nine games. He finished with 15 carries for 66 yards, leaving him 30 shy of becoming Temple's first 1,000-yard rusher since 2012.

Temple improved to 5-0 on the road for the first time in school history and beat a Texas team for the first time since topping TCU in 1939. It was the first win in the Lone Star State for the Owls since beating Texas A&M in 1935.

Walker was 18-for-25 for 268 yards without an interception in his first four-TD game since the 2013 finale against Memphis, and the Owls finished with 268 yards both rushing and passing.

Davis threw for 167 yards and had 102 yards rushing, including a 2-yard touchdown. Xavier Jones ran for two scores and finished with 67 yards on 16 carries for SMU.

Temple went ahead for good at 21-17 when Walker found Romond Deloatch for a 16-yard touchdown strike with 24 seconds left in the first half.

The Owls pushed the lead to 28-17 on Walker's 4-yard scoring pass to Adonis Jennings on the first possession of the second half after punter Tyler Mayes picked up 8 yards on a fake on fourth-and-6.

"We've just got to continue to find a way to not beat ourselves right before half, or right after half," Morris said. "And it's hard to battle back against really, really good teams when you beat yourself on a couple of occasions."

Jones shows support for DE Hardy

Associated Press

IRVING, Texas — Dallas owner Jerry Jones showed support for Greg Hardy on Friday after photos of the bruised ex-girlfriend from the defensive end's domestic violence case were released by Deadspin.

Jones said the team hadn't seen the photos before signing Hardy to an incentive-laden \$13 million free agent contract in March, but the Cowboys "were and are aware of the serious nature of this incident."

"We do not condone domestic violence," Jones said in a statement released by the team about eight hours after the photos were posted online. "We entered into the agreement with Greg fully understanding that there would be scrutiny and criticism."

As he was leaving the locker room Friday, Hardy ignored a reporter who asked repeatedly if he wanted to address the release of the photos showing various injuries to Nicole Holder.

Hardy was convicted by a judge over the 2014 incident in North Carolina, but the case was tossed on appeal when Holder couldn't be located to testify. The incident was expunged from Hardy's record this week. Prosecutors have said Holder reached a financial settlement with Hardy.

The NFL sued for access to some of the photos used at Hardy's trial, eventually reaching a settlement. The league suspended him for 10 games while saying that evidence suggested Holder "was severely traumatized and sustained a range of injuries."

Hardy's suspension under the personal conduct policy was reduced to four games by an arbitrator. He has played three games for the Cowboys (2-5), who have lost five straight games going into a home game against Philadelphia (3-4) on Sunday night.

Before his Dallas debut against New England, Hardy made headlines again with comments about Tom Brady's wife. He also caused a stir with an inappropriate tweet about the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks during this year's draft.

When the Cowboys gave up a decisive kickoff return in a loss to the New York Giants two weeks ago, Hardy barged into special teams coach Rich Bisaccia's huddle before the next kickoff and had a physical confrontation with the assistant coach.

Through it all, Jones has supported Hardy.

"We have given Greg a second chance," Jones said in his statement. "He is a member of our team and someone who is grateful for the opportunity he has been given to move forward with his life and his career."

Hardy missed the last 15 games with Carolina in 2014 because of the domestic case but still collected his \$13 million salary. He was accused of choking and grabbing Holder and throwing her on a futon that had at least four semi-automatic rifles on it.

League's best defenses specialize in getting after opposing quarterbacks

Associated Press

With sleek and sophisticated offenses, cunning and confident quarterbacks and recent rule changes designed for player safety, defense in the NFL has never been more difficult.

Blitzing might be the best way to do it.

This is football's ultimate risk-reward strategy, from recess pickup games with one blitz allowed per four downs to the game's highest level where masterminds like Minnesota coach Mike Zimmer and Denver defensive coordinator Wade Phillips devise complex versions to disrupt a quarterback's rhythm, get a sack or grab a turnover.

"When you blitz, the band plays," Philadelphia coach Chip Kelly said. "It's either our band or their band."

According to STATS research, an average of 21.9 blitzes per game have been used this season, up only slightly from 2014 and lower than each average annual figure from 2009 through 2013. Many of the league's best defenses, though, have built a scheme fueled by sending extra pass rushers effectively and often.

Gone is the decade-ago heyday of the conservative zone coverages that put a safety in each deep half of the field to pre-

vent the long pass and relied on the front four to pressure the quarterback. Good ones learned how to pick those schemes apart.

So that's part of why the New York Jets under first-year coach Todd Bowles have blitzed — defined as bringing a defensive player not on the line of scrimmage or using four-or-more pass rushers — on an NFL-leading 48.3 percent of passing plays. The Arizona Cardinals (43.1) and St. Louis Rams (39.6) are next.

"We just try to mix it up and keep the offense off balance," Jets defensive coordinator Kacy Rodgers said.

Here are three snapshots of a meaningful, successful blitz used in the NFL this season:

■ Arizona sent six rushers at Baltimore's Joe Flacco on third-and-2 midway through the fourth quarter, leading 26-10 on Oct. 26.

Safety Tyrann Mathieu, lined up on the edge to Flacco's left, crouched slightly before the snap and sprinted into the backfield untouched for a blind-side sack that forced a punt. Running back Justin Forsett was on Flacco's right for protection. But none of the Ravens, who lost 26-18, noticed Mathieu coming.

"When he's hitting it as hard as he is and I'm being unprotected, it's really a

good design by them, and it's a good play by him," Flacco said.

■ Denver led Oakland 9-7 on Oct. 11 when Phillips sent six rushers at quarerback Derek Carr on third-and-5 midway through the fourth quarter.

With linebackers Brandon Marshall and Shane Ray adding heat, Carr threw to the middle where wide receivers Amari Cooper and Seth Roberts were running crossing routes. Neither of them looked for the ball, and cornerback Chris Harris intercepted it on his way to a 74-yard return for a touchdown. The Broncos won 16-10.

■ Minnesota sent five rushers at Stafford on third-and-11 late in the third quarter, leading 25-17 on Oct. 25.

Linebackers Anthony Barr and Eric Kendricks loomed on each side of the center in the "A" gaps. Safety Harrison Smith lined up to blitz from the left edge but bailed out before the snap. Kendricks retreated into coverage as Stafford dropped into the pocket, as did defensive end Danielle Hunter into the left flat. Cornerback Captain Munnerlyn crept to the line from the slot and raced into the backfield. Theo Riddick blocked Munnerlyn, but Barr beat his man and shared a sack with defensive end Everson Griffen. The Vikings won 28-19.



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James, Cavs win fifth straight

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — The Cleveland Cavaliers played a listless first half Friday night. LeBron James decided to do something about it.

James scored a season-high 31 points, 18 in the third quarter, and the Cavaliers recorded their fifth straight victory, 108-102 over the winless Philadelphia 76ers.

Veteran teammate James Jones deserves an assist for Cleveland's decisive spurt. Trailing 50-49 at halftime, Jones had some heated words in the locker room for his teammates.

"We weren't playing inspired basketball and JJ got on all of us," James said. "I respect JJ probably more than anybody in this area because of how long we've been together. It's my job to respond."

James recorded his 9,000th career field goal in the second quarter, but gave the Cavaliers a scare when he was kneed in the left quad while driving to the basket early in the fourth.

James was down on the court for a couple of moments and limped to the bench after being checked by a trainer. He remained in the game and was pulled with 2:31 remaining and Cleveland (5-1) leading 104-90.

James hopes to play Sunday when Indiana visits Quicken Loans Arena. The four-time MVP said his leg was sore, adding, "Probably a lot worse tomorrow. Probably be around-the clock-treatment trying to get ready for Sunday. Hopefully it doesn't stop me from playing."

James reached his latest milestone with

a dunk late in the second quarter to become the 20th player in NBA history — and fifth active — to record 9,000 field goals.

Nerlens Noel and Jahlil Okafor scored 18 points each for Philadelphia (0-5).

James took over in the third quarter when he hit three three-pointers as the Cavaliers turned the one-point deficit into a 16-point lead. James came into the game shooting 2-for-18 from beyond the arc.

The Sixers, one of three winless teams in the league, were duly impressed.

"When they get going, it's like a freight train going downhill," Noel said.

"Look at his stats, he had 13 assists," coach Brett Brown said of James. "Those are the things that really kill you. LeBron will pick you apart whatever you give him."

Richard Jefferson scored 17 points while Mo Williams added 16 for Cleveland, which hasn't lost since the season opener against Chicago.

Cleveland's fast start has come despite a series of injuries. James received an anti-inflammatory injection in his back in training camp, but has played in every game in the regular season.

Kyrie Irving (fractured kneecap) and Iman Shumpert (wrist surgery) have yet to play and J.R. Smith (bruised knee and strained quadriceps) has missed the last two games.

Warriors 119, Nuggets 104: At Oakland, Ca., Stephen Curry had 34 points and 10 assists as defending champion Golden State remained unbeaten.

Pistons 100, Suns 92: Marcus Morris,

who said he was looking to "disrespect" his former team in Phoenix and was booed every time he touched the ball early in the game, scored 20 points to help Detroit open a six-game road trip.

Rockets 116, Kings 110: James Harden broke out of his early season shooting slump and scored 22 of his season-high 43 points in the second half to lead visiting Houston.

Lakers 104, Nets 98: Kobe Bryant scored 18 points, his highest performance since opening night, and visiting Los Angeles beat winless Brooklyn for its first victory of the season.

Hawks 121, Pelicans 115: Kyle Korver scored 22 points, hitting all four of his three-point shots, and Atlanta won its sixth straight over winless host New Orleans.

Magic 92, Raptors 87: Tobias Harris had 20 points, including what turned out to be the decisive free throw, and host Orlando handed Toronto its first loss of the season.

Pacers 90, Heat 87: Paul George scored 36 points and grabbed 12 rebounds to lead Indiana to a victory over visiting Miami.

Celtics 118, Wizards 98: Jared Sullinger scored 21 points, Isaiah Thomas added 16 points and eight assists and host Boston ended a three-game losing streak by beating Washington.

Bucks 99, Knicks 92: John Hensen scored 22 points and Giannis Antetokounmpo had 20 to lift visiting Milwaukee to a win over New York.

Bryant's final trip to NYC?

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Kobe Bryant always loved the history at Madison Square Garden, even before he made some of his own.

There's so much to soak in, from the famous faces sitting courtside to the jerseys of great players that hang overhead.

"I always try to take a look around, always try to kind of embrace the moment and kind of feel the energy a little," Bryant said. "I always try to make it a point to do that. Is it a little different this time around? Yeah."

That's because this time could be the last time.

The Lakers visit the New York Knicks on Sunday afternoon, Bryant's first game at MSG in nearly three years. And if his 20th season is indeed his last in the NBA, it will be his final trip to a building he loves performing in perhaps more than any other.

He's done it as well as anybody. His average of 30.7 points in 15 games is the highest among active players, according to STATS, and his 61 points there on Feb. 2, 2009, remains the record for a visitor.

And when he takes the floor Sunday, the memories of that night, maybe his first All-Star Game in 1998, and others will come rushing back. And just as quickly, Bryant will push them aside again.

"You think about it a little bit, but I block all that stuff out, just go out and play," Bryant said.

The Lakers are early in their first trip of the season, with most of the games against Eastern Conference teams they visit only once.

Bryant, 37, has said he doesn't know if this is his last season. But even if it is, he doesn't want one of those farewell tours where teams he's spent two decades battling honor him. To Bryant, the best way to honor him is to try to beat him.

"I really just appreciate the game the way it's been played over the years and I appreciate the competition, so it's like, the biggest sign of respect to me would be to approach it just like it was any other game and try to kick our butt just like it was any other game," he said. "Those are the things that I hold extremely dear."

Knicks fans may want to beat him, but many will cheer him. It's always been that way in New York and that was proven again Friday night in Brooklyn, where he received such loud applause in the Lakers' 104-98 victory that Los Angeles coach Byron Scott said one Nets player told him it felt like a road game.

Scott expects more of the same Sunday.

"When you talk about New York, they are basketball fans, big time," Scott said. "They love greatness and they're going to show their appreciation. No matter if they don't like you as a team or not, they love great players."

Knicks President Phil Jackson, Bryant's coach on five championship-winning teams, said before the season he didn't believe this would be Bryant's last season, but that perhaps it would be his last in Los Angeles.

But Bryant insisted again Friday that if he's still in the NBA next season, it will only be with the Lakers.

"How many times do I have to say it?" Bryant said. "I've said it so many times. I'm here, I'm a Laker for life. I'm not playing anywhere else no matter what. It's just not going to happen. I bleed purple and gold, and that's just how it's going to be."

Zajac helps lead Devils over Blackhawks

Associated Press

NEWARK, N.J. — The surprising New Jersey Devils aren't just winning games anymore. They have learned to how finish off struggling opponents, including the defending Stanley Cup champions.

Travis Zajac capped a three-goal first period with a goal and an assist in a 26-second span, and the Devils embarrassed the Chicago Blackhawks 4-2 on Friday night.

"I think we are coming to expect that we want to beat every team," goaltender Cory Schneider said after the Devils won for the seventh time in nine games. "You can't just feel good or get up for certain games. You have to get up for all of them and we are developing that mentality right now."

The Blackhawks' poor performance came a day after an upstate New York prosecutor decided not to bring rape charges against Chicago star forward Patrick Kane because of a lack of credible evidence following a three-month investigation.

Kane extended his goal-scoring streak to three games and his points streak to nine (6 goals, 7 assists) with a tally late in the second period that deflected off the back of Devils defenseman Damon Severson past Schneider.

The Devils dominated in sending the Blackhawks to their second straight loss and ending a four-game losing streak against them.

Lee Stempniak and Kyle Palmieri had a goal and an assist, Severson added two assists and Mike Cammalleri tallied a goal as New Jersey took a 4-0 lead in the opening 27:28. Chicago defenseman Niklas Hjalmarsson was on the ice for all four goals.

Red Wings 2, Maple Leafs 1 (OT):

Jakub Kindl scored 2:17 into overtime, Henrik Zetterberg got his 300th career goal and visiting Detroit won its third straight.

Kindl was able to skate in down the middle and beat James Reimer over the blocker for his second goal of the season.

Dion Phaneuf scored and Reimer finished with 22 saves for Toronto, which has just one win in seven games this season at Air Canada Centre.

Petr Mrazek made 32 saves for Detroit. The Red Wings went 0 for 3 on the power play while the Leafs failed to score on four chances with the man advantage.

Zetterberg opened the scoring with 3:39 to play in the first on an apparently harmless wrist shot taken from just inside the blue line. It fooled Reimer blocker side for Zetterberg's fourth goal this season.

Penguins 2, Oilers 1: Phil Kessel broke a tie midway through the third period and visiting Pittsburgh won its sixth straight.

Kessel's goal was his fifth. Daniel Sprong also scored and the Penguins won their ninth in 10 games.

Oscar Klefbom had the Oilers' lone goal. Edmonton has lost two of three.

Kessel scored on a power play 9:45 into the third. His shot from the point was partially blocked by Brandon Davidson then floated past goalie Anders Nilsson.

Jeff Zatkoff stopped 27 shots and won for the second time in two starts this year.

Stars 4, Hurricanes 1: Patrick Sharp scored the go-ahead goal and Radek Faksa added his first of his career to lead visiting Dallas.

Ales Hemsky and Jason Demers also scored and Colton Sceviour had two assists for the Stars. Kari Lehtonen finished with 30 saves.

Jordan Staal scored for Carolina and Eddie Lack stopped 25 shots. Staal's goal

marked the sixth time he had scored on an assist from brother Eric. Jordan has assisted Eric nine times.

The Western Conference-leading Stars have won six of their last seven games and are 6-2 on the road. Dallas has also won eight of the last 11 against Carolina and four of the last five meetings in Raleigh.

Rangers 2, Avalanche 1: Derek Stepan and Oscar Lindberg scored 21 seconds apart in the second period, helping visiting New York to its fourth straight win.

Henrik Lundqvist made 29 saves as the Rangers improved to 14-2 on the road against Western Conference teams dating to last season.

Nathan MacKinnon scored a power-play goal for the Avalanche, who have dropped four of their last five contests. They begin a seven-game trip Tuesday.

Ducks 4, Blue Jackets 2: Captain Ryan Getzlaf had three assists in his first game back from an appendectomy, including one on defenseman Josh Manson's first NHL goal, and thost Anaheim beat Columbus.

Cam Fowler and Patrick Maroon also scored, Corey Perry also had three assists and Frederik Andersen made 34 saves for the three-time defending Pacific Division champions in a matchup of teams that began the day last in their respective divisions. Anaheim has won three straight following a 1-7-2 start.

Clayton Stoner scored into an empty net with 16 seconds to play after Columbus' Scott Hartnell got his second goal of the night with a minute on the clock.

Curtis McElhinney stopped 33 shots for the Blue Jackets against his former club. Columbus is 4-4-0 under new coach John Tortorella, who replaced Todd Richards after the team's 0-7 start.