

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## Militias deal Islamic State double blow

As Iraqi Kurds make gains in Sinjar, Syrian rebels push militants from border town

Associated Press

SINJAR, Iraq — Dealing a double blow to the Islamic State group, Iraqi Kurdish forces pushed into the key town of Sinjar on Friday as a Syrian rebel coalition captured an Islamic State-held border town in northern Syria.

In Iraq, the Kurdish forces raised a Kurdish flag in the center of Sinjar and a top official said it was liberated, though U.S. and Kurdish military officials urged caution in declaring victory in a major offensive to retake the strategic community.

The Kurdish forces encountered little resistance, at least initially, suggesting that many of the Islamic State fighters may have pulled back in anticipation of Friday's advance. It was also possible that they could be biding their time before striking back.

Kurdish militia fighters known as peshmerga launched the offensive to retake Sinjar on Thursday and succeeded in cutting a key highway nearby. U.S.-led coalition

airstrikes supported the offensive, dubbed Operation Free Sinjar. The town has been under the control of the Islamic State group for more than a year.

Also Friday, across the border in Syria, a rebel coalition known as the Democratic Forces of Syria seized the town of Hol in northern Hassakeh province. The U.S.-backed offensive to retake Islamic State-held areas in the southern parts of Hassakeh is coinciding with the push to retake Sinjar.

Redur Khalil, the spokesman for the main Kurdish fighting faction in Syria known as the YPG, announced that the coalition took Hol. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights also reported the Democratic Forces of Syria had reached Hol. It said the Syrian fighters on the ground were backed by intense airstrikes by the U.S.-led coalition that killed dozens of Islamic State militants. Others fled, leaving their weapons and ammunition behind.

It was the biggest victory for the Syrian coalition, which was formed in mid-October.

The push to liberate southern Hassakeh province from the Islamic State group was announced shortly after that.

A senior Kurdish defense official, Nasser Haj Mansour, told The Associated Press earlier that the fighters of the coalition had reached the outskirts of Hol. He said Islamic State militants were burning houses as they fled the town, while others were using the few civilians left in the area as human shields.

In Iraq, Sinjar was overrun by the extremists as they rampaged across Iraq in August 2014, leading to the killing, enslavement and flight of thousands of people from the minority Yazidi community.

"We promised, we have liberated Sinjar," Massoud Barzani, the president of the semi-autonomous Kurdish region, told fighters in Sinjar. "It's time for the Yazidi girls to raise their heads up. Revenge has been taken for them. ... Sinjar is very important because it's become a symbol of injustice against the Kurdish people."

## US troops advise Kurdish peshmerga in assault

BY COREY DICKSTEIN  
AND SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — U.S. special operations forces directly supported Kurdish peshmerga this week as they seized a western Iraqi city held by Islamic State militants for more than a year, defense officials said.

American troops served in various roles in the two-day fight, launched Thursday morning on Sinjar, helping the Iraqi Kurds free the city about 30 miles east of the Syrian border along Highway 47, a key highway that connects the Islamic State strongholds of Raqqa in Syria and Mosul in northern Iraq. The militants had held Sinjar since capturing it in August 2014.

While most U.S. troops supporting the offensive served far behind the front lines advising senior commanders of the

Iraqi Kurdish fighters, a "handful" were closer to the fighting, working from atop Mount Sinjar to help peshmerga identify airstrike targets, said Army Col. Steve Warren, Operation Inherent Resolve spokesman.

Despite their location, those U.S. troops were not operating as Joint Terminal Attack Controllers, or JTACs, Pentagon press secretary Peter Cook said Thursday.

Warren said neither the Americans nor the Kurds atop Mount Sinjar were in direct communication with pilots flying warplanes over the city, the role a JTAC would serve. Instead, the special operators were working alongside the peshmerga using binoculars to gather intelligence and relay information to a joint Kurdish-American command hub in Irbil, Iraq, where airstrikes were approved. The U.S. conducted 36 airstrikes during

the fight, destroying at least 13 Islamic State tactical units and dozens of fighting positions and pieces of equipment.

Operation Free Sinjar was part of a broader international effort to split in two the territory held by the extremist group by clearing the border region, which has been largely under militant control, analysts say.

After months of deadlock on the battlefields, the strategic initiative is shifting against the Islamic State group, said a report by STRATFOR, the global intelligence firm based in Austin, Texas.

Syrian government forces this week broke the Islamic State group's siege against the Kweiris air base near the country's second-largest city, Aleppo. Iraqi Security Forces are slowly advancing on the city of Ramadi, which the militants captured in a surprise assault in May.

Across the border from Sinjar, Syrian Democratic Forces — an estimated 30,000 to 40,000 U.S.-backed anti-Islamic State fighters including Syrian Arabs, Kurds, Christians and Turkmen — have captured about 500 square miles of land from the militants around Al-Hawl and Al-Hasakah.

Warren said the simultaneous operations present challenges for the Islamic State group, pressuring its fighters to concede land from multiple directions.

"These events are really all connected," Warren said. "We're conducting a very comprehensive, thought-out campaign targeting and attacking (the Islamic State group) at multiple locations across Iraq and Syria. The operations are, of course, focused on the single goal of degrading, dismantling and, ultimately, defeating" the Islamic State group.

## DOD chief's top military aide fired

By COREY DICKSTEIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Ash Carter on Thursday removed his top military assistant and longtime confidant from his advisory team, citing alleged misconduct.

In a brief statement released Thursday evening, Carter said Army Lt. Gen. Ron Lewis had been relieved of his prominent position after the secretary had directed the Defense Department Inspector General to investigate alleged misconduct. The statement did not elaborate on the allegations, but The Associated Press cited an anonymous source who said Lewis was fired because of an improper relationship with an adult colleague.

"I have confidence in the Inspector General's ability to determine the facts," Carter said in the statement. "The Department of the Army will then take action as appropriate."

The general was reassigned to the Army, where he will report to Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Daniel Allyn.

An official said Carter learned of the allegations against Lewis on Tuesday and spoke to the general on Thursday morning, when he notified Lewis he'd been relieved of his duties.

## US airstrike targets Jihadi John

*The Washington Post*

LONDON — The U.S. military is "reasonably certain" that an American drone strike in Syria killed the Islamic State executioner known as "Jihadi John," an official said Friday as British and U.S. officials sought to confirm the details of the attack.

Speaking in Baghdad, Army Col. Steven Warren, a U.S. military spokesman, told reporters that Thursday's U.S. drone attack hit its intended target and people were killed. It still remained unclear, however, whether the London-raised militant, Mohammed Emwazi, was among them.

Emwazi, who was shown in videos beheading several Western hostages, came to symbolize the Islamic State's brutality and was seen as a potential recruiting tool in the English-speaking world.

Warren did not give details of why U.S. military officials can express increased confidence that Emwazi, 27, was killed, but he said the drone strike was carried out as planned.

In London, British Prime Minister David Cameron lauded the operation, but also added that there was no certainty that the British extremist was dead.

Pentagon press secretary Peter Cook said experts were "assessing the results" of the

strike around the Syrian city of Raqqa, the de facto capital of the Islamic State group.

A U.S. defense official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss an intelligence assessment, said U.S. officials believe that the two people in the targeted vehicle were killed, but the officials were not able to say with certainty that Emwazi was among them.

"We don't have jackpot," the official said. He cautioned that, in such cases where DNA evidence is difficult to obtain and the death is not easily established by other intelligence means, definitive confirmation may not be possible.

## Technicality delays combat vets' benefits

By HEATH DRUZIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Nearly 30,000 post-9/11 combat veterans — some of whom have been waiting for years — are still without Department of Veterans Affairs health benefits due to a technicality more than three months after a whistleblower brought the issue to light.

VA officials apologized but said they do not have the authority to automatically enroll the veterans, even though they filled out the proper paperwork

and by law are guaranteed at least five years of enhanced care.

At issue is an optional means test, which the veterans in question did not fill out. The free care they are guaranteed by a 2008 law does not require them to fill out the means test, but without that information, their applications are automatically placed into "pending" status. When VA program specialist Scott Davis first reported the issue in August, 35,000 combat veterans were on the pending list, half of whom had

waited five years or more to be enrolled.

The VA did not start reaching out to the veterans until Davis publicly reported the problem, and now says there are about 29,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans in pending status. Benita Miller, director of the VA's Health Eligibility Center, said the VA had enrolled 9,000 servicemembers since August. (Roughly 3,000 new veterans applied in that time.)

Miller said her office is continuing to reach out to veterans by telephone and by mail.

## Study: Child abuse risk up in returning troops' homes

*USA Today*

WASHINGTON — The babies and toddlers of troops returning from deployment face the heightened risk of abuse in the six months after the parent's return home, a risk that increases among servicemembers who deploy more frequently, according to a study scheduled for release Friday.

The study was slated to be published in the American Journal of Public Health. The abuse of servicemembers' children exposes another hidden cost from the wars

in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Research by the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia looked at families of more than 112,000 servicemembers whose children were 2 or younger for the period of 2001 to 2007, the peak of the Iraq War. Researchers examined Pentagon-substantiated instances of abuse by a servicemember or another caregiver and the diagnoses of medical personnel within the military's health care system.

"This study is the first to reveal an increased risk when soldiers with young

children return home from deployment," David Rubin, co-director of the hospital's PolicyLab and the report's senior author, said in a statement. "This really demonstrates that elevated stress when a soldier returns home can have real and potentially devastating consequences for some military families."

Rubin said the study will help the Army and other services learn "when the signal [of stress] is the highest and the timing for intervention to help the returning soldiers."



# Ryan gets revenge against Jets

Associated Press

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — With a sweet victory in hand in front of the crowd that used to cheer him, Rex Ryan absolutely let loose.

The Buffalo Bills coach jumped up and down, pumped his fists, slapped his players on their backs and lost his headset in the process.

"It's pretty satisfying, without question," Ryan said after his Bills beat the New York Jets 22-17 on Thursday night.

It came against the team that fired him in January after six seasons, and it made for a triumphant return to the Meadowlands for Ryan.

His defense had two interceptions, recovered a fumble and stopped the Jets inside the Bills 10 in the final minutes, capped by Bacarri Rambo's game-clinching last-minute pick.

"I can tell the truth, this thing is kind of like being dumped by some girl you have the hots for," Ryan said to reporters at an overflowing news conference. "Every guy in this room has been dumped by a girl. You move on, and every now and then, they call you back."

"And they can't have you back." Duke Williams returned a fumbled kick-off 19 yards for the go-ahead points, rookie Karlos Williams had a 26-yard touchdown catch and Dan Carpenter kicked three field goals as Buffalo (5-4) moved into the wild-card playoff picture. Meanwhile, the Jets (5-4) have lost three of their last four.

"It felt weird," said Ryan, who did not come out to the field during pregame warmups. "Two things dawned on me that I am no longer the coach of the Jets:

I was looking at the wrong side of the sheet when we were getting stats, and I spent six years coaching in green and white, and I look out there and my team is in red."

Buffalo's offense made just enough key plays and held off a late surge by the Jets after Ryan Fitzpatrick threw for two touchdowns.

"Yes, it really is (frustrating)," said Darrelle Revis, who Ryan referred to after the game as one of the best cornerbacks in NFL history. "There's a bad taste in my mouth right now, just how it all went."

Here are some things to know about the Bills' victory over the Jets:

**Rexception:** Ryan was greeted with some boos and a few cheers, but nothing over the top. The loudest catcalls came when former Jets defensive end IK Enemkpali, chosen by Ryan as a team captain for the game, came out for the coin toss. Enemkpali broke Jets quarterback Geno Smith's jaw with a punch during training camp, was cut and claimed the next day by Buffalo.

**So close:** Fitzpatrick hit Eric Decker for a 31-yard touchdown with 7:23 remaining to make it 22-17. The Jets then got another golden chance a couple minutes later when Buffalo punter Colton Schmidt bobbled a snap and was tackled at his 13 by Jamari Lattimore.

On fourth-and-4 from the 7 and with a chance to take the lead, offensive coordinator Chan Gailey had Fitzpatrick throw a fade for Kellen Davis — but the ball floated over the tight end and landed harmlessly in the end zone.

"I didn't see the ball until it was already past me," Davis said.

**Tone-setter:** The game swung in the

second quarter on consecutive plays. After Dan Carpenter tied it at 3 with a 47-yard field goal, Duke Williams added to that immediately by scooping up a fumble by rookie Devin Smith on the first kickoff return of his career. Williams scooted 19 yards for a 9-3 lead, although Carpenter missed the extra point.

"They had a good hit," Jets coach Todd Bowles said. "He let the ball go. He can't fumble."

**Running wild:** Both teams had some success on the ground, with Buffalo's LeSean McCoy and New York's Chris Ivory making some key gains.

McCoy rushed for 112 yards on 19 carries — he also had 47 yards on five receptions — and looked like the Shady McCoy who was a star in Philadelphia before being traded to the Bills during the offseason. He was especially effective as the Bills ran down the clock in the fourth quarter, and had rushes of 16, 15, 14 (twice), 12 and 11 yards.

Ivory lost a fumble that led to a Buffalo field goal in the third quarter. He had 99 yards rushing and 36 through the air.

**Injuries:** Fitzpatrick is scheduled for surgery Friday on the damaged ligament in his left thumb. He plans to be ready for the Jets' game at Houston on Nov. 22.

"We'll see how it goes, but that's the intention," he said.

New York lost running back Zac Stacy to a broken left ankle on a kickoff return at the end of the first half.

Bills defensive end Mario Williams spent most of the game sidelined with what the team called an illness. Ryan said Williams was "sicker than a dog" and "we were pumping fluids in him."

# Hokies rally past Jackets

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Frank Beamer picked up his first retirement gift.

Pretty sweet one, too. Virginia Tech rallied from an early 14-point deficit to give its retiring coach a 23-21 victory over Georgia Tech on Thursday night, moving the Hokies a step closer to becoming eligible for their 23rd straight bowl appearance.

"I can't tell you how much this win means," said Beamer, the winningest active coach in the NCAA's top division.

The 68-year-old coach announced his retirement last week with the oncemighty Hokies (5-5, 3-3 Atlantic Coast Conference) mired in another mediocre season.

But, if Virginia Tech wins one of its last two games, Beamer can at least go out with the nation's longest active bowl streak still intact.

"All our effort was toward Georgia Tech," Beamer said. "I told our coaches and players after we made the announcement that we were going to turn our attention toward Georgia Tech. That's the only thing we can control. You put your effort toward things that you can control. I thought we did."

After the Yellow Jackets fumbled it away on two straight possessions in the fourth quarter, Virginia Tech grabbed its first lead on Travon McMillian's second touchdown, a 4-yard run with 6:58 remaining.

As the coach walked off the field with his 278th career victory, the small Virginia Tech contingent saluted him with chants of "Beamer! Beamer! Beamer!"

"They were loud, and they helped us win," Beamer said. "They're a part of it."

Georgia Tech (3-7, 1-6) added another bitter defeat to its disappointing season. The Yellow Jackets have dropped seven of their last eight games and are assured of a losing record, likely ending their own streak of 18 straight bowls.

"I'm lost," said center Freddie Burden, summing up the attitude of everyone involved in a season that began with such high expectations. "I don't know," he added, shaking his head. "I don't know."

Georgia Tech went ahead on freshman Brant Mitchell's 32-yard interception return early in the second half, but the Yellow Jackets simply made too many mistakes to hang on.

They turned it over three times, extended Virginia Tech's winning drive with a pass interference penalty on third down inside the 10, and squandered their final chance with a downright silly flag. Having driven close to range for a potential winning field goal, quarterback Justin Thomas was stopped for a short gain.

When Chuck Clark tried to rip the ball out, offensive guard Errin Joe came in to level the Hokies safety. That drew a 15-yard penalty, essentially ending the home team's final hope.

The night started much better for Georgia Tech, which jumped ahead while many fans were still stuck in Atlanta traffic.

# Panthers want more than division title

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — The Carolina Panthers have their sights on more than just a three-peat as NFC South champions at the midway point of the season.

They want home-field advantage throughout the NFC playoffs.

With an 8-0 record and a two-game lead on the rest of the conference, they appear positioned to do just that.

That is why Carolina's 37-29 win over the Green Bay Packers on Sunday — the team's 12th consecutive regular-season victory — was so huge.

Arizona, Minnesota and Green Bay are all 6-2, although the Panthers own the tiebreaker against the Packers.

"I think it goes without saying we would rather play in Charlotte in January than in Green Bay," Panthers tight end Greg Olsen said.

The Panthers have reached this point behind the improved play of dual-threat quarterback Cam Newton, the league's top-ranked rushing attack and an opportunistic defense loaded with playmakers.

Newton has battled back from an injury-filled season in 2014 and has thrown and rushed for a touchdown in five different games this season.

Behind Newton and Jonathan Stewart the Panthers average more than 142 yards rushing per game and have run for at least 100 yards in 19 consecutive games.

Carolina's defense is best known for standout linebackers Luke Kuechly and Thomas Davis, but cornerback Josh Norman and defensive tackle Kawann Short captured NFC Player of the Month awards for September and October respectively.

Some things to know about the NFC South going into the second half of the regular season:

**Waiting in the wings:** The Panthers' defense has been pretty good this season, but its about to get even better. Charles Johnson, the team's top pass rusher, is eligible to return from short-term IR against the Dallas Cowboys on Thanksgiving. Johnson has been bothered by a hamstring injury, but has had more than two months to heal. Johnson will be paired opposite veteran Jared Allen, the NFL's active leader in sacks, when he returns. There's also second-year defensive end Kony Ealy, who has elevated his game in recent weeks.

**Clipped wings:** The Falcons opened the season a surprising 5-0 under first-year

coach Dan Quinn, but have dropped three of their past four, including the past two to division cellar dwellers Tampa Bay and San Francisco. Running back Davonta Freeman has been a huge find for the Falcons. He has 721 yards rushing, second only to Minnesota's Adrian Peterson. But quarterback Matt Ryan is struggling and Atlanta hasn't scored more than 21 points in any of its last four games.

**Just a Brees:** The Saints seem to have their offense moving in high gear. Drew Brees has thrown for more yards than any quarterback in the NFC, and New Orleans is first in the league in offense. But the Saints lost last week at home to the Tennessee Titans 34-28, ending a three-game winning streak. Defense continues to be an issue for the Saints, who've allowed 110 points in their past three games.

**Last-place Bucs:** Jameis Winston's development has been the most encouraging aspect of the first half for the Buccaneers. Since throwing four interceptions and losing a fumble during a loss to the Panthers in Week 4, the No. 1 overall pick in the draft has thrown for four touchdowns and no interceptions while guiding the Bucs to a 2-2 record over the past four games.



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# Warriors off to 10-0 start

The Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Stephen Curry dribbled across midcourt in the third quarter and went into a trademark crouch as he started to break down Andre Miller.

As Curry rose to take the shot, the 39-year-old Miller somehow got a hand on the ball and jarred it loose. The reigning MVP still managed to gather himself in the air and fire a one-handed, shot-put style three-pointer that splashed through.

"I was still kind of in rhythm," Curry said with a smirk. "It was just kind of a low release."

Curry scored 46 points, 21 in the first quarter, and the Golden State Warriors improved to 10-0 on the season with a 129-116 victory over the Minnesota Timberwolves on Thursday night.

Nothing the defending champions have seen this season has been able to throw them off as they have surged to the best start in franchise history.

Curry hit 15 of 25 shots, including 8 of 13 three-pointers, in another breathtaking performance. Draymond Green had 23 points, 12 assists and eight rebounds for the Warriors, who are the fourth defending champion to start the season with at least 10 straight wins.

"When you get up on him, he just shoots the ball from farther," said Timberwolves forward Shabazz Muhammad, who scored 16 points. "It looked like he was shooting it from dang near halfcourt."

Karl-Anthony Towns had 17 points and 11 rebounds and Andrew Wiggins scored 19 points for the Timberwolves (4-4), who have lost all four home games this season. Ricky Rubio missed his second straight game with a strained left hamstring.

The Warriors went 18-for-38 from three-point range while Minnesota was just 3-for-9.

The Warriors opened defense of their title as emphatically as possible, using potshots from the likes of the Houston Rockets and Los Angeles Clippers as fuel while blowing the doors off the league.

Curry has led the charge, shooting with a precision and range never before seen in this league. A human heat check, Curry has broken the league record for three-pointers made in a season in each of the last two years, and is on pace to smash it again this year. He has topped 40 points in a game three times this season and his 52 threes are more than three teams have made all season.

**Suns 118, Clippers 104:** While the Los Angeles Clippers' starting guards could only sit and watch, their Phoenix Suns counterparts had a big night.

Brandon Knight matched his career high with 37 points, Eric Bledsoe fell an assist shy of his second career triple-double and the host Suns rolled past the severely depleted Clippers 118-104 on Thursday night.

Bledsoe had 26 points, 10 rebounds and nine assists.

"Our guards played great tonight," Phoenix coach Jeff Hornacek said.

The Clippers' guards didn't play at all.

Chris Paul (groin strain) and J.J. Redick (lower back spasms) sat out. To make matters worse, Blake Griffin was ejected after drawing his second technical foul with 2:36 left in the first half.

That left Los Angeles without its top three scorers the rest of the way.

Jamaal Crawford had 18 points and Wesley Johnson added 14 for the Clippers.

"There are no excuses there," Los Angeles guard Austin Rivers said. "We need them (Paul, Redick and Griffin). That is obvious, but we are a deep enough team where we can win without them. We had bad spirit tonight."

Knight shot 6-for-10 on three-point attempts.

"Whenever you have a night like that, you're happy," Knight said, "but as long as we win, that's what counts. That's the biggest factor. You could have 37, 35, but if you don't win, it doesn't matter."

T.J. Warren matched his career best with 18 points for Phoenix, 14 in the sec-

ond half.

Bledsoe had a great chance at that 10th assist in the final seconds when he found Jon Leuer inside, but the big forward missed the layup.

"Having a triple-double, it would have been fun," Bledsoe said, "but at the end of the day it's bigger than me having a triple-double, it's about the win."

Phoenix snapped an eight-game losing streak against the Clippers.

The Suns' starting backcourt of Bledsoe and Knight outscored the Clippers' replacement guards Rivers and Pablo Prigioni 63-17.

Immediately after Griffin's ejection, the Suns went on a 9-1 run to end the half with a 58-49 advantage. They broke it open by taking a 25-point lead in the third quarter.

After Los Angeles cut the lead to 15 in the fourth, Hornacek put Knight back in the game, and that allowed him to match the career best he set against the Los Angeles Lakers on Dec. 31, 2013.

**Heat 92, Jazz 91:** When Miami traded Mario Chalmers earlier this week, team President Pat Riley decided it was time for a chat with reserve guard Tyler Johnson.

Riley's message was short and sweet.

"Now, it's on," Riley said. "That's what I said to him: 'Game on. You're not the third guard now.' And we have every confidence in him."

Johnson keeps showing why that's the case.

Chris Bosh led the way with 25 points, and Johnson capped his 17-point night with two key field goals in the final 1:48 as the Heat topped the Utah Jazz for their third straight win to open a seven-game homestand.

"Tyler is awesome," Bosh said. "He can play. He's had a great camp, he comes in and he works hard every day, works on his weaknesses, goes out there and lays it on the line and competes. He's literally started from the bottom and worked his way up into playing a very huge role for this team."

# Rousey driven by fear of failure

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Ronda Rousey says it's her fear of failure that guarantees she'll win Sunday when she defends her UFC bantamweight title against Holly Holm in front of a projected-record Melbourne crowd.

Just eight months after Australia's Victoria state lifted its ban on cage fighting, the UFC has brought its showcase UFC 193 event Down Under, with the Rousey-Holm fight as its main event.

Undefeated through 12 UFC bouts, including seven title defenses, the former judo Olympian says her fear of failure is bigger than anyone's.

"I've endured the worst losses possible. I lost the finals at the (judo) world championships when I wanted to be world champ like my mother (1984 champion AnnMaria De Mars)," Rousey said. "My dream since I was a little kid was to win at the Olympics and I failed twice."

"Nobody knows what failure feels like more than I do and that's why I'm the person who walks in there willing to die in order to win. And that's why I am always going to win, because I know how it feels."

Rousey, who has become one of the most prominent U.S. female athletes after winning her last three bouts in a combined 64 seconds, said she'd "rather die and go bankrupt than ever walk out of there not the winner."

"For every other girl in the division, it's easier for them to lose and go home with a paycheck. ... I'm going to walk out of there the winner every single time. I've lost enough in my life."

The UFC 193 main card also features a straw-weight title bout between Poland's Joanna Jedrzejczyk and Canadian Valerie Letourneau, as well as men's heavyweights Mark Hunt and Antonio Silva, and middleweights Uriah Hall and Robert Whittaker.

Melbourne's Etihad Stadium has been transformed from a 56,000-seat Australian rules football venue to an auditorium holding close to 75,000 seats for the event and a full house would easily eclipse the 55,724 fans who attended UFC 129 at Toronto's Rogers Centre in 2011.

Holm says her focus will be on Rousey rather than the crowd

"I don't even think I'll look around. I think I'm just going to focus on the cage because that's where the work needs to be done," she said. "I know they're there to watch but it's not just the people in the stands, there will be people all over the world watching it."

If the enthusiastic turnout to an open workout for the fighters in Melbourne's downtown Wednesday is any indication, a record crowd could be in the offing.

"Our workouts yesterday was a real touching experience," Rousey said. "It was bigger than any open workout I've ever had before and great to see how the people here have embraced us, even though none of the people on the main event fights are Australian."

"I'm so glad we picked here to try and beat the UFC attendance record."

# Rangers secure 7th straight win

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Surrounded by a small throng of reporters, New York Rangers center Derek Stepan shared the name of his favorite player in the NHL right now.

Was it Washington star Alex Ovechkin? Pittsburgh's Sidney Crosby? Chicago's Jonathan Toews? Los Angeles' Anze Kopitar?

No to all of the above. Try teammate Mats Zuccarello.

Zuccarello, Derick Brassard and Kevin Hayes scored in the first period, and the Rangers beat the St. Louis Blues 6-3 on Thursday night for their seventh straight victory.

Zuccarello finished with three points and was one of six Rangers with multiple-point efforts against St. Louis.

"He's playing at such a high level right now. It starts with his compete level," Stepan said. "He competes so hard."

J.T. Miller, Ryan McDonagh and Dan Girardi also scored for New York, which improved to 12-2-2. Henrik Lundqvist made 31 saves.

Dmitrij Jaskin, Vladimir Tarasenko and Troy Brouwer had the goals for St. Louis, which had won three in a row. The Blues fell to 11-4-1.

"I thought we were going to win this one," Alex Steen said. "We still had a really good vibe and a really good push."

New York and St. Louis entered ranked first and third, respectively, in the NHL in goals against per game. But the first of their two meetings this season was a wild affair.

**Devils 3, Blackhawks 2:** Sergey Kalinin scored a power-play goal with 2:27 left and visiting New Jersey beat Chicago for its second victory over the defending Stanley Cup champions in a week.

New Jersey has won three of four — including a 4-2 win over Chicago last Friday night — and is 9-3-0 after starting 0-3-1.

**Kings 2, Islanders 1:** Jhonas Enroth stayed unbeaten in his current uniform with 31 saves, and host Los Angeles beat New York for its 10th victory in 13 games.

Brock Nelson scored an early goal and Jaroslav Halak stopped 20 shots for the Isles, who have lost six of eight. New York has scored more than two goals just once during that stretch.

**Coyotes 4, Oilers 1:** Max Domi had a goal and an assist, Mike Smith stopped 27 shots and host Arizona raced past Edmonton after a slow start.

The Coyotes didn't stop once they got rolling and extended their point streak against the Oilers to 19 straight games (16-0-3), including six consecutive victories.

**Capitals 5, Flyers 2:** Jason Chimera had two goals and an assist to lead visit-

ing Washington to a victory over slumping Philadelphia.

**Maple Leafs 2, Predators 1 SO:** Peter Holland scored the only goal in a five-round shootout to give visiting Toronto a victory over Nashville.

**Lightning 3, Flames 1:** Steven Stamkos scored a go-ahead power-play goal in the third period, Ben Bishop stopped a personal five-game losing streak and host Tampa Bay beat Calgary.

**Stars 6, Jets 3:** Jamie Benn scored the tiebreaking goal on a third-period power play and host Dallas went on to beat Winnipeg.

**Sabres 3, Panthers 2:** Cody Franson scored the tiebreaking goal late in the second period, Sam Reinhart added a power-play goal early in the third and improving visiting Buffalo held off Florida.

**Senators 3, Canucks 2:** Bobby Ryan and Chris Wideman had power-play goals, Erik Karlsson also scored and host Ottawa beat Vancouver.

**Avalanche 3, Bruins 2:** Matt Duchene broke a tie in the third period with his sixth goal in five games and visiting Colorado beat Boston.

**Wild 3, Hurricanes 2 (OT):** Jason Zucker scored his second goal of the game with 1:10 left in overtime, giving visiting Minnesota the win over Carolina.