

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## Air Force fires 3 commanders at Laughlin

BY COREY DICKSTEIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Air Force removed three top commanders at Laughlin Air Force Base on Wednesday, citing concerns about dangerous and threatening behavior at the major pilot training installation in Texas, the service's Air Education and Training Command announced.

The chief of AETC, Lt. Gen. Steven Kwast, fired Col. Charles Velino, the commander of the 47th Flying Training Wing, and the commanders of its operations group and flying training squadron, citing "chronic leadership failures" raised in an investigation into widespread officer misconduct within the unit, according to an Air Force statement released Wednesday. The statement did not name the commanders of the operations group or the flying training squadron.

However, Col. Robert Pekarek had been in command of the operations group since June 2017, according to Air Force records. An Air Force spokeswoman declined to name the flying training squadron commander who was relieved of duty.

"The prior command team chronically failed to appropriately care for people and the mission," Kwast said in the statement. "They failed to correct an evolving situation that led to an environment where some airmen did not feel safe or respected."

Velino had served as the 47th Wing's commander since June 2017 after serving two years as the commander of the 15th Wing's Operations Group in Hawaii, according to his official biography. He has served in the Air Force since 1995 and has logged 3,700 flight hours piloting a variety of aircraft including C-17 Globemaster III cargo jets.

Maj. Gen. Patrick Doherty, the commander of the 19th Air Force, which oversees the 47th Wing, ordered an inquiry into the command team after misconduct allegations were raised. The investigation substantiated those claims revealing instances of heavy alcohol consumption and improper treatment of some student pilots, according to the Air Force.

Air Force Col. Lee Gentile was named the wing's new commander.

## Trump: 15,000 GIs could go to US-Mexico border

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said the number of military troops deployed to the U.S.-Mexican border could reach 15,000 — roughly double the number the Pentagon said it currently plans for a mission whose dimensions are shifting daily.

The Pentagon said "more than 7,000" troops were being sent to the southwestern border to support the Customs and Border Protection agents. Officials said that number could reach a maximum of about 8,000 under present plans.

The troop numbers have been changing at a dizzying pace, with Trump drawing a hard line on immigration in the lead-up to the midterm elections.

Just last week, officials were indicating that about 800 to 1,000 might be sent. On Monday, officials announced that about 5,200 were being deployed. The next day, the Air Force general running the operation said more than the initially announced total were going, and he pointedly rejected a news report that it could reach 14,000, saying that was "not consistent with what's actually being planned."

Gen. Terrence O'Shaughnessy, commander of U.S. Northern Command, told reporters the number would exceed the initial contingent of 5,200, but he offered no estimate of the eventual total.

Just 24 hours later, Trump thrust new uncertainty into the picture, catching the Pentagon by surprise.

With his eyes squarely on Tuesday's contests, Trump has rushed a series of immigration declarations, promises and actions as he tries to mobilize supporters to retain Republican control of Congress. His own Republican campaign in 2016 concentrated on border fears, and that's his focus in the final week of the midterm fight.

"As far as the caravan is concerned, our military is out," Trump said. "We have about 5,800. We'll go up to anywhere between 10,000 and 15,000 military personnel on top of Border Patrol, ICE and everybody else at the border."

Later Wednesday, Trump told ABC

News, "We have to have a wall of people."

His comments were the latest twist in a story that has pushed the Pentagon unhappily into the political space, prompting questions about whether Defense Secretary Jim Mattis was allowing the military to be leveraged as a political stunt.

"We don't do stunts," Mattis said Wednesday.

Trump rejected the idea he was "fear-mongering" or using the issue for political purposes, but his rhetoric at the end of the campaign season calls that denial into question. Trump has railed against illegal immigration, including several caravans of migrants from Central America slowly moving on foot toward the U.S. border.

As he seeks to stoke concerns about illegal immigration ahead of the midterm elections, Trump tweeted a video alleging Democrats were responsible for allowing a homicidal immigrant into the U.S. He provided no evidence supporting that claim.

In his Wednesday tweet, Trump highlighted the case of Luis Bracamontes, a twice-deported immigrant from Mexico sentenced to death in California for killing two police officers. The 53-second spot includes expletives uttered by Bracamontes during his trial as he professed regret at not killing more officials.

"Illegal immigrant, Luis Bracamontes, killed our people!," the video states, adding, "Democrats let him into our country. ... Democrats let him stay." It includes scenes of a migrant "caravan" moving toward the U.S., warning ominously, "Who else would Democrats let in?"

Trump's comments left some in the Pentagon scratching their heads. Officials said they had no plans to deploy as many as 15,000 troops. The number conceivably could reach 10,000, counting the 2,100 National Guard soldiers who have been operating along the border for months as part of a separate but related mission. The number of active-duty troops tapped for deployment stood at 7,000 as of Wednesday but could reach 8,000.

A deployment of 15,000 would bring the military commitment on the border to roughly the same level as in Afghanistan.

# Marines ditch meal cards in favor of new CAC card system

BY JAMES BOLINGER  
*Stars and Stripes*

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION IWAKUNI, Japan — Some junior Marines in Japan have shredded their meal cards and moved to a simpler system that requires only a common access card, or CAC, to dine at mess halls.

Part of a Marine Corps-wide initiative, the change eliminates an unnecessary piece of paper that can easily be lost or forged, said Chief Warrant Officer 4 Denis Lebreton, director of the Installation Personnel Administration Center, which oversees dining facilities at MCAS Iwakuni.

The CAC system increases accountability and reduces the administrative burden of managing the program, he said. For example, Marines who lost their

meal card were required to fill out a statement that had to be routed through their chain of command, the provost marshal office and the mess hall.

Using CACs also eliminates the ability for Marines to loan their meal card to another individual or make a copy that could then be used by someone else, Lebreton said.

The new system has been up and running for months; however, IPAC just recently received official word from the Marines to stop issuing meal cards at Iwakuni, he said.

Marines were instructed to shred their meal cards last month, prompting rumors that they would be put on a basic allowance for subsistence, or BAS.

Lebreton said that is not the case; however, the change should also benefit Marines

on BAS, because they will no longer be required to use cash to purchase a meal. Instead, the cost will automatically be deducted from their BAS and reflected on their leave and earnings statement at the end of the month.

Marines receiving BAS can still use cash, but there is now an option if they forget to bring money with them, he said.

The change does not affect members of other services stationed at Iwakuni or other Marine installations, Lebreton said. Sailors based at Iwakuni still need to use a meal card to dine at the mess hall, and servicemembers receiving BAS will have to show their ID and pay cash at the register.

Marines assigned to bases owned by a different service will have to follow requirements at that installation.

## CENTCOM apologizes for offensive phrase in welcome guide

BY JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

U.S. Central Command issued an apology Thursday after it was discovered that offensive language including the phrase “Negro blood” had found its way into a welcome guide for military personnel deployed to Saudi Arabia.

“We regret that inappropriate material was posted to our website without a more fulsome review and apologize to anyone who took offense,” CENTCOM spokesman Capt. Bill Urban said in a statement. “We removed the document as soon as we were notified of the content, and it was returned to the originating office for revision.”

The 69-page “Welcome Booklet,” which includes information ranging from base services to religious and cultural life in Saudi Arabia, delved into the country’s history with arcane language now regarded as offensive.

“The population of the (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) is mainly composed of descendants of indigenous tribes that have inhabited the peninsula since prehistoric times with some later mixture of Negro blood from slaves imported from Africa,” said the manual dated June 2018.

The language was recently highlighted by comedian Hasan Minhaj during a segment of his new Netflix show “Patriot Act.”

“If you are sent on a training mission in Saudi Arabia, this is the official military document you get. ... Oh America, even in boring, technical manuals you somehow manage to be racist,” Minhaj said in a show posted on Netflix on Sunday.

Urban said CENTCOM is conducting a survey of other training material to ensure it doesn’t contain offensive language.

## Tokyo moves forward with Futenma project

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE  
AND AYA ICHIHASHI  
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The Japanese government has restarted construction on a new U.S. military runway that will one day facilitate the relocation and closure of Marine Corps Air Station Futenma.

The move defies Okinawan officials’ repeated attempts to halt work on the project — which will allow landfill work for the runway into Oura Bay off the coast of Camp Schwab at Henoko — that include permit revocations from August.

The Okinawa Defense Bureau, which represents Japan’s Ministry of Defense on the island, began putting back floats Thursday morning that mark a “no-entry” boundary around

the Oura Bay site, according to agency spokesman Masashi Katsuren. Landfill work is scheduled to follow.

The move came a day after Japan’s Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism sided with Tokyo over the project, which had been approved in 2013 by former Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima.

The ministry’s lifting of Okinawa’s permit revocation for the work is not permanent, prefectural officials told Stars and Stripes earlier this week, likely setting the stage for yet another court battle over the project.

“We received the official revocation of the prefectural revocation from the Ministry of Land yesterday morning; therefore, we have resumed the construction at the sea this morning,” Katsuren said. “We

will put most of our effort on protecting the environment and residents’ safety while resuming the construction.”

Okinawa officials — who held emergency meetings throughout Thursday to determine their response to the restart — could not be reached for comment.

The issue ignited a small but vigorous protest movement — backed by popular support — that has been working to block the project and move Marine air operations totally off the island.

Marine officials have said that the helicopters need to be where the Marines are, and the U.S. and Japan have maintained that Henoko is the “only solution” to the Futenma safety quandary.



# Norwegian locals carry on during NATO war games

BY MARTIN EGNASH  
*Stars and Stripes*

OPPDAL, Norway — Residents of the sleepy Norwegian town of Oppdal went about their normal business Thursday, while the rumble of tanks and the crackling of gunfire echoed around them.

As part of NATO's Trident Juncture war games, U.S. Marine armored vehicles and infantry battled their way through to liberate the town and seize its small airfield.

As Marines dashed into positions and secured various objectives, residents ate lunch at local cafes overlooking the mock combat, scarcely giving the battle unfolding in front of them a glance.

"I have seen some soldiers (and Marines), but they have been quiet and polite," said Vilde Staverlokk, a local waitress, who said people around town generally mind their own business. "They aren't getting in the way for us."

The town was the main target in the amphibious force's assault on an "enemy" that had occupied Norway, played by Spanish, Italian and German troops.

"The Marines are repelling the enemy forces who have dug in to Oppdal," said Marine spokesman Lt. Larry Boyd. "The city is the key objective in our area of operations during the exercise."

As the first big battle of Trident Juncture for the 11,000 Marines in Norway, seizing Oppdal allows them to continue to their offensive operations

against the fictional occupying army.

The Marines hit the town from three sides, then proceeded to push the enemy southward away from the city and into the surrounding valleys.

The action began with a tank battle between Marine M1A1 Abrams tanks — drawn from the Marines' pre-positioned storage caves hidden in Norwegian mountains — and Spanish Leopard 2E tanks to wrest control of the airport.

"Our plan is to use our speed to attack fast and hit them hard," said Lance Cpl. Joaquin Medina, a Marine tanker, before the assault.

"We have a plan to engage the enemy, but once you make contact, plans usually go out the window and you have to operate on the fly," said fellow tanker Cpl. Joshua Avalos. "It usually comes down to who has the better platoon and who trained more."

Once the airfield was taken, the tanks pushed down the highway, fighting more Spanish armor all the way to the town.

The heavy armor unit was joined by dismounted Marines advancing through the snowy woodlands, and LAV-25s, including the anti-tank variant armed with wire-guided missiles.

The dismounted troops then secured the city, including all major entrances and exits.

Plans call for the Marines to continue to engage the mock enemy further away from Oppdal in the following days.

## Bulldog brigade mascot goes under the knife in S. Korea

BY MARCUS FICHTL  
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — A Texas-based unit's youngest and furriest soldier is breathing easier, literally, thanks to a Halloween-night surgery in South Korea.

Pfc. Tank Chester, a 7-month-old Victorian bulldog who serves as mascot for the 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division "Bulldogs," had his soft palate trimmed and nostrils widened at Camp Humphreys' veterinary clinic to ease the airways for the member of the notoriously hard-breathing breed.

"He's the face and symbol of who we are," Cpl. Mitchell Duncan, Chester's handler, said at the clinic Wednesday.

Chester, along with the rest of the Bulldog brigade, arrived in South Korea last month, taking the reins as the 2nd Infantry Division's sole brigade combat team on the peninsula.

While technically an elective surgery, it's a nearly necessary one for the active mascot, who like his predecessors is expected to ride shotgun with the unit's command team in everything from helicopters to tanks as they inspect and boost morale to the brigade's troops.

"With these English bulldogs ... we've bred in the smoosh face, which looks really cool, however it comes with its own complications," Camp Humphreys veterinarian surgeon Capt. Sean Curry said. "It's really a struggle for them to breathe."

Chester is the ninth of his name since the first was donated in 1940 by the British as a "token of appreciation," Duncan said. He comes with a full complement of soldiering gear, including identification cards, a passport and a rank he's still living up to.

"He's a Pfc. for a reason — he's got an attitude, he's a little stubborn, and he still does things his way," the 24-year-old from Redfield N.Y., said joking-

ly. "He's your typical bulldog. He loves people; loves attention. His idea of fun is sitting on the couch and watching TV with you."

The surgery might never have happened if not for a bit of luck. The military surgeon back home at Fort Bliss, Texas, didn't feel comfortable with the procedure, and no surgeons were trained for it in South Korea. A weeklong medical symposium in Yongsan serendipitously brought in the Army's main surgeon in the region, Maj. Shane Andrews, whose team routinely does the surgery on Okinawa.

A team of four worked on Chester. Two enlisted veterinary technicians monitored the dog's anesthesia and vitals, while Curry and Andrews took turns opening up his airways and cutting off a wedge of cartilage in each nostril. The surgery took about 40 minutes.

With Andrews helping train the Humphreys team, Curry said Wednesday's surgery also helped the clinic expand its capabilities. "We're starting to kick off our surgical procedures again here at Humphreys," he said.

The number of surgeries, including standard spays and neuters, they could perform has been limited for nearly all of the past year because they've been unable to get some necessary medication through customs, Curry said. But three weeks ago, they swung the surgical doors wide-open to the public.

Curry added that Chester's surgery will help families with bulldogs on the peninsula and "in the process we're helping out a dog, and that's always a good day for us."

Chester was released Thursday morning back to the Bulldog brigade with no issues.

# US watchdog: Few signs of progress in Afghanistan

BY PHILLIP WALTER  
WELLMAN  
*Stars and Stripes*

KABUL, Afghanistan — The U.S.-backed government in Afghanistan has lost control of or influence over a record number of districts as the country's thinly stretched security forces sustain record casualties, a U.S. government watchdog said Wednesday.

The figures represented a bleak progress report on America's longest war, now in its 18th year. A full assessment remains difficult because of Pentagon restrictions on Afghan forces data, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction said. SIGAR said Afghanistan's army and police "made minimal or no progress in pressuring the Taliban" from July 1 to Sept. 30 — the period covered in its latest quarterly report — with both sides controlling less of the country but contesting more of it.

"Notably, Afghan government control or influence of its districts reached the lowest level (55.5%) since SIGAR began tracking district control in November 2015," the report said.

Those districts include about two-thirds of Afghanistan's population. Kabul's goal is to control or influence areas where 80 percent of the country's 33 million people live by the end of 2019.

Meanwhile, 3.5 million people lived in areas controlled or influenced by insurgents — a slight decrease since last quarter — while the number of people living in contested areas slightly increased to 8.1 million, the report added. Since late 2015, nearly a year after the NATO transition from a combat mission to one focused on training and advising Afghans, the numbers have shown overall insurgent gains.

Some military analysts say those gains are even more substantial than the U.S. military reports. A study by the Long War Journal, published by the nonpartisan group Foundation for Defense of Democracies, found that a little over half of Afghanistan's people live in districts outside of government control. Meanwhile, Afghan forces are also struggling to maintain force strength, the SIGAR report stated.

# S. Korea president: N. Korean leader to visit Seoul 'soon'

BY KIM GAMEL  
AND YOO KYONG CHANG  
*Stars and Stripes*

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un will soon visit Seoul and Russia, and will likely meet with China's president in Pyongyang, South Korea's president said Thursday.

While Moon Jae-in expressed hope the diplomatic moves would lead to denuclearization and peace, Kim hinted at another motive of weakening what he called "vicious sanctions" against his regime.

The comments came as Seoul and Washington said they will make a decision this month on whether to conduct large-scale war games next year to facilitate talks aimed at persuading the North to give up its nuclear weapons.

Several joint military exercises have been canceled since an unprecedented summit between Kim and President Donald Trump on June 12 in Singapore.

The two Koreas have moved rapidly to improve relations despite slow progress in U.S.-North Korean nuclear talks.

Kim said during his most recent summit with Moon in September that he would visit Seoul "in the near future." That would make him the first North Korean leader to do so since the 1950-53 war ended in an armistice instead of a peace treaty.

Moon was optimistic Thursday in a policy speech to defend his budget. "The second North-U.S. summit is near at hand," he said in a major policy speech, adding that Kim's visit to Seoul "will also take place soon."

Kim, meanwhile, stepped up his criticism of U.S.-led economic sanctions meant to punish his regime for developing nuclear weapons. The North has repeatedly called for sanctions to be lifted as payoff for steps it has already taken toward denuclearization. Washington insists it will maintain pressure on Pyongyang until more concrete measures are achieved.

# Calif. roadway to be named after Marine vet, actor Ermey

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE  
*Stars and Stripes*

If you one day hear the Marines' Hymn while driving between Agena Road and Sierra Highway in Palmdale, Calif., do not fret; your ears are not having a "major malfunction."

That section of road — known as Avenue N — will be named for acclaimed actor and Marine Corps veteran R. Lee Ermey during a ceremony on Nov. 10, the Marine Corps' birthday, according to a fundraising page linked to Ermey's family, friends and supporters.

Ermey lived just off Avenue N for 24 years until his death in April at age 74, the

GoFundMe page said. Efforts to rename the road after him began in May and have since been unanimously approved by the cities of Palmdale and Lancaster, Los Angeles County and the California Department of Transportation.

Plans call for street and highway signs reading "R. Lee Ermey Avenue (Avenue N)," plaques and even a "musical road" that will play the Marines' Hymn via grooves in the road when driven upon.

While Ermey's friends and family received overwhelming support from municipal government officials to rename the 7-mile stretch of roadway,

they bear the onus to pay for the memorial, the GoFundMe page said. That is why they are attempting to raise \$150,000.

They had raised \$5,365 in the campaign's first 24 days.

The ceremony honoring the Golden Globe-nominated actor is slated to take place at the intersection of Avenue N and Sierra Highway, The Antelope Valley Press in Palmdale reported this week. It's known to aviation enthusiasts as a prime viewing spot for aircraft taking off from Air Force Plant 42.

Ermey — a Vietnam veteran who spent 11 years in the Marines — is perhaps best known for his portrayal of the foul-

mouthed drill instructor, Gunnery Sgt. Hartman, in Stanley Kubrick's Academy Award-nominated "Full Metal Jacket," in which he demanded of a recruit, "What is your major malfunction?" He had over 100 additional credits in film, television and video games that included everything from "Toy Story" to "The Simpsons." He was also an author, a businessman and a humanitarian, particularly known for his work on behalf of veterans.

Ermey died on April 15 due to complications from pneumonia. He was buried with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery.



# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Chef arrested after lewd act at event

**SC** CHARLESTON — A South Carolina chef who exposed his genitalia and buttocks at an event showcasing female-owned businesses has been arrested.

Charleston police arrest records show Mike Ray was charged with indecent exposure Wednesday, two days after he announced he would step away from his day-to-day duties at One Broad and Normandy Farm Bakery and seek counseling.

Ray told The Post & Courier that he'd "always been the life of the party," but said he realized pulling down his pants at the Oct. 26 cocktail reception "didn't go over so well."

## Police: Review doesn't support agent's claims

**TX** HOUSTON — An FBI agent's explanation for why he fatally shot a hostage during a rescue attempt in Houston "is not supported" by evidence reviewed by police investigators, the Houston police chief said Wednesday.

Chief Art Acevedo said "the totality of the evidence and statements in this investigation" are not consistent with the agent's claims in the January shooting of Ulises Valladares, 47.

Acevedo declined to elaborate, but said the findings of his investigators were forwarded to federal authorities and the Harris County district attorney's office.

Authorities have said Valladares was kidnapped on Jan. 24 in Conroe, north of Houston, as part of an attempt to extort money from his brother. During a rescue attempt, Val-

ladares grabbed the barrel of an agent's rifle and the agent, fearing the weapon could be used against other agents, fired twice, Acevedo said. One bullet hit Valladares, who died.

At least three suspects were arrested in the kidnapping and are facing charges.

## Baby giraffe born at Columbus Zoo

**OH** POWELL — The Columbus Zoo and Aquarium has a new giraffe.

The zoo announced 8-year-old Zuri delivered a calf early Tuesday. The zoo said her father, Enzi, is an 8-year-old Masai giraffe.

The sex of the calf is not yet known.

The delivery was captured on a National Geographic webcam.

It is the first giraffe calf born at the zoo in nearly 20 years, and another is expected. In July, the zoo said Zuri and 6-year-old Cami were pregnant. Cami and Enzi also mated, and the zoo said Cami's calf appears to be growing steadily.

## Grizzly moved from golf course after damages

**MT** STEVENSVILLE — A grizzly bear with poor golf etiquette, including breaking flag sticks and not replacing his divots, has been captured and relocated away from a western Montana golf course.

Whitetail Golf Course pro Jason Lehtola told the Ravalli Republic that four flag sticks were snapped over a period of several days at the course along the Bitterroot River near Stevensville. On another day, there was a large hole in the manicured 7th green.

Lehtola called Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and wardens set a trap near the 7th green. They expected to catch a black bear. Instead, a 2½-year-old, 250-pound male grizzly bear was caught in the trap.

The bear was relocated Sunday to the lower Blackfoot Valley, on the southern edge of the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem.

## Chief: Man climbed into well to 'say he did it'

**FL** DELEON SPRINGS — Authorities said they rescued a Florida man who got stuck after climbing into a 30-foot-deep well in DeLand just "to say he did it."

Volusia County Fire Rescue Battalion Chief Scott Smoak told news outlets the man was stuck for about an hour early Wednesday before being pulled to safety.

Smoak told WFTV the man didn't have the strength to pull himself out of the narrow well but he was awake and talking to rescuers the entire time.

## Half-naked woman falls through ceiling

**TN** KINGSPORT — Police in Tennessee said a half-naked woman fell through a restaurant's ceiling and landed in its kitchen.

News outlets reported Harley C. Morton, 26, was arrested Tuesday on charges including trespassing and disorderly conduct.

A Kingsport police report said a Cook Out employee called 911 when the naked bottom half of a woman dropped through the ceiling tiles.

It said a responding officer found her wallet with her ID on the restaurant's roof.

Police said she may have got into the ceiling through an air-conditioning unit.

## Ben & Jerry's adds Pecan Resist flavor

**VT** MONTPELIER — Ice cream maker Ben & Jerry's said it is taking a stand against what it calls the Trump administration's regressive policies by rebranding one of its flavors Pecan Resist.

The company and its founders are unveiling the limited batch ice cream flavor in Washington ahead of the midterm elections.

The company said Pecan Resist celebrates activists who are resisting oppression, harmful environmental practices and injustice.

As part of the campaign, Ben & Jerry's is giving \$25,000 each to four activist entities: Color of Change, Honor the Earth, Women's March and multimedia platform Neta.

## Class ring found 32 years later in new state

**LA** NATALBANY — A man has been reunited with his high school class ring that went missing 32 years ago.

The Daily Star of Hammond reported the ring was found in Wiggins, Miss., and recently returned to Natalbany, La., resident Luis Alvarez.

Alvarez said the ring commemorating his 1984 graduation from Natalbany Baptist High went missing in 1986 and he's not sure how it ended up in Mississippi.

From wire reports

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# Brees, Saints brace for high-octane Rams

BY BRETT MARTEL

Associated Press

METAIRIE, La. — Drew Brees and the New Orleans Saints face an unusual challenge this weekend.

They'll try to keep up with an offense every bit as potent as their own — and do so against one of the top-rated defenses in the NFL.

Saints coach Sean Payton said dealing with the Los Angeles Rams' eighth-ranked defense will be a tall order in itself.

"It presents a ton of problems," Payton said. "First off, the talent when you're talking about some of the top tackles and ends in the business — that that in itself is difficult. And then when you put it with an outstanding scheme, then you really have a challenge."

Brees said Aaron Donald and Ndamukong Suh comprise the best interior defensive line he's faced since he was at Purdue and played a Georgia team fielding Marcus Stroud and Richard Seymour in the 2000

Outback Bowl (Georgia won, 28-25).

"At this level, it's really unheard of to have Suh and Donald in there," Brees said. "Those guys are unbelievable."

Donald and Suh have combined for 13 sacks, with Donald getting 10.

The Saints so far have held up well against the pass rush. Brees has been sacked nine times and generally has had enough time to make accurate throws. He was intercepted for the first time Sunday night in Minnesota when an edge rusher was unblocked and closing quickly on him.

Offensively, New Orleans ranks eighth in yards per game and second in points per game at 33.4.

Brees' passing numbers have gone down lately, but more because of New Orleans' ability to run the ball and control the clock with Mark Ingram returning from his four-game suspension.

The Saints are 3-0 since Ingram's return and have won six straight overall after los-

ing to Tampa Bay in the season opener.

But the unbeaten Rams rank second offensively in yards per game (442.6) and have averaged 33 points, which rank third.

Brees sees similarities between the Saints when he and Sean Payton first joined forces 13 seasons ago, and the Rams under 32-year-old offensive-minded head coach Sean McVay and 24-year-old Jared Goff, the 2016 top overall draft choice.

"We like to feel like over the last 13 years that we've kind of been at the forefront of offensive football ... taking the personnel that you have and being able to utilize it in some really unique ways," Brees said.

"You can't help but turn on the film and be intrigued by the things that they're doing. Obviously, I think Jared Goff is playing as well as anybody right now. He's got a bunch of weapons there at the receiver position that are lighting it up, Todd Gurley, one of the best backs in the league."

Brees said that while he doesn't know McVay well, he said the Rams coach's youthful energy, enthusiasm and offensive background remind him of Payton to some extent, starting with the fact they both played quarterback in college and had offensive backgrounds as NFL assistants before their first head coaching jobs.

"What I've seen from his offenses and what I hear about him is there's a lot of those same traits, and it makes it really, really fun to play for a guy like that, because it makes it exciting and it gives you a ton of confidence," Brees said.

Saints defensive end Cam Jordan said his unit should be confident in its ability to slow Los Angeles if it plays largely mistake-free schematically and tackles well throughout, especially against Gurley.

"When we're able to execute at a high level, I don't think there's anybody on the field that can stop us. We have to be able to do that for all 60 minutes, though," Jordan said.

## Maryland fires Durkin following backlash

BY DAVID GINSBURG

Associated Press

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — DJ Durkin's return as Maryland's football coach lasted one day.

Durkin was fired Wednesday evening, just over 24 hours after being reinstated by the school.

Instead of resolving the issues facing the flawed program, the decision by the University System of Maryland board of regents on Tuesday to retain Durkin and athletic director Damon Evans created a different set of problems in the wake of a player's death and discontent engulfing the football team.

Several state officials called for Durkin to be fired, and one called the decision to retain him an "embarrassment."

Maryland President Wallace Loh fired Durkin after conferring with the leadership of the Student Government Association, the Senate Executive Committee, deans, department chairs and campus leadership.

"The overwhelming majority of stakeholders expressed serious concerns about Coach DJ Durkin returning to the campus," Loh wrote in a statement.

"The chair of the Board of Regents has publicly acknowledged that I had previously raised serious concerns about Coach Durkin's return. This is not at all a reflection of my opinion of Coach Durkin as a person. However, a departure is in the best interest of the University, and this afternoon Coach Durkin was informed that the University will part ways," Loh wrote. "This is a difficult deci-

sion, but it is the right one for our entire University."

Durkin's dismissal comes while he was in the third season of a five-year, \$12.5 million contract he signed in December 2015. He will be owed about \$5.5, according to buyout terms of his contract.

Matt Canada is expected to resume the role of interim coach. Maryland is 5-3 heading into Saturday's home game against Michigan State.

Hired after serving one season as defensive coordinator at Michigan, Durkin had a 10-15 record at Maryland.

Durkin began his coaching career as a graduate assistant at Bowling Green in 2001 after playing four seasons there as a defensive end and outside linebacker.

He served three years as

an assistant coach at Stanford from 2007-9 and was at Florida from 2010-14, spending the last two years as the Gators defensive coordinator.

Durkin was placed on administrative leave Aug. 11 while board of regents waited for the results of an investigation on the culture of the program.

After receiving that report, the board decided to bring him back, saying he was "unfairly blamed for the dysfunction in the athletic department."

Durkin and Evans were on the job when offensive lineman Jordan McNair collapsed on the practice field on May 29 and died of heatstroke on June 13. The attorney for the family has said Durkin should have been fired and is reviewing legal options.



# MLB Hall of Famer McCovey dies at 80

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Willie McCovey, the sweet-swinging Hall of Famer nicknamed “Stretch” for his 6-foot-4 height and those long arms, died Wednesday. He was 80.

The San Francisco Giants announced McCovey’s death, saying the fearsome hitter passed “peacefully” in the afternoon “after losing his battle with ongoing health issues.”

A former first baseman and left fielder, McCovey was a career .270 hitter with 521 home runs and 1,555 RBIs in 22 major league seasons, 19 of them with the Giants. He also played for the Athletics and Padres.

McCovey made his major league debut at age 21 on July 30, 1959, and played alongside the other Willie — Hall of Famer Willie Mays — into the 1972 season before Mays was traded to the New York Mets that May.

McCovey batted .354 with 13 homers and 38 RBIs on the way to winning 1959 NL Rookie of the Year. The six-time All-Star also won the 1969 NL MVP and was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1986 after his first time on the ballot.

“You knew right away he wasn’t an ordinary ballplayer,” Hall of Famer Hank Aaron said, courtesy of the Hall of Fame. “He was so strong, and he had the gift of knowing the strike zone. There’s no telling how many home runs he would have hit if those knees weren’t bothering him all the time and if he played in a park other than Candlestick.”

McCovey had been getting around in a wheelchair in recent years because he could no longer rely on his once-dependable legs, yet was still regularly seen at the ballpark in his private suite. McCovey had attended games at AT&T Park as recently as the final game of the season.

“For more than six decades, he gave his heart and soul to the Giants,” Giants President and CEO Larry Baer said. “As one of the greatest players of all time, as a quiet leader in the clubhouse, as a mentor to the Giants who followed in his footsteps, as an inspiration to our Junior Giants, and as a fan cheering on the team from his booth.”

While the Giants captured their third World Series of the decade in 2014, McCovey returned to watch them play while still recovering from an infection that hospitalized him in September of that year for about a month.

He attended one game at AT&T Park during both the NL Championship Series and World Series. He even waited for the team at the end of the parade route inside San Francisco’s Civic Center.

“It was touch and go for a while,” McCovey said at the time. “They pulled me through, and I’ve come a long way.”

McCovey had been thrilled the Giants accomplished something he didn’t in a decorated career in the major leagues.

Even four-plus decades later, it still stung for the left-handed slugging McCovey that he never won a World Series after coming so close. He lined out to end the Giants’ 1962 World Series loss to the New

York Yankees.

He often thought about that World Series, which the Giants lost in seven games, and it remained difficult to accept. The Giants lost 1-0 in their final game when McCovey lined out to second baseman Bobby Richardson with runners on second and third for the final out.

“I still think about it all the time, I still think, ‘If I could have hit it a little more,’” he said on Oct. 31, 2014.

In 2012, he said: “I think about the line drive, yes. Can’t get away from it.”

McCovey narrowly beat out pitcher Tom Seaver for the 1969 MVP. McCovey led the NL in home runs (45) and RBIs (126) for the second straight year, batting .320 while also posting NL-bests with a .453 slugging percentage and .656 on-base percentage. He was walked 121 times, then drew a career-high 137 free passes the next season.

He had been third in the ‘68 voting MVP, but after 1969 would never again finish higher than ninth.

McCovey and Ted Williams before him were among the first players to really face infield shifts as opponents tried to affect his rhythm at the plate.

Tributes began pouring in Wednesday on social media.

“I’m extremely sad to hear of the passing of my dear friend @SFGiants Legend Willie McCovey,” basketball Hall of Famer Bill Russell wrote on Twitter. “I will always have fond memories of him. Our thoughts are with his family. #RIP My friend #Forever44 #SFGiants.”

## MLS roundup

# Valeri’s 2 goals lift Timbers past FC Dallas

Associated Press

DALLAS — Diego Valeri scored two goals, the second with Portland a man down, and the Timbers beat FC Dallas 2-1 in an MLS knockout game Wednesday night.

The fifth-seeded Timbers advanced to a two-game Western Conference semifinal against Sporting Kansas City or the Seattle Sounders, depending on the outcome of Thursday’s LAFC-Real Salt Lake match.

Valeri’s first goal came in the 23rd minute on a free kick that he put inside the left post from

26 yards out.

In the 57th, Larrys Mabiala took down Dominique Badji as the last defender near the penalty box. The free kick was blocked but Portland was down to 10 men.

But in the 71st, Jeremy Ebobisse dropped off a short pass to Valeri in the goal box amid a scattered Dallas defense and Valeri nudged the ball into the net for his team-leading 12th goal.

Dallas broke through in the 94th minute with Matt Hedges heading in a goal but couldn’t come up with another despite a

few additional chances in stoppage time.

Timbers keeper Jeff Attinella made five saves.

**New York City FC 3, Union 1:** Maximiliano Moralez had two big assists on first-half goals and added a score of his own in the second half to help host NYCFC advance out of the knockout round with a victory over Philadelphia.

Ismael Tajouri-Shradi and David Villa scored first-half goals and NYCFC moved forward to play second-seeded Atlanta United in a two-game Eastern Conference semifi-

nal series, with the first game scheduled for Sunday in New York.

In the 10th minute, Moralez sent a pass forward that Villa flicked off his heel to Tajouri-Shradi, who turned it into a 22-yard line drive into the upper left-hand corner of the net for a 1-0 lead.

On a counterattack following a turnover, Ronald Matarrita passed to Moralez charging down the left side. Moralez sent the ball to Villa, who slotted in his team-leading 15th goal of the season from just outside the penalty area in the 26th.

## NBA roundup

# Rose scores 50 points to lead Wolves

Associated Press

During the 2017-18 regular season, Derrick Rose didn't score 50 points in all of January.

Or February.

Or March.

Or April.

He was hurting, always in and out of the lineup, never in rhythm. Those problems, all his years of problems, seemed so long ago Wednesday night, when Rose was better than ever — finishing with a career-high 50 points that lifted the Minnesota Timberwolves over the Utah Jazz 125-122.

"I played my heart out," Rose said. "My teammates told me before the game, just play my game. And tonight was a hell of a night."

That it was, by every possible measure.

Rose became the fourth player already this season — it's barely two weeks old — to score at least 50 in a game, joining Blake Griffin, Stephen Curry and Klay Thompson. Rose made 19 of 31 shots from the floor, including four three-pointers, and eight of 11 free throws.

And if the 50 wasn't enough, Rose sealed the win by blocking Dante Exum's three-point shot with about two seconds remaining.

Moments later, Rose walked off the floor in tears. The game had made the 2011 NBA MVP cry before. Only this time, the emotion was all joy.

"I know the person that he is, the character that he has," Wolves coach Tom Thibodeau said. "And it shines through."

Rose has dealt with four knee surgeries, needed to take time away last season to figure things out while dealing with ankle issues, was forced to sit out nearly two full seasons when he should have been in his prime.

A night like this showed what is still possible.

"In every story, there's a beginning, a middle and an end," Thibodeau said. "And I think the end is going to be great for him."

Rose tried to play it cool afterward, then acknowledged that he was still "jittery as hell" — and that was about an hour after the game.

"It means everything," Rose

said.

The Wolves mobbed Rose on the floor when it was over. They doused him with water in the locker room. And around the league, players couldn't wait to show him love.

"What he gives to his mind and body just to play one game is something I watched being his teammate," said LeBron James, who played with Rose in Cleveland last season. "When you talk about perseverance, that is the true definition of it. ... Even when a superhero is knocked down, he is still a superhero at the end of the day. And Derrick showed why he is a superhero."

"Every Basketball fan in the world should feel good for DRose," wrote Miami guard Dwyane Wade, also Rose's teammate in Cleveland. "Tonight was an example of never giving up on yourself and when others believe in you. Amazing things can happen. I'm smiling like I scored 50! Congrats to a good dude!"

"Hard work is undefeated," wrote Portland's CJ McCollum.

**Warriors 131, Pelicans 121:**

Stephen Curry had 37 points for his sixth 30-point game of the season, and host Golden State beat New Orleans for its sixth straight win.

**Lakers 114, Mavericks 113:** LeBron James scored 29 points and made the game-winning free throw with 2.1 seconds left as host Los Angeles held off Dallas.

**Spurs 120, Suns 90:** DeMar DeRozan scored 20 of his 25 points in the first half, LaMarcus Aldridge added 24 and San Antonio routed host Phoenix for its third consecutive victory.

**Pacers 107, Knicks 101:** Domantas Sabonis matched his career high with 30 points, Victor Oladipo scored 11 of his 24 points in the fourth quarter and Indiana beat host New York.

**Nets 120, Pistons 119 (OT):** Spencer Dinwiddie made a three-pointer with 7.1 seconds left in overtime and finished with 25 points to help host Brooklyn beat Detroit.

**Nuggets 108, Bulls 107 (OT):** Paul Millsap's putback with 0.1 seconds left in overtime lifted Denver past host Chicago.

## Virtanen scores twice as Canucks hold off Blackhawks

Associated Press

VANCOUVER, British Columbia — Before the Canucks started their season, coach Travis Green said he wanted his team to "score by committee."

Vancouver did just that Wednesday night in a 4-2 victory over the Chicago Blackhawks.

Jake Virtanen scored twice, Brendan Gaunce got the go-ahead goal midway through the third period and Antoine Roussel also found the net for the Canucks.

"It's easier said than done, but any team that wins in this league has secondary scoring, usually," Green said. "You need guys at certain times to step up. It's not one or two or three guys

that can score every night."

It was the first two-goal game of Virtanen's career. At one point in the third period, it appeared he might have a chance at a hat trick, but the 22-year-old chose not to push it.

"I didn't want to go out of position or anything," he said. "I wanted to make sure we weren't getting scored on. ... We'd rather just secure the win and call it a day."

Jacob Markstrom made 24 saves for Vancouver.

Brandon Saad and Jonathan Toews scored for the Blackhawks. Corey Crawford turned away 24 shots, but coach Joel Quenneville thought turnovers were a big problem.

"I think it was self-inflicted on the goals against," he said. "Preventable, all of them, and they turned turnovers into the back of the net."

The team got sloppy with the puck, according to Saad.

"A couple posts and unlucky bounces, but regardless we have to tighten up defensively," he said. "We give that team that much rush chances and time and space and they are going to capitalize. It definitely wasn't good enough defensively."

Gaunce scored at 9:23 of the third after he snatched up a Chicago pass. The goal was the sixth of his NHL career, with the last one coming on Feb. 1.

"I just tried to get it off as

quick as I could," he said. "I knew (Crawford) was coming out and he was a little bit off because it was such a quick play and I just tried to get it up."

Gaunce also assisted on Roussel's late goal in his first game with the Canucks this season. He was called up Tuesday from the Utica Comets of the AHL to help fill out a roster riddled by injuries.

"I want to be in the NHL, and at the start of the year I obviously wasn't, so there was a reason for that," Gaunce said. "You come in here with the mentality that you're going to make a difference and you're going to kind of make them have to keep you."