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Marines seeking 38,500 new recruits

BY MARTIN EGNASH

Stars and Stripes

Marine recruiters are confident they can pick up their pace and meet demand for the highest number of new recruits in more than a decade, officials said Thursday.

The Corps needs to recruit 38,500 new Marines to fill the gap in the ranks caused by the large number of people getting out, Gen. Robert B. Neller, commandant of the Marine Corps, said in a letter last month.

The Corps has the youngest population but highest turnover of all the services, Neller said.

Retention of experienced Marines is a key issue because nearly two-thirds of Marines are E-5 or below.

For Marine Corps recruiters, that means they will need to find qualified individuals more quickly than in the past.

“Higher numbers require our newest Marine recruiters to perform and get results potentially faster than before,” said Maj. Andrew Nicholson, commander of the Twin Cities recruiting station. “However ... I’m confident we’ll meet and even exceed our quantity and quality standards this [fiscal year].”

One hurdle in the Corps’ race to recruit more Marines

is a lack of volunteers in special duty assignments, like recruiters or drill instructors, Neller said.

“We must re-double our efforts to encourage, screen, and assign the highest quality Marines to (special duty assignments),” he said.

If a qualified Marine is selected for special duty and rejects those orders, they are generally unable to gain rank or re-enlist.

Further complicating the recruiting effort is the relatively small number of people qualified to become Marines, due to the Corps’ physical and educational standards.

Marine Corps sources say

as much as three-quarters of America’s youth would not qualify even if they wanted to join.

“That should scare you,” Neller said in a statement last month.

Even with the increased demand, there is no sign that Marines plan on lowering their standards.

“We’re not just looking to enlist qualified applicants; we’re searching for the highest quality of qualified applicants,” Nicholson said.

“We want valedictorians, team captains and anyone else who has shown desire to be a cut above their peers.”

Border mission no longer called ‘Faithful Patriot’

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon has directed U.S. military commanders to stop calling the deployment of active-duty troops to the southern border “Operation Faithful Patriot,” a name derided by critics as overtly political while President Donald Trump played up the mission in stumping for Republican candidates.

The decision was acknowledged Wednesday after the midterm elections, and it was not immediately clear what name the military operation may ultimately take instead.

“We are no longer calling it Operation Faithful Patriot,” said a Pentagon spokesman, Army Lt. Col. Jamie Davis. “We are referring to it as border support. I have nothing further at this time.”

A second Pentagon spokesman, Chris Sherwood, said that

simply referring to the military operation as “border support” is a “more accurate description” because the Department of Homeland Security is overseeing it.

The news was first reported by The Wall Street Journal, which said the directive was issued by Defense Secretary Jim Mattis’ office on Election Day.

He has sought to shield the military from politics, with mixed results.

The operation has come under fire from some retired generals, who say it unnecessarily thrusts the military into politics.

Trump sought to characterize migrants traveling north through Mexico from Central America in a caravan as an “invasion” of the United States.

In reality, the group is believed to consist almost entirely of families who could legally apply for asylum at

ports of entry at the border.

The operation, announced Oct. 29, is in support of the Department of Homeland Security and Customs and Border Protection.

The Pentagon has sought to stress that it has only a support role, while the president has suggested that the military will face the migrants at the border.

Army Col. Rob Manning, a Pentagon spokesman, told reporters Monday that the administration specifically asked for active-duty servicemembers to deploy for the operation.

They are limited in what they can do by the Posse Comitatus Act, which prohibits federal military from involvement in most domestic law enforcement missions in the United States. About 5,200 active-duty troops were expected to be involved in the operation by Monday.

The military has deployed the U.S. military to the border before, but not in such large numbers of active-duty troops in a century.

More typically, National Guard units, which operate under state authority, are called upon to provide support.

The U.S. military has released dozens of photos and videos in recent days of servicemembers on the border, including some Tuesday of Air Force Gen. Terrence O’Shaughnessy, chief of U.S. Northern Command, visiting servicemembers deployed to Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., as part of the operation.

To date, the Pentagon has not allowed any independent media to cover the operations and provide a fuller account of what is occurring.

Gunman kills 12 people in California bar

Associated Press

THOUSAND OAKS, Calif. — Using a smoke bomb and a handgun, a hooded former Marine dressed all in black opened fire during college night at a country music bar in Southern California, killing 12 people and sending hundreds fleeing in panic before apparently taking his own life, authorities said Thursday.

Authorities said the motive for the attack Wednesday night was under investigation.

The killer was identified as Ian David Long, 28, a veteran of the war in Afghanistan who authorities said had an episode of erratic behavior last spring that they were told might be post-traumatic stress disorder.

Screaming in fear, patrons rushed for the exits, ducked under tables and hurled barstools to smash second-floor windows and jump to safety as gunfire erupted at the Borderline Bar & Grill, a hangout popular with students from nearby California Lutheran University.

“I dropped to the floor,” Sarah Rose DeSon told ABC’s “Good Morning America.” “A friend yelled, ‘Everybody down!’ We were hiding behind tables trying to keep ourselves covered.”

The dead included 11 people inside the bar and a veteran sheriff’s sergeant who was the first officer inside the door, Ventura County Sheriff Geoff Dean said.

“It’s a horrific scene in there,” Dean said in the parking lot. “There’s blood everywhere.”

The bloodshed was the latest in what seems to be a never-ending string of deadly mass shootings that are happening with terrifying frequency across the U.S. It came less than two weeks after a gunman massacred 11 people at a synagogue in Pittsburgh.

President Donald Trump praised police

for their “great bravery” in the California attack and said, “God bless all of the victims and families of the victims.” He ordered flags flown at half-staff in honor of the victims.

Authorities began a search of Long’s home in Newbury Park, about 5 miles from the Borderline bar, for clues to what set him off.

“There’s no indication that he targeted the employees. We haven’t found any correlation,” the sheriff said. “Maybe there was a motive for this particular night, but we have no information leading to that at all.”

The gunman was tall and wearing all black with a hood and his face partly covered, witnesses told TV stations. He first shot a security guard standing outside, then went in and opened fire on staff members and patrons, the sheriff said.

Sheriff’s Sgt. Ron Helus and a passing highway patrolman arrived at the Borderline around 11:20 p.m. in response to several 911 calls, heard gunfire and went inside, the sheriff said.

Helus was immediately hit with multiple gunshots, Dean said. The highway patrolman pulled Helus out, then waited as a SWAT team and scores more officers arrived. Helus died early Thursday at a hospital.

By the time officers entered the bar again, the gunfire had stopped, according to the sheriff. They found 12 people dead inside, including the gunman, who was discovered in an office and had apparently shot himself, the sheriff said.

“There’s no doubt that they saved lives by going in there and engaging with the suspect,” said Dean, who was set to retire on Friday. He praised the slain officer — a close friend — as a hero: “He went in there to save people and paid the ultimate price.”

In addition to the dead, one other person was wounded by gunfire, authorities said.

Shooter left Marines in 2013 as corporal

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A 28-year-old Marine veteran who had served in Afghanistan as a machine gunner is suspected of killing 12 people and himself late Wednesday night at a Los Angeles-area nightclub, police and military officials said Thursday.

Ian David Long carried out the mass shooting at the Borderline Bar and Grill, a country-themed nightclub, in Thousand Oaks, authorities said.

Long served in the Marine Corps from August 2008 to March 2013, attaining the rank of corporal, according to his service records. He served a deployment to Afghanistan from November 2010 through June 2011, his records show. He earned a Combat Action Ribbon for his service during that deployment. He had most recently served with 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment at Kaneohe Bay in Hawaii.

“The Marine Corps extends its deepest condolences to the families of the victims in this senseless tragedy,” Capt. Joseph Butterfield, a Marine spokesman, said in a statement.

Long had previously had a few “minor” run-ins with area police, Dean said, including a traffic ticket and an April incident in which deputies responded after he was reported to be acting “irate and irrationally” at his home in Newberry Park.

He was not arrested as a result of that incident, Dean said, but mental health experts who responded determined he “might be suffering from” post-traumatic stress disorder. The sheriff did not provide any evidence Long had been diagnosed with PTSD.

‘Devil Dog Field’ in Germany honors WWI troops

Stars and Stripes

U.S. Marine Forces Europe and Africa’s parade ground is now known as “Devil Dog Field” in honor of the troops who fought 100 years ago in the Battle of Belleau Wood and on battlefields across Europe.

Maj. Gen. Russell A. Sanborn, the commander of Marines in Europe, dedicated a memorial Thursday at the field marking the occasion at the command’s

Panzer Kaserne headquarters near Stuttgart, Germany.

The Marine nickname of “devil dog” traces to the Battle of Belleau Wood in France, where Marines and Army troops fought a bloody battle against German forces during World War I. The battle played a key role in stopping the German advance toward Paris and was a turning point in the war.

The Devil Dog Field memo-

rial is made of two stones from Belleau Wood and was donated by a French farmer. A bronze plaque and a bronzed WWI U.S. doughboy helmet is attached to the rocks. The monument rests on an oval pad of cobblestones in the shape of the 4th Marine Brigade’s shoulder patch, which was worn when the brigade entered Germany in 1918.

Funds for the memorial were raised by private donations and

an online GoFundMe campaign launched by a retired Marine in the Stuttgart area.

“This stone, which symbolically witnessed the battle, will be a daily reminder to today’s Marines and visitors to the Headquarters of the sacrifice and bravery of the Marines, Sailors and Soldiers who fought in that Wood in 1918,” wrote Andy Gillan, who led the GoFundMe effort.

US Navy testing 'Sea Hunter' drone ship in Pearl Harbor

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

JOINT BASE PEARL HARBOR-HICKAM, Hawaii — The first prototype of the Navy's submarine-hunting, catamaran-style drone ship is undergoing testing out of Pearl Harbor this month.

The Sea Hunter — a Medium Displacement Unmanned Surface Vehicle, as it is formally classified — arrived at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam on Oct. 31, said Lt. Cmdr. Tim Gorman, a spokesman for U.S. Pacific Fleet.

The testing, overseen by the Office of Naval Research, is intended to demonstrate the Sea Hunter's capabilities for endurance and range, Gorman said in a written statement.

The testing also seeks to establish "operator trust in safe, reliable operation via rigorous at-sea testing and modeling and simulation," he said.

The demonstrations are part of the process to enable "a new class of naval system," he said.

The Sea Hunter was designed and built by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, or DARPA, which handed over development to the Office of Naval Research in February.

DARPA has described the Sea Hunter as "the first of what could ultimately become an entirely new class of ocean-going vessel able to traverse thousands of kilometers over open seas for months at a time, without a single crew member aboard."

The Sea Hunter was christened in April 2016 in Portland, Ore.

At the christening ceremony, Deputy Defense Secretary Bob Work hailed the Sea Hunter's creation as a significant advancement in "human-machine

collaboration," a statement said at the time.

"This will be a change just like other momentous changes in our society," Work said. "You see this human-machine collaboration in our businesses and manufacturing now, you see it in our daily lives, and you're going to see it increasingly in warfare."

Potential missions for the drone ship would include submarine tracking and countermeasure activities, Arati Prabhakar, DARPA's director, told reporters that same day.

The 132-foot robotic ship has a range of 10,000 nautical miles at 14 mph. Work said the prototype cost \$23 million to produce and that it would cost about \$15,000 to \$20,000 per day to operate this type of drone ship once several of them are in the Navy's fleet.

"[Sea Hunter] is a ship that you just sit down over the horizon and it might be able to do an awful lot of things that you don't want a manned platform to do, especially in an area where there's a lot of anti-access, area-denial threats," Work said.

"[Sea Hunter] represents a new vision of naval surface warfare that trades small numbers of very capable, high-value assets for large numbers of commoditized, simpler platforms that are more capable in the aggregate," Fred Kennedy, director of DARPA's Tactical Technology Office, said in a statement in February.

"The U.S. military has talked about the strategic importance of replacing 'king' and 'queen' pieces on the maritime chessboard with lots of 'pawns,' and [the drone program] is a first step toward doing exactly that."

US ambassador shakes things up in Germany

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

BERLIN — One of the first things Richard Grenell did when he arrived in May as the new U.S. ambassador to Germany was call in the Marines.

It was an unusual first move — a top diplomat prioritizing an office rapport with junior troops. But six months into the job, the Marines are serving as unofficial ambassadors for the envoy at high-level dinners with Germany's movers and shakers.

"They help me send a message that a serious military takes people committed to it for a career," Grenell said during a recent interview at the embassy building, which is sandwiched between the historic Brandenburg Gate and the city's Holocaust memorial.

Grenell's relationship with about 15 Marines who help secure the diplomatic compound has become a focal point for the 52-year-old ambassador, who attracted attention early in his tenure as President Donald Trump's lightning rod in Germany.

On military matters, Trump's focus on defense spending — or lack of it — among key allies like Germany has been relentless. At NATO meetings, Trump has demanded more and made threats about quitting the alliance if allies fall short, straining Washington's relationship with Berlin in the process.

As Trump's point man, one of Grenell's tasks as he meets with senior German leaders is drumming up support. Progress is being made, Grenell said, as Berlin gradually increases its expenditures.

Much of Trump's ire about NATO has been directed at Germany — an economic powerhouse falling well short of an alliance benchmark that calls for dedicating 2 percent of gross domestic product to military matters. Trump also has criticized Germany for a trade imbalance with the United States.

Some of the pressure on Berlin gets applied directly. Gren-

ell recently authored an op-ed on the need for Germany to do more on defense, and he frequently raises the issue on social media.

But Grenell, who served for seven years as the U.S. spokesman at the United Nations during the George W. Bush administration, also gets his message across in other ways, some unusual in a country like Germany where defeat in two world wars and association with the Holocaust damaged the image of military service.

Enter the Marines, who have become a regular presence at the ambassador's house, where German policymakers, diplomats and business executives come to talk.

Regardless of the topic, he says he likes to showcase the Marines to spotlight the American military's overall stature.

"I take time at the beginning and talk about our Marines and their service, and that they are heroes," Grenell said. "Without a doubt, every dinner, some German, usually more than one, will come up and say, 'It's amazing how you guys honor military service.'"

For the Marines, Grenell's approach was jarring at first.

"Him inviting us over to important dinners and meeting people that were prominent people in the European community, that was crazy," said Sgt. Anna-Cathryn Colson, an Alabaman who has worked security at the U.S. embassy since May.

Colson said it was an opportunity to learn and network in a way she hadn't experienced on her other diplomatic security assignments.

"We were treated like adults," Colson said.

Sgt. Sergio Medina, another member of the security team, said hobnobbing at the dinners and roundtables has forced Marines "out of their comfort zones."

"I've had no experience trying to talk to these kinds of people, heads of organizations," said Medina.

House Democrats set their sights on Trump's finances

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Beyond trying to get their hands on the Holy Grail of President Donald Trump's business dealings — his tax returns — House Democrats are prepared to use their new majority and subpoena power to go after financial records that could back up their claims that he's using his presidency to enrich himself and his family.

After two years of being blocked by the White House and The Trump Organization, Democrats hope the new year brings a new day on such issues as foreign government spending at Trump properties, Trump's foreign licensing deals, Trump administration ties to lobbyists and special interests, and spending by Trump's charitable foundation.

Rep. Elijah Cummings, the Maryland Democrat poised to take charge of the House Oversight Committee, said in a statement to The Associated Press that he intends to use the panel as "a check on the executive branch — not merely for potential criminal violations, but for much broader concerns, such as conflicts of interest, emoluments violations and

waste, fraud and abuse."

While Democrats taking over key House committees have not specifically telegraphed their targets, Cummings' committee would likely seek Trump's business tax returns and other company-related financial records, according to two Democratic congressional staffers who spoke on condition of anonymity in order to discuss post-election plans.

Trump's personal income taxes, which he withheld during the 2016 campaign and in his two years in office, are expected to be the purview of the House Ways and Means Committee.

Internal Revenue Service law allows House and Senate tax-writing committees to request federal returns, and the ranking Ways and Means Democrat, Rep. Richard Neal of Massachusetts, has signaled publicly he would ask for them — a move the White House might fight.

Trump said in a wide-ranging news conference Wednesday that he doesn't want to release his taxes because they are under a "continuous audit." He also said: "They're extremely complex. People wouldn't understand them."

AG Sessions resigns at Trump's request

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Attorney General Jeff Sessions was pushed out after enduring more than a year of blistering and personal attacks from President Donald Trump, who inserted in his place a Republican Party loyalist with authority to oversee the remainder of the special counsel's Russia investigation.

The move Wednesday has potentially ominous implications for special counsel Robert Mueller's probe given that the new acting attorney general, Matthew Whitaker, until now Sessions' chief of staff, has questioned the inquiry's scope and spoke publicly before joining the Justice Department about ways an attorney general could theoretically stymie the investigation.

Congressional Democrats, concerned about protecting Mueller, called on Whitaker to recuse himself from overseeing the investigation in its final but potentially explosive stages.

That duty has belonged to Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, who appointed Mueller and closely monitors his work.

The resignation, in a one-page letter to Trump, came one day after Republicans lost control of the House and was the first of several expected post-midterms Cabinet and White House departures. Though Sessions was an early and prominent campaign backer

of Trump, his departure letter lacked effusive praise for the president and made clear the resignation came "at your request."

"Since the day I was honored to be sworn in as attorney general of the United States, I came to work at the Department of Justice every day determined to do my duty and serve my country," Sessions wrote.

The departure was the culmination of a toxic relationship that frayed just weeks into Sessions' tenure, when he stepped aside from the Russia investigation because of his campaign advocacy and following the revelation that he had met twice in 2016 with the Russian ambassador to the U.S.

Trump blamed the recusal for the appointment of Mueller, who took over the Russia investigation two months later and began examining whether Trump's hectoring of Sessions was part of a broader effort to obstruct the probe.

The investigation has produced 32 criminal charges and guilty pleas from four former Trump aides.

Trump had repeatedly been talked out of firing Sessions until after the midterms, but he told confidants in recent weeks that he wanted Sessions out as soon as possible after the elections, according to a Republican close to the White House who was not authorized to publicly discuss private conversations.

Justice Ginsburg fractures 3 ribs in fall in her office

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg fractured three ribs in a fall in her office at the Supreme Court and is in the hospital, the court said Thursday.

The court's oldest justice fell Wednesday evening, the court said. She went to George Wash-

ington University Hospital in Washington early Thursday after experiencing discomfort overnight.

She was admitted to the hospital for treatment and observation after tests showed she fractured three ribs.

In her absence, the court was going ahead Thursday with a courtroom ceremony welcom-

ing new Justice Brett Kavanaugh, who joined the court last month.

President Donald Trump and new acting Attorney General Matthew Whitaker were expected to attend.

Ginsburg, 85, has had a series of health problems. She broke two ribs in a fall in 2012. She also has had two prior bouts

with cancer.

Appointed by President Bill Clinton in 1993, Ginsburg rebuffed suggestions from some liberals that she should step down in the first two years of President Barack Obama's second term, when Democrats also controlled the Senate and would have been likely to confirm her successor.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Potential juror ousted for autograph request

NY NEW YORK — A man who wanted the autograph of the Mexican drug lord known as “El Chapo” has been dismissed as a potential juror at a U.S. trial.

The man admitted at jury selection Tuesday that he asked a court officer to help him get the autograph of Joaquin Guzman. That was enough for the judge to disqualify him.

Another potential juror who had described himself as a Michael Jackson impersonator also was dismissed. Prosecutors had argued his profession made him too recognizable for a jury that’s being kept anonymous as a safety measure.

Man charged with stealing trooper’s gun

IN TERRE HAUTE — State Police said they charged a western Indiana man with stealing a handgun from a trooper’s vehicle.

They said Logan Blubaugh, 19, of Rosedale was charged Tuesday with unlawful entry of a motor vehicle, obstruction of justice and theft. He’s being held at the Vigo County Jail in Terre Haute.

Police said a tip to Parke County sheriff’s deputies about a stolen vehicle led to Blubaugh’s arrest.

Police said the trooper’s 45-caliber pistol was stolen early Monday when a man broke into his department-issued vehicle in northern Vigo County. The handgun hasn’t been recovered.

Stolen lizard returned to Lawrence pet store

KS LAWRENCE — The owner of a pet store said a stolen lizard was anonymously

returned a day after the store posted security footage of the theft on social media.

Pet World owner Sherry Emerson told the Lawrence Journal-World that a bearded dragon named Clearwater was abducted.

Emerson on Saturday posted security footage that showed a woman placing the lizard into her purse before walking out of the store with two accomplices.

Emerson said the lizard was left at the store’s door in the middle of the night Sunday.

Police: Drunken man rode toward racetrack

KY LOUISVILLE — State Police said a drunken man entered a restricted area at the Breeders’ Cup Classic, mounted a horse and rode it out toward the racetrack before he was arrested.

News outlets quoted a police report as saying Michael Wells-Rody, 24, was arrested Saturday at Churchill Downs in Louisville. Police said the man was the influence of alcohol and was disorderly to race-track staff. He was taken into custody on charges including public intoxication.

Wells-Rody told WHAS-TV the horse was once on his family farm in Georgetown, and someone at the race let him ride it.

Birthday fugitive charged with murder

AK ANCHORAGE — Officials said a man sought by police in Alaska is accused of fatally shooting one person and injuring two others after they kicked him out of a home during a party to celebrate his 27th birthday, according to a criminal complaint.

Asiagin Dana Ahmaogak is charged with second-degree murder and two counts of as-

sault in the shooting Sunday morning in Utqiagvik, also known as Barrow.

According to the criminal complaint, a woman identified as Victoria Koonaloak told authorities that Ahmaogak brandished a handgun and was asked to leave and escorted out.

She said he stayed outside, knocking on the door, and when the door was opened, he allegedly shot Edmund Siologa, Elizabeth Bordeaux and Masteredseed Vondincklage and fled.

Siologa died at the scene, and Vondincklage and Bordeaux were taken to a hospital, according to the court document.

Police announced a \$5,000 reward for information leading to Ahmaogak’s arrest.

Police: Man hit player who tackled his son

AL TUSCALOOSA — A dentist was accused of slapping a player who tackled his son during a youth football game.

Tuscaloosa police Lt. Teena Richardson said in an email to news outlets that Marcus Dempsey, 43, was arrested Monday in connection with the Oct. 4 Tuscaloosa County Park & Recreation Authority football game.

Richardson said Dempsey was part of a crew keeping up with first-down yardage markers when he saw his son injured during a tackle. She said Dempsey then walked onto the field and slapped an opposing team’s player, who stumbled backward. Dempsey was charged with harassment.

Woman accused of fleeing in squad car

ND DEVILS LAKE — Charges are pending against a 23-year-old woman who police allege got into a po-

lice car and tried to drive away in northeast North Dakota.

KFGO radio reported that police responded to a fight early Sunday in Devils Lake, a city about 160 miles northwest of Fargo. When one officer got out of a squad car to investigate, the woman allegedly jumped in, drove the car onto a curb and tried to back up onto the street.

She was arrested on charges including driving under the influence.

Authorities seize illegally caught fish

SC LITTLE RIVER — Authorities said more than 1,000 pounds of illegally caught fish were seized in South Carolina and two men are charged.

State Department of Natural Resources Lt. Angus McBride told The Post and Courier the 1,340 pounds of yellow snapper, out-of-season cobia and other migrating fish were taken from a boat docked in Little River in October.

Wildlife officers arrested Richard Saunders, 47, and Christopher Beasley, 43, on violations including fishing without proper permits or licenses.

Police dog involved in 200 arrests dies

FL BOYNTON BEACH — A Florida police dog credited with taking part in more than 200 criminal arrests has died.

The Boynton Beach Police Department said in a statement that 13-year-old Hutch died Saturday. The Belgian Malinois had been retired for four years and was living with his police officer handler.

The department calls Hutch its top dog in terms of arrests made.

From wire reports

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Ex-Cowboy WR Bryant signs with Saints

Associated Press

METAIRIE, La. — Dez Bryant has found a new team, agreeing to join the already prolific offense of the surging New Orleans Saints.

The former Dallas Cowboys wide receiver, who has been looking for an NFL home since becoming a free agent in April, will now have a chance to catch passes from one of the most prolific quarterbacks in NFL history in New Orleans' Drew Brees.

"There is certainly a skillset that he has that is going to be beneficial," Brees said. "So I look forward to getting to work with him. I look forward to building a rapport with him. I look forward to getting him involved in this offense and just become a complement to all the guys that we already

have. He'll be a great addition."

Bryant, 30, and the Saints agreed to contract terms on Wednesday, and it remains unclear to what extent Bryant will play when New Orleans visits Cincinnati on Sunday.

Bryant spent his first eight years in the NFL with Dallas and last season caught 69 passes for 838 yards and six touchdowns, including a 50-yard scoring play, for the Cowboys.

However, his professional reputation has been marred at times by public confrontations with coaches and teammates during games and practices.

Veteran Saints tight end Ben Watson said players in New Orleans' locker room must guard against pre-judging Bryant based on

superficial observations from old television clips without knowing all the facts or how Bryant has evolved personally since.

"I don't know Dez. I wasn't in the locker room with him in Dallas. I don't know all the dynamics," Watson said. "I also don't know what's transpired with him personally since that situation. So the great thing about a locker room, I think, is we take guys in and we say, 'Hey, what are you like now?'"

Seeking salary cap relief, the Cowboys released Bryant after last season with two years remaining on the receiver's five-year, \$70 million contract.

Bryant was among several receivers to work out for the Saints on Tuesday. He'd previously met with Cleveland and Baltimore.

League experiencing renaissance at RB

Associated Press

Ezekiel Elliott likes to give Todd Gurley credit for the NFL's running renaissance because the Los Angeles Rams star ended an unprecedented two-year drought of backs taken in the first round of the draft.

With MVP-type numbers on a team looking like a Super Bowl contender, Gurley is the best example why it's a good time to be a running back not many years after the position seemed undervalued in what is still considered a passing league.

"Definitely it's starting to re-emerge," said Elliott, who was the NFL rushing leader as a rookie in 2016 with the Dallas Cowboys. "He was the first one in that draft and then as the years went on, more backs started to get picked and they've all been doing well. I wouldn't take all the credit, but I think it's just a new age of backs."

And an age of young backs. Gurley went 10th overall to the Rams when they were in St. Louis, followed five picks later by Melvin Gordon to the Chargers when they were still in San Diego. Now both backs are in LA.

Elliott was the first of two straight rookies to win the rushing title, followed by Kansas City's Kareem Hunt last season.

Among the top 10 rushers this season, eight are 25 or younger.

That's still not getting to New York Giants rookie Saquon Barkley, the No. 2 overall pick and highest back taken since Reggie Bush went second in 2006.

"I guess I kind of did start the first-round thing again," Gurley said. "But those guys are great players. They put themselves in great positions to be where they are at today, and you see why they are having success in the NFL."

Elliott got a top-four thing going when the Cowboys drafted the Ohio State star fourth overall in 2016. Now there have been three straight years with a back taken at least that high: Leonard Fournette fourth out of LSU in 2017, then Saquon Barkley from Penn State this year.

The other top 10 running backs over the past three drafts also illustrate one reason runners could be in vogue: their ability as pass catchers. Carolina took Christian McCaffrey eighth overall out of Stanford last year, even with the perception he might be a third-down back.

Now McCaffrey has a respectable 111 carries for the play-off-contending Panthers while ranking fourth among running backs with 49 catches.

"A lot of times teams that had a feature back, he was considered the first- and second-down guy, and then they put in a little scatback to be the third-down receiver," said Buffalo general manager Brandon Beane, who had a hand in drafting McCaffrey while with Carolina. "Well, now, you're getting these guys that can do it all."

Hunt and Barkley have made it back-to-back seasons for rookies to start their careers with six or more straight games of at least 100 scrimmage yards. Barkley's run ended there, but now he's at seven of his first eight games despite another miserable season for the Giants (1-7).

Hunt started his career with seven straight last year — the first rookie to do that since Kevin Jones for Detroit in 2004.

Gurley is well on his way to his first rushing title with 868 yards; leads the NFL with 16 touchdowns, including 12 rushing; and has a chance Sunday against Seattle to become just the fourth player with at least one TD in each of the first 10 games. The others are all Hall of Famers.

The former Georgia standout has a 162-yard lead over James Conner, the replacement for Le'Veon Bell in Pittsburgh

when Bell decided to stay away from the Steelers rather than play under the franchise tag.

Conner's emergence also shows the depth of the 2017 class — even with Fournette missing all but two games with a hamstring injury after rushing for 1,040 yards and nine touchdowns as a rookie for a team that reached the AFC championship game.

The second-year group has two of the NFL's top three rushers in Conner and Hunt, who have almost 1,400 yards and 16 rushing touchdowns between them, while Hunt has another six receiving TDs.

The versatility of 2017 Offensive Rookie of the Year Alvin Kamara helps quarterback Drew Brees in one of the NFL's best offenses in New Orleans. Dalvin Cook (Minnesota) and Joe Mixon (Cincinnati) are expected to play leading roles in their respective run games.

And forget for a moment about the draft.

Another second-year player, Matt Breida in San Francisco, is ninth in the NFL with 531 yards rushing after going undrafted. Denver rookie Phillip Lindsay is sixth at 591 after not getting selected.

Resilient Pitt in control of own destiny

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH—Pittsburgh coach Pat Narduzzi didn't throw the ACC Coastal Division standings up on the wall during his team's annual Sunday night meeting.

There was no need. Narduzzi is well aware his players know where the Panthers (5-4, 4-1 ACC) sit heading into Saturday's visit from Virginia Tech (4-4, 3-2): in first place and in control of their own destiny.

"I'm not going to address it," Narduzzi said Monday. "There's still a bunch of hungry teams sitting below us. Doesn't really matter. I know they read on Twitter all that stuff. I guess I don't have to address it."

Maybe, but that it's even a topic of discussion is a testament to Pitt's resiliency.

Narduzzi raised eyebrows when he told a group of fans at a kickoff luncheon in August to keep the first weekend of December open so they could plan a trip to Charlotte for the ACC title game. It's a possibility that seemed remote at best after the Panthers were drilled by

Penn State and Central Florida and then suffered a baffling loss to North Carolina, all in September.

And yet the Panthers have responded brilliantly, winning shootouts and defensive struggles alike during their three-game conference winning streak. Their taut 23-13 victory at Virginia last Friday may have been the closest they have come all season to fitting Narduzzi's definition of "Pitt football."

Darrin Hall ran for 229 yards and three touchdowns. The defense sacked Virginia quarterback Bryce Perkins five times. Alex Kessman drilled a 53-yard field goal and the Panthers pushed the Cavaliers around on the road.

"[It's] kind of what you want," Narduzzi said. "[An] old-school game. That's who we are, what the city of Pittsburgh is."

Still, Narduzzi stressed it's far too early for the Panthers to think they've arrived.

"We haven't done anything yet," he said. "We've got a long way to go. Premature victories are no good."

The road to the ACC championship, however, doesn't look quite as daunting as it did six weeks ago. Virginia Tech's bumpy resume includes losses to Old Dominion, Georgia Tech and Boston College. Wake Forest will play the rest of the year without injured starting quarterback Sam Hartman and Miami — the preseason pick to roll in the Coastal — is closer to last place than to first.

All of which makes Pitt the favorite — or the closest thing to one — at getting a shot at the ACC's Atlantic Division champion on Dec. 1. Heady territory for a group that has faced one of the most difficult schedules around.

"I don't think anybody has played five Top 25 football teams in the country, which we have," Narduzzi said. "We faced five of them so far. Wasn't an easy schedule. Everybody knew it wasn't an easy schedule coming into the year. After the game is over, no one says, 'But it's a hard schedule.' What other way would you want it?"

Narduzzi isn't too concerned

about his team getting caught up in the hype. Facing the Hokies should be enough. Pitt had a chance to win in Blacksburg last year but lost 20-14 when it failed to score on four plays from the Virginia Tech 1 in the final moments, a defeat that ultimately prevented the Panthers from becoming bowl eligible and one that Narduzzi still finds himself replaying in his mind 12 months later.

Pitt has a chance to erase that memory on Saturday while inching closer to an improbable division title. Not that Narduzzi wants to talk about it. He'd rather his team just go out and play and worry about what it all means later.

He didn't change the way the Panthers practiced when they were struggling in September. He's not going to change anything now that they're rolling in November.

"We do what we do, offensively, defensively, structurally," Narduzzi said. "Our days don't change. We try to keep things as similar, as familiar with the kids as we possibly can."

Clemson looks to clinch division title at BC

Associated Press

CLEMSON, S.C. — No. 2 Clemson plans to maintain its same season-long focused approach when the Tigers take on Boston College.

The Tigers (9-0, 6-0 Atlantic Coast Conference, CFP 2) visit the 17th-ranked Eagles (7-2, 4-1, CFP 22) with the chance to wrap up a fourth-straight ACC Atlantic Division title and spot in the league title game.

Clemson has been as dominant as any team in the country the past month or so, winning its past four games by a combined score of 240-36. The latest was a 77-16 victory over Louisville for the second-largest margin of victory ever in an ACC game.

Co-offensive coordinator Jeff Scott believes the Tigers' success comes from their steady

approach. They don't seem to elevate their enthusiasm or effort to match the moment, instead they simply rely on what they've done all season.

"I like the focus, intensity we've had in games," Scott said. "We're continuing to get better."

Clemson has excelled in big games this season, and has had a couple of close calls.

The Tigers stopped a two-point conversion at Texas A&M in week two to escape with 28-26 victory. They were down 10 points to then-undefeated Syracuse in the fourth quarter before rallying for a 27-23 win on Sept. 29.

And they turned one Top 25 showdown against 5-0 North Carolina State into a 41-7 rout three weeks ago.

Scott believes the Tigers

won't flinch against the Eagles, either, even if they haven't been truly tested in more than a month.

"You look for poise in those situations," he said Monday. "I don't feel like at any point we lost our poise."

That goes for freshman quarterback Trevor Lawrence, too.

Lawrence passed for more than 300 yards in blowouts over North Carolina State and Florida State. He threw for just 59 yards — although he had two touchdown passes — as Clemson went to the ground to pound the Cardinals.

Lawrence, the 6-foot-6 newcomer who leads the ACC with 18 touchdowns, has not yet been part of a tight, fourth-quarter contest since winning the starting job in mid-September.

Lawrence watched Clem-

son's comeback against Syracuse from the sidelines with a neck strain, knocked out in the second quarter by the Orange.

But Lawrence, who said he's never been north of Virginia, said he and the offense are ready for the challenge.

"We've shown earlier in the season we can win close games and we can find a way to win," he said. "I think it's been good to play well these past few weeks so we don't have to go into the fourth quarter."

Clemson coach Dabo Swinney said the Tigers work all season long for the chance to win championships and don't plan to let outside worries get in their way.

"This is what it's all about," he said. "We hope to have an opportunity like this down the stretch, so here we are."

NBA roundup

Chandler gives Lakers lift in LA debut

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Tyson Chandler savored the ovations when he first took the court in downtown Los Angeles. The cheers at the end were even sweeter.

The Lakers' newest big man got to represent his hometown Wednesday night for the first time in his 18 NBA seasons, and he came up bigger and better than even he expected in a hard-fought win.

LeBron James had 24 points, 10 rebounds and nine assists, and Kyle Kuzma scored six of his 21 points in the final minutes of the Lakers' 114-110 victory over the Minnesota Timberwolves.

James, Kuzma and Josh Hart played major roles in the Lakers' third win in four games, but they all directed praise toward Chandler, who joined the Lakers on Tuesday after reaching a buyout agreement with Phoenix. After LA's savvy basketball fans welcomed Chandler to town with cheers, the

veteran provided much of what the Lakers have been lacking this season.

"It's honestly all love," Chandler said. "I love this city the way they love me. When you're homegrown from here and going to high school and all that and you've had these same fans, and now you represent the jersey that everybody has been cheering for their entire lives, you kind of become one. I've been on the other side and played the villain. Now it's great to be on this side and actually rep them."

With only a cursory knowledge of the Lakers' plays and schemes, Chandler still provided defense, rebounding and hard picks while playing a surprising 23 minutes.

Chandler's nine rebounds included two enormous offensive boards in the last minute. He then contested Derrick Rose's final three-point attempt, forcing a miss that essentially sealed the win.

"You can tell he's a young-

old guy that's happy to be back home, and he played with a lot of energy tonight," said Rajon Rondo, who was thanked by Chandler for vocally directing him around the court.

Pelicans 107, Bulls 98: Anthony Davis had 32 points, 15 rebounds and four blocks in his best game since spraining his right elbow nearly two weeks ago, and host New Orleans ended a six-game skid.

Raptors 114, Kings 105: Kawhi Leonard had 25 points and 11 rebounds in his return from an ankle injury, and visiting Toronto beat Sacramento to improve the NBA's best record to 11-1.

Thunder 95, Cavaliers 86: Dennis Schroder scored a season-high 28 points in replacing injured star Russell Westbrook and Oklahoma City beat host Cleveland.

Heat 95, Spurs 88: Hassan Whiteside had 29 points, 20 rebounds and an NBA season-high nine blocked shots, and host Miami snapped a four-year

drought against San Antonio.

Pistons 103, Magic 96: Andre Drummond had 23 points and 19 rebounds and Detroit beat host Orlando to snap a five-game losing streak.

76ers 100, Pacers 94: Joel Embiid scored 20 points and Ben Simmons nearly had a triple double to lead Philadelphia past Indiana for its first road victory of the season. Simmons had 16 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists.

Jazz 117, Mavericks 102: Donovan Mitchell scored 23 points in his return from an ankle injury and host Utah beat Dallas to end a four-game skid.

Knicks 112, Hawks 107: Tim Hardaway Jr. scored 27 of his 34 points in the second half, reserve Enes Kanter added 17 points and 11 rebounds, and New York beat host Atlanta.

Grizzlies 89, Nuggets 87: Marc Gasol scored 20 points, including the go-ahead free throws with 4.6 seconds remaining, to lead host Memphis past Denver.

NHL roundup

Oshie takes hit, scores winner for Capitals

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — T.J. Oshie left for the second time after taking Evgeni Malkin's shoulder to the head but returned to score late and lift the Washington Capitals over the rival Pittsburgh Penguins 2-1 on Wednesday night in a meeting of the two most recent Stanley Cup champions.

Alex Ovechkin and Sidney Crosby traded goals, and Oshie got the winner with 1:14 left following a dangerous hit from Malkin. The Penguins star was thrown out of the game for an illegal check to the head and could get a hearing with the NHL's department of player safety.

Capitals goaltender Braden

Holtby stopped 41 of 42 shots for his first victory since Oct. 22. The only goal he allowed was Crosby's eighth of the season, which came on the power play.

Pittsburgh's Casey DeSmith stopped 20 of 22 shots in his first career start against Washington. The Penguins lost their fifth in a row and could be without Malkin in the near future.

Ducks 3, Flames 2: Ryan Getzlaf scored 27 seconds after Calgary got a tying goal in the third period to lift host Anaheim.

The Flames trailed 2-0 in the first but rallied to tie it six minutes into the third on Mark Jankowski's short-handed goal. Getzlaf then was able to cor-

ral a loose puck in front of the goal and directed a backhand through Mike Smith's legs for his second game-winner of the season.

Jakob Silfverberg and Adam Henrique also scored for Anaheim. Ryan Miller made 37 saves and tied Andy Moog (372) for 17th on the career wins list.

Predators 4, Avalanche 1: Colton Sissons got his second career hat trick and Colorado had two apparent goals nullified on replay review as Nashville won at the Avalanche.

Ryan Hartman added an empty-net goal with 2:54 left in Nashville's 11th consecutive regular-season victory against Colorado, which has lost four

straight overall.

Trailing 2-0, the Avalanche had an apparent goal at 1:29 of the second period waived off after a replay review showed the puck had drifted across the blue line, making it offside. Samuel Girard was straddling the blue line when he passed to Ian Cole, whose shot zoomed into the net past goalie Pekka Rinne only to have it erased after the Predators' challenge was upheld.

A second Avalanche goal was disallowed, on a shot by Colin Wilson, with 12:33 left in the third following a Predators challenge. Officials took away the score after the replay review, saying the Avs were offside.