

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## Troops on border get broader authority

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The White House has granted Defense Secretary Jim Mattis broader authority to move U.S. troops deployed to the U.S.-Mexico border region to provide protection for the Customs and Border Protection agents they are supporting, the Pentagon chief said Wednesday.

Mattis told reporters he was reviewing his options, but he did not order any immediate changes to the force posture of the nearly 5,800 active-duty troops supporting the operation once known as Faithful Patriot in Texas, California and Arizona.

The new proposed authorities were outlined in a White House memorandum signed by Chief of Staff John Kelly late Tuesday, U.S. officials said. The document could allow military troops — likely military police officers armed with handguns and outfitted in riot gear — to take actions “reasonably necessary” to protect border protection agents, who are also armed. Measures could include use of lethal force “where necessary” as well as crowd control, short-term detention and searches of migrants, according to the officials who described the memo, which was not made public.

Troops always have the inherent right of self-defense and to defend others with whom they are directly working, which could include lethal force if necessary. Mattis told reporters at the Pentagon he did not intend to issue any declaration authorizing troops to use lethal force.

As of Wednesday, Mattis said, nothing along the border had changed. He said he had neither authorized such mission adjustments nor had the Department of Homeland Security requested them.

“I am reviewing them now,” the defense chief said. “We’ll decide if [the authorities] are appropriate for the military ... we’ll stay strictly within accordance of the law.”

The 1878 Posse Comitatus Act bars military troops from conducting law enforcement activities outside of military installations. Mattis said he would ensure that federal law is upheld.

To date, MPs deployed to the border region have been providing security, primarily for engineering troops who have placed thousands of meters of concertina wire at locations on and near the border and for aviators ferrying CBP agents in the region. Under the new authorities, some of those MPs could be moved to work directly alongside CBP agents, one of the officials said. The official spoke on condition of anonymity

to discuss the unreleased memo.

Other powers would not constitute law enforcement and, therefore, not conflict with Posse Comitatus, Mattis said.

He explained that crowd control measures would merely include placing temporary barriers near ports of entry that could be quickly closed in case of a riot.

Detaining and searching of migrants — who Pentagon officials have long insisted were unlikely to come in contact with military troops — would only occur in extreme circumstances, Mattis said, and would last “minutes not hours.”

The defense chief defended the deployment of the active-duty troops who are operating alongside about 1,200 National Guardsmen deployed on a separate operation also in support of CBP. He likened it to past deployments of military troops under Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama.

The troops were deployed rapidly to the border region ahead of the Nov. 6 midterm elections as President Donald Trump repeatedly warned that a group of several thousand Central American migrants moving toward the United States to seek asylum amounted to an “invasion.”

## New Navy evaluation includes peer input

BY JOSHUA KARSTEN

*Stars and Stripes*

The Navy’s new performance reports will gather input from subordinates and peers, the service said in a message outlining a long-awaited overhaul to the evaluation system.

The move away from evaluations based entirely on supervisor assessment is one of several changes in store for the new system, which will also expand the current 5-point system to a 9-point scale that ranks sailor performance traits across multiple categories. The administrative message did not elaborate on those standards, but the Navy

currently rates sailors in seven categories, including teamwork, professional knowledge and character.

“The new evaluation system will place emphasis on merit over seniority or tenure,” according to the message, signed Nov. 18 by Navy personnel chief Vice Adm. Robert Burke.

The new standards eliminate “forced distribution,” where sailors get ranked against their peers in categorized groups within a command, the message stated. Sailors will instead be rated on paygrade-based objective standards.

The change is part of a larger push from Navy leadership

called Sailor 2025, an initiative designed to improve pay, personnel and career management systems. It also seeks to instill a coaching system — now in testing among 10,000 sailors across 140 commands — that gives sailors more immediate feedback on their performance.

The coaching phase starts with a self-assessment and combines input from subordinates, peers and supervisors. The sailor and supervisor will then receive a report to better enable coaching sessions, which the message states “are not occurring consistently across the Fleet today.”

The coaching system is ex-

pected to roll out in mid-2019, followed by the changes to the evaluation system “soon after,” according to the message.

“This will allow for much better mid-term counseling across the Fleet next year and set the conditions for a smooth transition to the enhanced evaluation system,” the message stated.

The Navy is also introducing a mobile application for sailors to use the assessment tool. Sailors interested in trying it out during the test phase can visit the MyNavy Portal at <https://www.mnp.navy.mil/group/performance>.

# USS Ronald Reagan pulls into Hong Kong

BY CHRISTIAN LOPEZ  
*Stars and Stripes*

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan and its battlegroup dropped anchor in Hong Kong on Wednesday, nearly two months after China denied a similar visit there by a U.S. warship.

The Ronald Reagan was accompanied by the cruiser USS Chancellorsville and the destroyer USS Curtis D. Wilbur, a Navy statement said.

The destroyer USS Benfold is also part of the group, according to the Hong Kong Free Press.

“Hong Kong is always an incredible port visit and I’m glad that the officers and sailors of Carrier Strike Group 5 will have the chance to enjoy the culture, vitality and diversity of this great city,” Rear Adm. Karl

Thomas, strike group commander, said in the statement.

The USS Wasp, an amphibious assault ship based in Sasebo, Japan, was denied a stop in Hong Kong in late September following growing trade disputes, new 10 percent tariffs on \$200 billion of annual Chinese imports and the announced sale of U.S. military equipment to Taiwan.

China denied the Wasp port call a day after the tariffs took effect.

The U.S. also imposed sanctions once it learned China had purchased fighter jets and a surface-to-air missile system from Russia.

Despite that friction, the Yokosuka-based Ronald Reagan’s visit emphasizes efforts by the U.S. to improve its relations in the Indo-Pacific region, Thomas said.

“The abundant growth and prosperity

that surrounds us in Hong Kong is what the United States Seventh Fleet seeks to preserve for all nations in this important region,” he said in the statement.

President Donald Trump and Chinese leader Xi Jinping are scheduled to meet next week at the Group of 20 summit in Argentina, the first time the two will have faced each other since trade tensions escalated.

The Ronald Reagan strike group recently wrapped up dual-carrier drills with the Washington-based USS John C. Stennis aircraft carrier in the Philippine Sea.

The carriers brought 10 ships, about 150 aircraft and 12,600 personnel to maneuver and execute anti-submarine, surface and air warfare operations in the international waters, the Navy said.

## Marine on Okinawa faces sexual-assault charges

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE  
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — A member of the Okinawa-based III Marine Expeditionary Force must answer to multiple charges in the April sexual assault of a female Marine who was reportedly too intoxicated to consent.

Sgt. Morgan Bergdahl, of Combat Logistics Battalion 31, 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, faces eight charges of sexual assault and abusive

sexual contact in the incident, according to a copy of the charge sheet provided to Stars and Stripes.

A court-martial has been tentatively scheduled for Jan. 7. Bergdahl has been held in pre-trial confinement on Okinawa since April 25.

The first sexual assault charge alleges that Bergdahl penetrated the genitalia of the unnamed victim with his penis “on or about” April 21 when she was “incapable of consenting to the sexual act due to impair-

ment” by alcohol.

The charges state that Bergdahl knew, or should have “reasonably” known, that the woman was too intoxicated to consent at the time.

The next charge is for causing bodily harm in the commissioning of the penetrative act.

The next two sexual assault charges mirror the first two but pertain to oral sex.

The four abusive sexual contact charges read much like the sexual assault charges, though they use language such as

“touch” instead of penetration.

Lt. Gen. Eric Smith, III Marine Expeditionary Force commander, signed off on the charges on Oct. 16, the charge sheet said.

Bergdahl, who is tentatively scheduled to be arraigned next month, signed on for his current enlistment in August 2014, the charge sheet said. He was nearing the end of his four-year term when the alleged incident took place.

## US bombers fly near disputed South China Sea isles

*Stars and Stripes*

A pair of Guam-based bombers recently flew near disputed islands in the South China Sea, an Air Force statement said.

The B-52H Stratofortress bombers left Andersen Air Force Base on Monday for the “routine training mission,” the statement said.

“This recent mission is consistent with international law and the United States’ long-standing commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific,” it added.

The U.S. routinely sends the aircraft to the South China Sea — where more than \$1.2 trillion in U.S. trade transits annually — and other parts of the Indo-Pacific as part of its “continuous bomber presence” missions.

Earlier this month, Chinese officials told their U.S. counterparts to stop sending ships and military aircraft close to islands claimed by Beijing in the South China Sea. The U.S. pushed back, insisting it will continue to “fly, sail and operate wherever in-

ternational law allows.”

Last month, the Chinese destroyer Luyang “conducted a series of increasingly aggressive maneuvers” as the USS Decatur sailed through the sea’s Spratly Islands, according to Lt. Cmdr. Tim Gordon, a spokesman for U.S. Pacific Fleet.

The Luyang came within “45 yards of Decatur’s bow, after which Decatur maneuvered to prevent a collision,” Gordon said. At the time, Gordon called the Luyang’s maneuvers unsafe.



# Air Force gives permission to Muslim airman to grow beard

BY COREY DICKSTEIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Air Force has quietly approved a request by a Muslim airman to grow a beard, marking the service's first such religious accommodation for a follower of Islam, Air Force officials said Tuesday.

Staff Sgt. Abdul Rahman Gaitan, 30, was granted the appearance exception in August to grow a beard in keeping with his Muslim faith, officials said, but the Air Force publicly announced his waiver only last week in a public affairs-produced article published on the service's website.

Gaitan is an aerial porter assigned to the 821st Contingency Response Support Squadron at Travis Air Force Base in California, according to the Air Force.

Since 2014, the Pentagon has allowed service-members to appeal to military leadership for the right to wear certain items mandated by their religions that would not be allowed under standard grooming and appearance regulations.

The Army, for example, has allowed brigade commanders to determine whether soldiers can wear certain religious items, including beards and turbans for Sikh soldiers and hijabs for female Muslim soldiers. More recently, the Army approved a soldier's request to grow a beard as part of his claim to follow a Norse Pagan religion.

While not all Muslim men wear beards, some of them believe facial hair is a requirement of the religion's male followers.

Gaitan, who converted to Islam following an Air Force stint at a base near Izmir in Turkey in 2011, said his beard is in keeping with the following of the Prophet Muhammad.

"It is a constant reminder of our faith and who we are as Muslims," he said, according to the Air Force article.

The airman said he had received some negative reactions since he began growing his beard, including questions from fellow airmen about whether he was a terrorist or had decided to join Islamic State. But others came to Gaitan's defense, he said.

"The incident shot straight to the commander, like a lightning bolt, and the following morning I was called into his office with the chief and first sergeant waiting for me," he said in the article. "In my entire career, I've never had a commander look me in the eyes like he did ... his look, tone, words and posture were shouting at me, 'Don't worry, we have your back.'"

After the meeting, the commander reminded the unit of the Air Force's zero tolerance policy on discrimination.

"I walked out of there with a feeling I had never felt as a Hispanic Muslim airman," Gaitan said. "I finally felt like I was fully part of the Air Force family and that my peers and my leadership would fight to protect me."

## Toll rises in bombing of Kabul hall

BY J.P. LAWRENCE  
*Stars and Stripes*

KABUL, Afghanistan — The death toll from a bombing of religious scholars celebrating the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad in the Afghan capital has continued to rise in the 24 hours since the attack, while the Taliban has denied responsibility.

At least 55 were killed and 94 more were wounded, Afghan Health Ministry spokesman Waheed Majroh said Wednesday.

The attack took place at the Uranus Wedding Hall, a colorfully lit complex about 2 miles from the Kabul airport, where U.S. troops are stationed. Hundreds of religious scholars had gathered to celebrate the Muslim prophet's birthday when a suicide bomber walked in and blew himself up during a reading of the Quran from beginning to end, Interior Ministry spokesman Najib Danish said.

A video of the attack circulated on social media showing scholars listening intently to words from the Muslim holy book before an orange flash appears on screen. A bang and the sounds of people rushing from the scene follow.

An investigation is ongoing, police spokesmen said. No group has claimed the attack, which the Taliban denounced in a statement.

It was the first major attack in Kabul since an Islamic State suicide bomber struck a gym in September, killing dozens.

The latest bombing fits the profile of previous attacks by the local ISIS affiliate, which began operating in the country's east in 2014 and has staged several attacks.

In recent years, U.S.-trained and -supplied Afghan forces, backed by American special operations troops, have battled both rising Taliban insurgency and the ISIS offshoot, which is known as ISIS-Khorasan province, or ISIS-K. Both groups seek to overthrow the U.S.-backed Kabul government,

## Report: Hunger, disease claim 85,000 kids in Yemen

*Associated Press*

CAIRO — A leading international aid group said Wednesday that an estimated 85,000 Yemeni children under the age of 5 may have died of hunger and disease since the outbreak of the country's civil war in 2015.

Save the Children based its figures on mortality rates for untreated cases of severe acute malnutrition, or SAM, in young children. The United Nations says more than 1.3 million children have suffered from SAM since a Saudi-led coalition went to war with Yemen's Houthi rebels in March 2015.

The aid group said its "con-

servative estimate" was that 84,701 children may have died, based on historical studies that find that 20 to 30 percent of untreated cases lead to death. Save the Children says it calculated the figure based on the number of cases reported in areas where aid groups were unable to intervene.

"For every child killed by bombs and bullets, dozens are starving to death and it's entirely preventable," said Tamer Kirolos, Save the Children's Yemen director. "Children who die in this way suffer immensely as their vital organ functions slow down and eventually stop."

The war has given rise to the

world's worst humanitarian crisis. Three-quarters of Yemen's people require life-saving assistance and more than 8 million are at risk of starvation. Tens of thousands of people are believed to have been killed in the fighting.

Save the Children blamed the widespread starvation on a Saudi-led blockade that was tightened a year ago after the Iran-aligned rebels fired a ballistic missile at the Saudi capital, Riyadh. The charity also cited recent fighting in and around the port city of Hodeida, a lifeline through which Yemen imports some 70 percent of its food and humanitarian aid.

## Indian police: Isolated tribe killed American

Associated Press

NEW DELHI — An American is believed to have been killed by an isolated Indian island tribe known to fire at outsiders with bows and arrows, Indian police said Wednesday.

Police officer Vijay Singh said seven fishermen have been arrested for facilitating the American's visit to North Sentinel Island, where the killing apparently occurred. Visits to the island are heavily restricted by the government.

The Sentinelese people live on the small forested island and are known to resist all contact with outsiders, often attacking anyone who comes near.

North Sentinel is in the Andaman Islands, a group of islands at the juncture of the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea.

Indian media reports said the American was on an adventure trip to the islands and his body had been spotted by the fishermen. Singh said police were recovering the body.

Singh said the man was killed Saturday. He declined to give any other details, saying he was investigating the case.

Kathleen Hosie, spokeswoman for the U.S. Consulate in Chennai, the capital of southern Tamil Nadu state, said it was aware of reports concerning an American in the islands. Survival International, an organization that works for the rights of tribal people, said the killing of the American should prompt Indian authorities to properly protect the lands of the Sentinelese and other Andaman tribes.

"The British colonial occupation of the Andaman Islands decimated the tribes living there, wiping out thousands of tribespeople, and only a fraction of the original population now survives. So the Sentinelese fear of outsiders is very understandable," Stephen Corry, the group's director, said in a statement.

Shiv Viswanathan, a social scientist and a professor at Jindal Global Law School, said North Sentinel Island was a protected area and not open to tourists.

# Mattis says US, South Korea will scale back spring drill

By COREY DICKSTEIN  
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The United States and South Korea will scale back their annual Foal Eagle exercise next spring to facilitate ongoing negotiations over North Korea's nuclear program, U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said Tuesday.

"Foal Eagle is being reorganized a bit to keep it at a level that will not be harmful to diplomacy," Mattis told reporters at the Pentagon.

The United States and South Korea have canceled their last four scheduled large-scale training exercises on the Korean Peninsula to provide diplomats an opportunity to negotiate with North Korea. The North has long viewed such military training as provocative and a prelude to invasion. Presi-

dent Donald Trump unexpectedly ordered those large-scale exercises canceled in the wake of his June meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

Foal Eagle in recent years has included some 11,500 American troops and 290,000 South Korean troops and has consisted of field exercises involving ground, air, naval and special operations troops. Foal Eagle has typically been held in the spring alongside another computer-simulated exercise known as Key Resolve, which last year included about 12,200 Americans and 10,000 South Korean personnel.

Mattis on Wednesday did not provide details about how the United States and South Korea would scale back the annual exercise. He said decisions about canceling or scaling back additional major training exercises

would be made in the future.

Some Pentagon officials have raised concerns about the combat readiness of the 28,500 U.S. troops in South Korea if large-scale exercises continue to be canceled. Mattis has largely discounted those concerns.

Despite Trump's cancellation of major training exercises, American and South Korean troops have continued working together on a smaller scale including brigade and company unit levels, Pentagon officials have said.

The United States has said it seeks the "complete, verifiable and irreversible" denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in exchange for the lifting of stringent economic sanctions. North Korea has also said it desires a formal end to the Korean War. Fighting ended in an armistice in 1953.

## California rains could help fire fight but hinder remains search

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Rain in the forecast starting Wednesday could aid crews fighting California's deadly wildfires while raising the risk of flash floods and complicating efforts to recover remains of those killed.

Residents in communities charred by the Los Angeles-area fire stacked sandbags as they prepared for possible downpours that threatened to unleash runoff from hillsides left barren by flames.

In Northern California, teams continued sifting through ash and debris as they searched for bodies in and around the decimated town of Paradise.

"The task is arduous," said Rick Crawford, with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. "And the

possibility exists that some people may never be found."

With the death toll at 81 in the state's most destructive wildfire, there are still nearly 870 people still unaccounted for.

Authorities trying to identify the scores of people killed are using rapid DNA testing.

The burned area surrounding Paradise, which is about 140 miles northwest of San Francisco, was expected to see rain Wednesday. The precipitation could help knock out the flames, but it could also hinder the search by washing away fragmentary remains and turning ash into a thick paste.

The National Weather Service issued a flash flood watch for Paradise and nearby communities and for those areas charred by wildfires earlier this year in Lake, Shasta, Trin-

ity and Mendocino counties.

The Camp Fire, which has burned an area about the size of the city of Chicago — nearly 238 square miles — and destroyed around 13,000 homes, was 75 percent contained on Tuesday.

In Southern California, people who worried days earlier that their homes might be consumed by flames were taking action to guard against possible debris flows caused by the Pacific storm. Residents filling sandbags at Malibu's famous Zuma Beach were mindful of the disaster that struck less than a year ago when a downpour on a fresh burn scar up the coast sent home-smashing debris flows through Montecito, killing 21 people and leaving two missing.



# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Soda cans, bees litter road after 2 crashes

**FL** SARASOTA — Two crashes left Florida roadways littered with thousands of soda cans and swarming bees.

The Florida Highway Patrol said in a news release that at least one person was killed in the Tuesday morning crash involving three tractor-trailers in Charlotte County, south of Sarasota.

A few miles away, a truck carrying bees was involved in a crash with a dump truck that left the scene. Troopers said that crash left the bees swarming in the area. One person was injured in that crash.

## Dog snarls freeway traffic, bites trooper

**AZ** PHOENIX — A dog that snarled traffic on two Phoenix freeways during Tuesday morning's commute will be quarantined for 10 days after it bit a state trooper trying to grab its collar.

An Arizona Highway Patrol spokesman said the trooper suffered hand wounds while trying to secure the dog after that trooper or another used a stun gun to subdue the animal.

A pole-mounted snare was then used to restrain the dog, which was turned over to animal control.

Trooper Kameron Lee said dispatchers got calls overnight about the dog being on at least one freeway and that efforts to remove it intensified during the commute when it began tying up traffic on State Routes 51 and 202.

## Police say mom drove with son on car hood

**PA** BETHLEHEM — A Pennsylvania mom

faces criminal charges for allegedly driving with her son on the hood of her car after the boy refused to go to the dentist.

Police in Bethlehem Township said the incident began when the 12-year-old boy told Shaurice Jones, 36, he wasn't going to the dentist and climbed on the hood of the car.

Jones then allegedly drove 2 miles to a regional police office. Police say the speed limit on the road is 40 mph.

LehighValleyLive.com reported Jones, of Bath, was charged with child endangerment and reckless endangerment.

## Siamang surprises zoo with new baby

**CA** SAN DIEGO — A new baby at the San Diego Zoo came as a real surprise.

Eloise, a 37-year-old siamang — that's a type of gibbon — had been on birth control for years. But on Nov. 12, she gave birth to her seventh child.

Eloise and her partner, 35-year-old Unkie, had their last child at the zoo in 2006.

The zoo said Eloise hadn't shown any signs of pregnancy and it's unclear why the birth control didn't work this time.

Still, animal care manager Jill Andrews told the San Diego Union-Tribune that the zoo is overjoyed. Andrews said any birth involving an endangered species is a reason to celebrate.

## Deer with other buck's head in antlers shot

**KY** WICKLIFFE — A Kentucky hunter killed a buck that had another deer's decomposing head still attached to its antlers.

The state Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources posted a photo on Facebook last week of Bob Long holding his prize.

The antlers of the deer Long shot in Ballard County this

month were tangled with the other deer's. The recently shot buck's head was still attached, but the decomposing head was missing a body.

Department Sgt. Tony Dunker told KFVS-TV that he suspects the bucks locked antlers in a fight over territory or mates and after one died, its body decayed for weeks to the point where the head separated.

## Vet graduates from firefighting school

**WA** SEATTLE — A war veteran who lost part of his left leg when he stepped on a roadside bomb in Afghanistan graduated from firefighting school and plans to enroll in a course for emergency medical technicians.

KING-TV reported retired Air Force Tech Sgt. Daniel Fye was serving his fourth tour of duty in Afghanistan when he stepped on an improved explosive device in 2011. He lost his left leg below the knee. He kept his right leg after months of surgery.

On Saturday, he graduated with honors from a 4½-month training program at the South Sound Fire Academy.

Fye plans to volunteer with Central Kitsap Fire and Rescue for the time being and attend emergency medical technician school in February.

## Brand-new Battle Born Memorial is damaged

**NV** CARSON CITY — A memorial honoring 895 Nevada residents who have died in wars and conflicts dating to the Civil War was damaged days after its dedication.

The Nevada Appeal reported the Battle Born Memorial on the Capitol grounds suffered cosmetic damage just three days after Gov. Brian Sandoval dedicated it.

The damage was reportedly

caused by four teens, two riding BMX bicycles and two on Razor scooters. It includes cracks to three slabs of the black granite platform that stretches the length of the memorial.

## Endangered fish making a comeback

**NM** FARMINGTON — U.S. officials said biologists have captured more yearling razorback suckers this fall in the San Juan River than they have captured in one season in more than 20 years.

The Daily Times of Farmington reported that the findings in the San Juan River this past spring signify the fish are reproducing in northwest New Mexico.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist Nate Franssen said wildlife officials have been stocking razorbacks and managing the river for many years hoping to see these signs of recovery.

In 1991, federal officials classified the razorback sucker as an endangered species.

## Rastafarian woman's lawsuit dismissed

**ND** MINOT — A judge dismissed a lawsuit filed by a practicing Rastafarian after her baby daughter was born in Minot with traces of marijuana in her system.

North Central Human Services put Shanika Lister's name on a child abuse registry after the 2015 birth. Lister argued putting her name on the registry was illegal after a judge later ruled her use of marijuana during pregnancy was a protected religious practice.

The Minot Daily News reported Judge Todd Cresap dismissed the case because Lister's name has already been removed from the registry.

From wire reports

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# Cowboys have found way back in hunt

Associated Press

FRISCO, Texas — Ezekiel Elliott still had five more games to watch last year after the Dallas Cowboys lost in Atlanta at the beginning of their star running back's six-game suspension over domestic violence allegations.

After playing a huge role in helping the Cowboys thrust themselves into the NFC East race with a win at the Falcons, Elliott will be right in the middle of trying to get them back to the playoffs instead of having to watch a season go south without the 2016 NFL rushing champ.

"We can't lose this grit. We can't lose the way we're going out there and working every day. We can't lose the way we're going out there and competing on Sundays," Elliott said after a 22-19 win over the Falcons. "We've got to build on that."

It's quite a two-game streak to build on for Dallas (5-5): road victories over the past two Super Bowl participants from the NFC, before which the Cowboys were winless away from home and teetering on

playoff extinction just halfway through the season.

And it set up a Thanksgiving showdown against Washington (6-4) on Thursday with the division lead on the line.

"That's all that much more reason to appreciate how this team's come together and be where we are right now," owner and general manager Jerry Jones said. "We (Cowboys and Redskins) don't always play for a title, but to some degree, we're playing for it out there Thanksgiving day."

Both victories featured winning drives to answer tying fourth-quarter touchdowns — first against defending champion Philadelphia. The Cowboys actually answered two tying TDs in the final quarter against the Eagles.

Elliott had two of his five 100-yard rushing games and combined for 388 yards from scrimmage and three touchdowns in wins over the Eagles and Falcons.

Instead of wondering what they'll do without that kind of production, the Cowboys are feeding off growing confidence in an offensive line that is fi-

nally absorbing changes and the residual benefits of new No. 1 receiver Amari Cooper, acquired in a trade when Dallas was 3-4 going into its open week.

"We've talked about that for a couple weeks now," quarterback Dak Prescott said. "The way teams are playing us and the way they're playing Amari and adjusting their coverages has given us favorable boxes. The offensive line is doing a great job of taking advantage of that. Zeke's finding holes and making people miss."

Prescott was sacked a career-high eight times in his first game without Elliott last year against the Falcons, the start of a three-game losing streak.

Although the Cowboys won the final three without their running back, the margin for error was gone. A loss to Seattle in Elliott's return eliminated Dallas a year after Prescott and Elliott led the team to an NFC-best 13 wins.

The reward for the current two-game surge is three straight home games, although one-loss New Orleans is the middle opponent. After an ex-

tended break following the Saints game, the Eagles visit. Philadelphia's hopes of a repeat are fading coming off a blowout loss at New Orleans.

"We played our way back into this thing, but this one is every bit as big as the last two," Cowboys executive vice president of personnel Stephen Jones said on his radio show Monday. "So, we got to pull this off and it's great we put ourselves back into a position to be relevant here."

The formula from the two road wins seems to be the best hope for the Cowboys. The defense keeps them in games, as it has done several times this season, while the offense makes the winning plays late.

One of the fourth-quarter TDs against Atlanta was set up by rookie linebacker Leighton Vander Esch's second interception in as many games.

"We're gelling at the right time," Prescott said. "We're complementing the defense. They get turnovers. We're turning them into points and when you do that, you give yourself a chance. We know we're going to be in every game."

## Top four teams in CFP rankings remain unchanged

Associated Press

Alabama, Clemson, Notre Dame and Michigan were at the top of the College Football Playoff rankings Tuesday night, marking the first time in the five-year history of the postseason system that the same teams held the first four spots for three straight weeks.

Unlike last week, there was a little movement in the top 10. Unbeaten Central Florida moved up two spots to No. 9. The Knights became the first team from outside the Power Five conference to be ranked in the selection committee's top 10.

Georgia remained No. 5, followed by Oklahoma at sixth. LSU remained seventh, Washington State held at 8 and Ohio

State stayed at 10th, getting jumped by UCF.

Committee chairman Rob Mullens, the Oregon athletic director, said the group spent "considerable time" discussing Ohio State, which beat Maryland 52-51 in overtime on Saturday, and UCF, coming off a 38-13 victory against Cincinnati.

"We said while UCF might not have the depth of talent of Ohio State, the committee thought they're playing more as an all-around team," Mullens said.

### UCF's long shot

There does not seem to be a realistic path to the playoff for UCF. What about an unrealistic one? Maybe. Imbalanced

conferences have set traps for playoff contenders that UCF athletic director Danny White could not have laid out any better.

There is a case to be made that there is literally no way UCF would be allowed in the playoff. The conspiracy theorist would say the selection committee has been given their Power Five marching orders and that's that. There is a glass ceiling over UCF no matter the chaos in the other conferences. The less cynical would say UCF's schedule, not as rigorous as the other top teams, would deservedly keep the Knights out even if the alternative is teams that have lost two or even three games.

CFP executive director Bill Hancock has often said there

is no glass ceiling on the Group of Five teams. They just need aggressive and fortuitous non-conference scheduling. The example often given is Houston of the American Athletic Conference in 2016. The Cougars, coming off a Peach Bowl victory like UCF this season, beat two highly ranked Power Five teams with star quarterbacks that season — Oklahoma with Baker Mayfield and Louisville with Lamar Jackson. But they lost three conference games and didn't even earn a major bowl bid.

But a Group of Five team with those types of nonconference victories, plus a strong conference record and league title, would have a chance to make the final four.



## College basketball roundup

# Lipscomb stuns TCU for first Top 25 win

Associated Press

FORT WORTH, Texas — Kenny Cooper turned a steal into a breakaway layup that put Lipscomb ahead only seconds after halftime at No. 18 TCU.

The Bisons never gave up the lead and went on to win 73-64 on Tuesday night, their first victory over a Top 25 team.

“Our mentality at the beginning of the second half was completely different than at the beginning of the game,” coach Casey Alexander said. “Our guys were timid and passive early, and so that gave us more of a lift emotionally than it did just somebody making a good play.”

The Bisons (4-1), who trailed by 14 points early in the game, pushed in front by 12 after halftime before TCU’s Kouat Noi missed a potential tying three-pointer with 90 seconds left. Garrison Mathews grabbed the rebound and made a game-sealing three at the other end.

Mathews scored 23 points, Cooper had 17 and Rob Marberry 13 for the ASUN Conference preseason favorites, who had been 0-13 against ranked teams since 2006.

“It’s a big win,” Alexander said. “We talked about it before the game, we talked about it at halftime — a chance to give Lipscomb a win that it had never had before, against a ranked team.”

Alex Robinson had 17 points, 10 rebounds and six assists for TCU (3-1), which lost a November game for the first time since 2015. The Horned Frogs’ 18-game winning streak during the month had been the second-longest among Division I programs, behind only Virginia’s 21 in a row.

“We knew how good these guys were,” TCU coach Jamie Dixon said. “When we scheduled, we knew they’d be all seniors, they’re all back, they were in (the NCAA) Tournament last year, it’s early in the season.”

While TCU has played seven newcomers as it prepares for the Big 12 schedule, Lipscomb has one of the most experienced teams in the country, returning 92 percent of its offense from a squad that scored 82 points per game last season. The Bisons started three seniors and two juniors.

“Moments like this is where

you may see that,” Alexander said.

**No. 3 Gonzaga 91, Arizona 74:** Rui Hachimura scored 24 points, Zach Norvell Jr. added 20 and the Bulldogs earned a spot in the Maui Invitational title game.

Gonzaga (5-0) was out of sync late in the first half after a good start, falling into an eight-point hole.

The Zags turned the Lahaina Civic Center into The Kennel West early in the second, the cheers growing louder with each basket during a 15-2 run that put them up 56-53.

Two-time Maui champion Arizona (4-1) fought back to keep it close, but only for a little while. Gonzaga went on another run, pushing the lead 79-67, and kept the Wildcats at bay from there.

**No. 16 Clemson 64, Georgia 49:** Marcquise Reed scored 24 points and grabbed nine rebounds, Elijah Thomas had his second straight double-double and the Tigers beat the Bulldogs to reach the championship game of the Cayman Islands Classic.

Clemson will play Creighton for the title Wednesday.

Thomas finished with 12 points and 11 rebounds for Clemson (5-0), off to its best start since the 2013-14 season. Shelton Mitchell, who scored a season-high 22 on Monday, chipped in with 13 points and David Skara had three of the Tigers’ nine steals.

Coach Brad Brownell won his 154th game at Clemson, three from passing Bill Foster for second in program history.

**No. 23 Ohio State 68, Samford 50:** Kaleb Wesson scored 17 points, Keyshawn Woods added 14 and the Buckeyes shook off a sluggish first half to beat the scrappy Bulldogs.

Host Ohio State (5-0) seemed out of sync from the opening tip, as coach Chris Holtmann benched four starters for being late to “game-day preparation,” according to the school. The Buckeyes shot just 37.5 percent from the field in the first half while Samford shot 50 percent and led 32-29 at the break.

But in the second half, Ohio State went on a 21-3 run that sealed the win. The Buckeyes shot 50 percent to 24 percent for Samford (5-1).

Junior guard Myron Gordon led the Bulldogs with 18 points.

## No. 1 Duke outlasts Auburn, earns berth in Maui final

Associated Press

LAHAINA, Hawaii — Duke hit Auburn with a flurry of alley-oops, acrobatic drives and step-back three-pointers.

The Tigers, unlike the Blue Devils’ first four opponents, fought back, going right back at the top-ranked Blue Devils.

It still wasn’t enough.

Duke withstood its toughest test of the season so far, outlasting No. 8 Auburn 78-72 Tuesday night to reach the Maui Invitational title game.

“Big-time game. Both teams played so hard,” Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski said. “That was a heck of a win for us. To

play this level of game at this time of the year is amazing for us.”

Duke (5-0) came into the game as the tournament favorite and looked like it would run Auburn out of the gym after racing past San Diego State in the opener.

The Tigers (4-1) clawed back to pull the Blue Devils within reach, yet could never get a firm grip.

Duke answered every Auburn challenge, earning a chance to play No. 3 Gonzaga for the chance at an unprecedented sixth Maui Invitational title.

Marques Bolden, an upper-classmen leader among all the talented freshmen, keyed the defensive, blocking seven shots while scoring seven points and grabbing nine rebounds.

Zion Williamson provided the wow factor with acrobatic moves to the basket, finishing with 13 points and nine rebounds.

Jared Harper nearly kept the Tigers in it singlehandedly with deep three-pointers in the second half. He had 22 points and Bryce Brown 16 for Auburn.

“We’re very disappointed that we weren’t able to take advantage of the opportunity,”

Auburn coach Bruce Pearl said. “Our great strength is our balance and I think when we continue to become a little bit more balanced in many ways we’ll continue to become a better team.”

The Blue Devils came to Maui yet to be tested, leaving fans wondering what they’ll do next through the first four ooh-and-ahh-inducing routs.

The Blue Devils express kept rolling at the Lahaina Civic Center.

Duke stymied Auburn defensively early, limiting the Tigers to 4-for-20 shooting while jumping out to a 20-8 lead.

## NBA roundup

# Wiz rally from 24 down, beat Clippers

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — There has been a lot of negativity around the struggling Washington Wizards in recent days. When they fell behind the Los Angeles Clippers by 24 points midway in the second quarter, the Wizards didn't fall apart again. Instead, they rallied for their biggest win of the season.

John Wall scored 30 points, Bradley Beal had 27 and Jeff Green added 20 as Washington wore down the Clippers 125-118 on Tuesday night.

Amid a 5-11 start, there were reports the team would listen to trade offers for All-Star guards Wall and Beal, and talk of a nasty practice last week with Wall yelling at coach Scott Brooks and being fined for disrespectful behavior.

"It happened. We talked about it, we moved on," Brooks said. "I'm not here to throw anything in anybody's face."

Wall, Beal and Green each scored 10 in the fourth quarter as Washington outscored Los Angeles 39-23 to pull out the win.

"We've still got a lot of stuff to fix," Beal said. "I'm still not happy. I know everybody's not happy with where we are."

The Wizards cut the Clippers' lead to 95-86 after three quarters and took a 115-113 lead on Wall's layup with 2:33 to play.

Tobias Harris scored a season-high 29 points, Montrezl Harrell had 20, and Lou Williams and Shai Gilgeous-Alexander each added 17 for the Clippers, who had won five straight. Williams was ejected with 34.5 seconds to play.

"You have a team, you can see they're wounded, and I really thought we had a chance to be up 30 at halftime," Los Angeles coach Doc Rivers said. "And you can just see it we kind of got the lead, kind of turned down the energy."

**Raptors 93, Magic 91:** Danny Green made a fade-away jumper with less than a second remaining to lift visiting Toronto over Orlando.

Green caught Kyle Lowry's inbound pass with 2.3 seconds left, pulled up on the left side of the lane and hit a jumper with

0.5 seconds remaining. Orlando's Nikola Vucevic missed on a 67-foot heave as time expired.

Kawhi Leonard led Toronto with 18 points, and Pascal Siakam had 15. Serge Ibaka added 14 points and nine rebounds, and Green finished with 13.

Evan Fournier led the Magic with 27 points, 22 of them in the second half when he was about the only offense Orlando could generate. Aaron Gordon had 16 points, and Vucevic had 14 points and 18 rebounds for the Magic, who ended a three-game winning streak.

**Trail Blazers 118, Knicks 114:** CJ McCollum scored 31 points, Damian Lillard had 29 points, eight assists and six rebounds, and visiting Portland beat New York.

Portland's star guards provided most of the offense in a game that was close most of the way, and Evan Turner helped the Trail Blazers finally pull it out when he put back a missed shot with Portland clinging to a two-point lead and 9.5 seconds remaining.

Jusuf Nurkic finished with

13 points and 11 rebounds for the Blazers, who have won two straight after dropping the first two games on their trip that now heads to its difficult conclusion. Portland plays Milwaukee on Wednesday and closes it at Golden State.

**Nets 104, Heat 92:** D'Angelo Russell scored 20 points, Jarrett Allen had 13 points and 14 rebounds, and Brooklyn added to Miami's misery at home.

Spencer Dinwiddie scored 16 points for Brooklyn, which held the Heat to 36 percent shooting. Joe Harris and DeMarre Carroll each added 11 for the Nets and Rondae Hollis-Jefferson scored 10.

Hassan Whiteside had 21 points and 23 rebounds for Miami, which dropped its fifth straight at home — all on their "Vice" themed court. No Heat team has ever had a home losing streak of five or more games and went on to make the playoffs.

Josh Richardson scored 16 and Rodney McGruder finished with 15 for Miami.

## McDavid, Oilers respond to new coach, beat Sharks

Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Connor McDavid and the Edmonton Oilers responded the right way to a wakeup call after coach Todd McLellan was fired just hours before they took the ice.

McDavid scored his 100th career goal and set up Leon Draisaitl's game-winner 51 seconds into overtime to give the Oilers a 4-3 victory against the San Jose Sharks in Ken Hitchcock's first game as coach Tuesday night.

"That's what it has to be," McDavid said. "Anytime you bring in a new coach, that's kind of the last option I would say before shipping everyone out. This is a chance for us to

come together and turn this around."

The Oilers started that process by overcoming three deficits to earn just their second win in eight games.

McDavid set up Drake Caggiula's tying goal early in the third period and then the winner in overtime when his pass ricocheted off defenseman Marc-Edouard Vlasic before hitting Draisaitl's skate and trickling past goalie Martin Jones.

"I was more worried that it was past my bedtime and I wasn't going to be able to stay up," Hitchcock said. "I don't think I've seen a third period all year out West. But for me,

we just got better and better as the game went on. We got better in the second; we were really good in the third. We really got on the grind."

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins added a short-handed goal and Mikko Koskinen made 22 saves.

Joe Thornton assisted on Marcus Sorensen's goal in the first period to tie Mario Lemieux for 11th place all-time with his 1,033rd helper. Joonas Donskoi and Logan Couture also scored for San Jose.

"Tonight's a disappointing one because I thought if we had gotten a little bit better effort from everybody, from 20 guys, we should have gotten two points," coach Peter

DeBoer said. "We didn't have enough participants tonight. We didn't play well enough for long enough stretches. It wasn't one or two guys, it was almost everybody."

The Sharks took a 3-2 lead in the final minute of the second period when Couture deked Adam Larsson on the rush and beat Koskinen for his first goal in 11 games.

But the Oilers responded early in the third when McDavid set up Caggiula on an odd-man rush for the equalizer less than four minutes into the period.

"There are too many odd-man rushes," Couture said. "It wasn't horrible tonight."