

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

## 3 US troops killed in Afghan IED blast

Deadliest day for US forces in country this year brings total deaths in 2018 to 13

By PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN  
*Stars and Stripes*

KABUL, Afghanistan — Three U.S. troops were killed and four Americans were wounded when a roadside bomb exploded Tuesday in central Afghanistan, marking the deadliest day for U.S. forces in the country this year.

The wounded — three troops and a contractor — were evacuated and are receiving medical care, a military statement said.

The blast occurred near Ghazni city when a convoy of U.S. forces sent to help battle the Taliban struck the bomb, said Mohammad Araf Noori, spokesman for the governor of Ghazni province.

The troops were on their way to Andar district to participate in military operations against insurgents, Amanullah Kamran, a provincial council member, told Stars and Stripes.

The Taliban quickly claimed responsibility for the attack, saying it was targeted

at “American invaders.” The group has stepped up activity in Ghazni in recent months.

If it wasn’t for U.S. military support, the province would fall to the Taliban, Kamran said.

The names of the slain troops were being withheld until after next of kin are notified, in accordance with Pentagon policy.

The deaths came just days after Sgt. Leandro A.S. Jasso, a member of the elite 75th Ranger Regiment, was killed battling al-Qaida fighters during a raid in southwestern Nimruz province. A separate statement on Tuesday said his death may have been the result of an accidental shooting by an Afghan ally during close-quarters fighting against dug-in enemy fighters.

Tuesday’s blast also follows a visit to Ghazni last week by the top U.S. commander in the country, Gen. Scott Miller, to discuss the security situation. In August, the Taliban stormed the city, about 100 miles southwest of Kabul, in one of their most significant advances in years, leading to days of heavy fighting.

Several U.S. Special Forces troops were wounded and seven armored vehicles were disabled by enemy roadside bombs, mortars and rockets as they rushed to aid Afghan forces in repelling the Taliban assault, Time magazine reported in the wake

of the battle.

During Miller’s visit last week, two rockets were fired on the city, damaging a medical facility, but there were no reported casualties.

A photograph of Miller carrying an M4 carbine during the visit circulated on social media. Miller was at a meeting last month where two Afghan leaders were killed in an insider attack that wounded two other Americans.

Earlier this month, Taliban fighters took swaths of two outlying districts in Ghazni province, forcing thousands of civilians to flee the violence and leading to demonstrations in the Afghan capital calling for the government to oust the insurgents.

Afghan security forces members expressed condolences for the Americans fatally wounded by the latest violence in the province.

“U.S. troops are fighting terrorism side-by-side with us. If they suffer, we suffer,” said Ahmad Khan Seerat, a Ghazni police spokesman. “Today we are sad that we lost our partners.”

The deaths bring to 13 the number of U.S. troops killed in the country in 2018. Of those, 12 were combat fatalities, the most in a single year since the end of 2014, when most international combat troops were withdrawn from the country.

## Marines loosen liberty for some in Pacific

By CARLOS M. VAZQUEZ II  
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Just in time for the holidays, the lowest-ranking Marines across Japan, Australia and Hawaii are getting an extra hour of off-base liberty, along with other loosened restrictions.

Evening curfew for those ranked sergeant and below has been revised from midnight to 1 a.m., according to a Nov. 19 memo from Lt. Gen. Eric Smith, commander of III Marine Expeditionary Force and Marine Forces Japan.

Smith has also relaxed the requirement that those Marines have liberty partners

when they leave their bases unless they intend to consume alcohol.

The new policy is organizing Marines into three tiers — from tier one, which imposes the fewest restrictions on off-base liberty and alcohol consumption, to tier three, which allows neither off-base liberty nor alcohol consumption on or off-base.

Another change allows newly arriving Marines and sailors in Japan tier-one liberty without a minimum wait time of 30 days in their commands based upon their performance and an initial assessment.

“It should perk up morale,” Cpl. Jacob Budds, of Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron 12 at Marine Corps Air Station

Iwakuni, Japan, told Stars and Stripes on Monday. “It’s a rule of thumb to have a liberty buddy, but some Marines get in trouble even with a buddy. So, I think that giving them an extra hour to get back on base when they may have been out drinking would be good.”

In some instances, Budds said, leadership requires troops at Iwakuni to file a weekend activities plan so their supervisors can help guide their choices for spending their time off base.

According to the memo and a III MEF spokesperson, the III MEF liberty policy is being revised to reflect Smith’s memo and more changes are to come.

# Kremlin warns over hostilities in Ukraine

Associated Press

KIEV, Ukraine — The Kremlin warned Tuesday that Ukraine's declaration of martial law over Russia's seizure of three Ukrainian ships might trigger a flare-up in hostilities in eastern Ukraine, while Kiev blamed Russia for parading captured Ukrainian seamen on television.

Russia and Ukraine have blamed each other for Sunday's confrontation in the Kerch Strait, which links the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. The clash has raised the specter of renewing a full-blown conflict in eastern Ukraine and saw Russia strongly criticized at the United Nations by the United States and its allies.

The Ukrainian parliament on Monday adopted a motion by the president to impose martial law for 30 days. That is something Ukraine avoided doing even when Russia annexed its nearby Crimean peninsula in 2014 or sent in clandestine troops and weapons to insurgents in war-torn eastern Ukraine.

On Sunday near Crimea, Russian border guards rammed into and opened fire on three Ukrainian navy vessels traveling from the Black Sea toward a Ukrainian port. The Russians seized the ships and their crews.

Ukraine considers the 24 captured men to be prisoners of war and says some have been seriously injured, while Russia says

they are individuals who have violated its border.

The Kremlin reacted strongly to Ukraine's declaration of martial law, with Dmitry Peskov, Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman, telling reporters Tuesday that it might trigger a flare-up in hostilities in eastern Ukraine.

Ukrainian troops have been fighting Russia-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine since 2014, a conflict that has left more than 10,000 dead, but fighting has eased since a truce in 2015.

The martial law formally went into effect Monday in several parts of Ukraine, including areas bordering territory now held by the separatists.

## USS John S. McCain floats again after repairs

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS

Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The USS John S. McCain floated again into the waters of its homeport on Tuesday, 15 months after a collision with a civilian oil tanker left 10 sailors dead and the destroyer severely damaged.

The 6,700-ton ship sat atop several feet of water Monday in its dry dock. By Tuesday, waters filled the dock and lifted the ship, which is named for the late senator from Arizona and his father and grandfather, who were both Navy admirals.

Onlookers from around base flocked to the U.S. Naval Ship Repair Facility as they heard the news.

Sailors and civilians who'd worked on the repairs stood aboard the ship in hard hats as the McCain slowly crept out of the

dock. It took a systematic process involving tug boats and rope to pull the destroyer from its home of 11 months.

The McCain eventually reached its new berth, nestled between other destroyers and cruisers along the base pier.

On Aug. 21, 2017, the McCain collided near Singapore with a civilian oil tanker, which impaled itself into the ship's port side. Confusion among watch-standers had led to a loss of steering control, and the destroyer crossed into the tanker's path. The impact crumpled a berthing area and caused heavy flooding. Ten sailors died.

The McCain collision was the second major fatal accident involving a destroyer last year. The USS Fitzgerald — also homeported at Yokosuka — collided with a Philippine-flagged container ship on June 17, 2017, just south of Japan, killing seven sail-

ors. The Fitzgerald is undergoing repairs at the Ingalls Shipbuilding yard in Pascagoula, Miss.

The damaged McCain was sent to Yokosuka, its homeport. However, its hull cracked on the starboard side while it was being transported by a heavy-lift vessel, so it detoured to the Philippines in October 2017. The ship finally arrived in Japan in January and had been tucked away since then in a dry dock at the Yokosuka repair facility.

The collision left a gaping hole in the McCain. Repairs were made from the ship's hull to its mast, with scaffolding covering much of the ship for months.

Officials with the 7th Fleet declined a request for comment Tuesday and further details of the ship's improvements were not available.

## Mattis presides over SOUTHCOM command change

Miami Herald

MIAMI — Adm. Craig Faller was named the new commander of the Miami-based U.S. Southern Command on Monday.

Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis, who named Faller to the post, said the agency responsible for naval and ground operations in Latin America and the Caribbean will continue to collaborate with neighboring countries to "protect our people" from the effects of mother nature's storms, drug trafficking and terrorism.

"There is more in this hemisphere that binds us together than drives us apart,"

Mattis told civil and military leaders, foreign ministers and others at a ceremony inside the gym on the SOUTHCOM campus in Doral, Fla. He said the United States prides itself on mutual respect and stable military ties with many of its neighbors, but not those "suffering under the unfortunate leadership in Cuba and Venezuela."

Faller assumes the new role from Adm. Kurt Tidd, who has been leading the agency for almost three years. Both have extensive experience in the Navy.

Faller's service has taken him to the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific region.

He most recently served as senior military assistant to Mattis.

"As I see it, the Western Hemisphere is our neighborhood," Faller said. "Where I grew up, good neighbors respect each other."

Faller, who is from Fryburg, Pa., went up to the microphone before Tidd spoke, even though he was scheduled to speak after his predecessor. Tidd joked in his remarks, "You can see why Craig Faller is my very best friend in the whole world. You cannot ask more than a guy who wants to take the reins and run right away."



# Officials: Ranger likely killed by accident

By CHAD GARLAND  
*Stars and Stripes*

An Army Ranger killed in action in Afghanistan over the weekend was likely shot by Afghan troops accidentally, the military coalition in Kabul said Tuesday.

Sgt. Leandro A.S. Jasso, 25, was shot while American troops and Afghan forces were assaulting “one of multiple barricaded al-Qaida shooters” in Nimruz province, officials with U.S. Forces-Afghanistan said, citing initial interviews with witnesses. The troops were fighting a close-quarters battle, they said.

“There are no indications he was shot intentionally,” the statement said.

Jasso was medically evacuated from the combat zone and later died of his injuries at a medical facility in Helmand province.

The soldier, from Leavenworth, Wash., was on his third deployment to Afghanistan. He enlisted in the Army in 2012 and became an accomplished soldier, completing the Basic Airborne Course and earning the Combat Infantryman’s Badge and the much-sought after Ranger tab, the Army’s Special Operations Command said in a statement.

U.S. special operations troops often ac-

company their Afghan counterparts into battle as part of a joint counterterrorism mission, which is separate from the much larger U.S. and coalition mission to train and equip government forces battling a 17-year Taliban insurgency.

“Sgt. Jasso was killed defending our nation, fighting al-Qaida alongside our Afghan partners,” Gen. Scott Miller, the top U.S. and NATO commander in Afghanistan, said in a statement. “All of us, and throughout our coalition of 41 nations, recognize the threats posed by groups such as al-Qaida and ISIS and are determined to fight them here.”

## US troops probed in death of Afghan commando

By PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN  
*Stars and Stripes*

KABUL, Afghanistan — U.S. Green Berets and Czech troops are being investigated in the beating death of an Afghan commando who was suspect of killing a Czech soldier last month, military officials in Afghanistan said Tuesday.

The commando, Wahidullah Khan, 19, had been arrested by Afghan troops and handed over to the U.S.-led coalition shortly after he was accused of opening fire and killing a Czech soldier at Shindand Air Base in western Herat province on Oct. 22, The New York Times first reported Monday. When Khan was returned to Afghan custody, he had been beaten unconscious, officials said. He died shortly thereafter, the newspaper said, citing unnamed Afghan officials.

Gen. Scott Miller, commander of U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan, has since asked the U.S. Army Criminal In-

vestigation Command to investigate the death.

“The incident remains under investigation,” NATO’s Resolute Support mission in Kabul said Tuesday in an email to Stars and Stripes. “We will hold individuals accountable, as appropriate.”

A team from the Army’s 7th Special Forces Group, which helped transfer Khan to the custody of Czech soldiers, has been removed from Afghanistan for the duration of the investigation, the Times reported. It’s not clear if any U.S. troops were responsible for beating Khan.

The Czech Ministry of Defense denied any involvement in the commando’s death to the Times.

Khan was accused of killing Cpl. Tomas Prochazka and wounding two other Czech soldiers when he shot at a coalition vehicle last month.

It was one of five insider attacks in which a member of the Afghan security forces

has turned their weapon on coalition troops this year. NATO troops were killed in four of these incidents.

The shooting came just days after an insider attack at a meeting in Kandahar province killed Afghan police Gen. Abdul Raziq and wounded U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Jeffrey Smiley. Miller, the top U.S. commander in the country, had been at the meeting but was unharmed.

Insider attacks remain a serious threat in Afghanistan, although they are much less frequent than at their peak in 2012. U.S. and Afghan officials have sought to reduce the threat in recent years and in September 2017 introduced a screening process that has since led to the removal of some 300 Afghan commandos from the force.

The elite commando troops conduct most of the country’s offensive operations against terrorist and insurgent groups. They are often accompanied on the battlefield by U.S. special operations troops.

## B-52 squadron leader is removed from command

By JENNIFER H. SVAN  
*Stars and Stripes*

Lt. Col. Paul Goossen, commander of the 69th Bomb Squadron at Minot Air Force Base, was removed from command Tuesday for failure to maintain a professional workplace environment.

Maj. Natassia Cherne, a wing spokeswoman at the North Dakota base, confirmed Goossen was relieved Tuesday morning. The decision was made by Gen. Timothy Ray, commander of Air Force Global Strike Command, she said.

Cherne said Goossen was the subject of a commander-directed investigation by his boss, Col. Bradley Cochran, commander of the 5th Bomb Wing. That investigation concluded on Oct. 31.

Cherne did not have specifics about the probe but said it was not a criminal investigation. Goossen was “removed from his position solely because of his failure to maintain a professional work environment,” she said.

Commander-directed investigations are administrative in nature. Commanders may initiate a probe to look into and correct

problems within their command, usually either systemic ones or those pertaining to individual conduct or responsibility, according to Air Force guidance.

Goossen took over command of the 69th Bomb Squadron in December 2017, Cherne said, adding that he will be reassigned to another position at Minot until he’s due to transfer to another duty location.

Lt. Col. Dennis Zabka, the 5th Operations Support Squadron director of operations, assumed command of the squadron on Tuesday. The squadron has about 90 airmen.

# Some US border troops shifted to Calif.

By ROSE L. THAYER

*Stars and Stripes*

AUSTIN, Texas — About 300 active-duty troops were moved to California during the last few days to bolster border protection as a large caravan of migrants hoping to seek asylum in the United States masses in Tijuana, Mexico, according to the Army.

Troops were shifted from Texas and Arizona to California's southern border with Mexico after military and U.S. Customs and Border Patrol officials determined military police, engineering and logistics units were needed to support shifting requirements within that state.

Now, about 1,800 of the 5,600 active-duty troops deployed to the southwest border with Mexico are in California, according to numbers provided Monday by the Army. About 2,400 are in Texas and the remaining 1,400 are in Arizona.

Thousands of Central American migrants have traveled for more than a month to seek asylum in the United States. About 5,000 arrived last week in Tijuana, Mexi-

co, The Associated Press reported. At one point, the caravan had more than 7,000 people.

President Donald Trump tweeted on Monday: "Mexico should move the flag waving Migrants, many of whom are stone cold criminals, back to their countries. Do it by plane, do it by bus, do it anyway you want, but they are NOT coming into the U.S.A. We will close the Border permanently if need be. Congress, fund the WALL!"

Demonstrations on Sunday took place on both sides of the border near San Diego and resulted in officials temporarily closing the San Ysidro Port of Entry. In response to the protests, military engineers moved barricades and military police backed up other law enforcement agencies at the border, according to a news release issued Sunday by U.S. Northern Command.

San Ysidro is one of the busiest ports of entry in the Western Hemisphere, processing an average of 70,000 northbound vehicle passengers and 20,000 northbound pedestrians daily, according to the U.S. General

Services Administration. The Northern Command statement released Sunday did not further outline troop involvement, but said military personnel "will not be conducting law enforcement functions, but are authorized to provide force protection for Customs and Border Protection personnel and help make sure CBP personnel can perform their assigned federal functions."

Army Capt. Guster Cunningham III, a spokesperson for the task force on the ground with the Border Patrol mission, said military police only step in after Border Patrol, other federal law enforcement personnel and state personnel, including National Guard and local law enforcement resources, are utilized "so as to preclude [the Defense Department] being a first line of contact with migrants."

At this time, Defense Department officials said there's been no change to plans to have servicemembers deployed along the southwest border home by Dec. 15, as Defense Secretary Jim Mattis outlined in a news briefing on Nov. 21.

## Experts: Budget cuts could hurt national security

By CLAUDIA GRISALES

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon, which is facing potential spending cuts next year, could see U.S. armed forces suffer and a possible national security crisis if the military's budget is slashed, officials and lawmakers warned Tuesday.

The concerns were highlighted during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing focusing on a report issued by the National Defense Strategy Commission earlier this month.

The commission, which is directed by Congress to weigh the National Defense Strategy against global threats, has said an inadequately resourced military could struggle to win, or even risk losing, a confrontation with major powers such as China or Russia. Major powers competition is a central theme of the National Defense Strategy issued in January.

While the 2018 and 2019 fiscal year "budgets moved us in

the right direction, there is now a prospect, however, that we will be moving in the wrong direction," testified Eric Edelman, co-chairman of the Commission on the National Defense Strategy and a former U.S. ambassador.

There's a misconception that increased defense funding in the 2018 and 2019 fiscal years has solved all the military's problems, said retired Adm. Gary Roughead, co-chairman of the commission.

"There's a sense that the last two years of growth have fixed the problems," Roughead testified. "Nothing could be further from the truth, whether it's in readiness, whether it's in conventional modernization or nuclear modernization. But I think that's kind of feeding this idea that it's time to taper down."

Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-Okla., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said he was especially alarmed at the report's assessment that the United States is very near the point of "strategic insolvency."

## Special counsel says Manafort lied, broke deal

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The special counsel in the Russia investigation is accusing former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort of violating his plea agreement by repeatedly lying to federal investigators, an extraordinary allegation that could expose him to a lengthier prison sentence — and potentially more criminal charges.

The torpedoing of Manafort's plea deal, disclosed in a court filing Monday, also results in special counsel Robert Mueller's team losing a cooperating witness from the top of Donald Trump's presidential campaign who was present for several key episodes under investigation. That includes a Trump Tower meeting involving Donald Trump Jr. and a Russian lawyer he was told had derogatory information on Democrat Hillary Clinton.

The move signals a return to the acrimonious relationship Manafort has had with the special counsel's office since his indictment last year. Before

his plea agreement, Manafort aggressively challenged the special counsel's legitimacy in court, went through a bitter trial and landed himself in jail after prosecutors discovered he had attempted to tamper with witnesses in his case.

In the latest filing, Mueller's team said Manafort "committed federal crimes" by lying about "a variety of subject matters" even after he agreed to truthfully cooperate with the investigation. Prosecutors said they will detail the "nature of the defendant's crimes and lies" in writing at a later date to the judge.

Through his attorneys, Manafort denied lying, saying he "believes he provided truthful information" during a series of sessions with Mueller's investigators.

He also disagreed that he breached his plea agreement. Still, both sides now agree they can't resolve the conflict and U.S. District Judge Amy Berman Jackson should set a date to sentence him.



# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Helen Keller's desk displayed at museum

**KY** LOUISVILLE — A writing desk that belonged to Helen Keller is on display in Kentucky at the American Printing House for the Blind Museum.

News outlets reported the desk is on loan to the Louisville museum from the American Foundation for the Blind. Keller, who was deaf and blind and was an author, lecturer and political activist, worked at the foundation for 44 years.

Museum director Mike Hudson said the museum wants visitors to consider the work Keller did at the desk and how creativity comes about.

## State university hosts its first drag show

**UT** LOGAN — The first-ever drag show at traditionally conservative Utah State University drew a large and supportive crowd to cheer on 10 drag performers in an event that organizers said marks progress on LGBTQ issues.

The show earlier this month was held as part of a discussion about drag culture and the LGBTQ community. Performers not only danced and sang but also answered questions about what taking part in the show meant to them, The Salt Lake Tribune reported.

## Endangered white rhino displayed at zoo

**TX** BROWNSVILLE — The newest resident of a South Texas zoo is an endangered white rhino that goes by the name Bebop.

The 5-year-old Southern white rhino has joined other endangered white rhinos on

display at Gladys Porter Zoo in Brownsville. The new rhino arrived at the zoo in March from the Center for Conservation of Tropical Ungulates in Punta Gorda, Fla., the Brownsville Herald reported.

Zookeepers have placed Bebop in enclosures close to the zoo's other female white rhinos, Abby and Julie.

## School votes to drop its Indian mascot

**OH** OXFORD — An Ohio school district is dropping its Native American mascot after a close school board vote.

The Hamilton-Middletown Journal-News reported the Talawanda Board of Education recently voted 3-2 to change the district's mascot name from the Talawanda Braves to Talawanda Brave. Officials say the new name denotes bravery and courage.

The Oxford district will no longer purchase any apparel, items or equipment using the image of a Native American head.

The vote comes after months of public outcry.

## Mystery lovers gather for D.B. Cooper event

**OR** PORTLAND — Mystery lovers and others gathered this past weekend to discuss a common obsession — the infamous hijacker known as D.B. Cooper.

KGW-TV reported the "D.B. Cooper Con" conference held Saturday in Portland was dubbed the first open investigative gathering in seven years. The event took place on the 47th anniversary of the unsolved crime.

On Nov. 24, 1971, a hijacker calling himself "Dan Cooper" parachuted from a Northwest

Orient Airlines 727 over the Pacific Northwest after receiving \$200,000 in ransom. The fate of the man remains unknown.

## Rodent causes outage on Thanksgiving Day

**NV** HENDERSON — Electric utility NV Energy said a rodent caused the Thanksgiving Day power outage that affected more than 13,000 buildings in Henderson.

The Las Vegas Review-Journal reported homes and businesses lost power around 8 p.m. Thursday for almost four hours.

NV Energy spokeswoman Jennifer Schuricht said it is unclear what kind of rodent caused the outage and how the rodent was able to damage the utility's equipment.

## Fossil of plant-eating reptile has been found

**NM** ALBUQUERQUE — The New Mexico Museum of Natural History said the earliest known example of a plant-eating reptile has been found in the fossil record in southern New Mexico.

The museum made the announcement last week. It said the unique structure of the skull, jaws and teeth of the sail-backed reptile indicate it was an herbivore, and that such specialized plant-eating wasn't previously known in reptiles older than about 200 million years.

## Doctor fights seizure of dinosaur skull

**TX** FORT WORTH — A doctor in Texas with a passion for paleontology is challenging the federal government after authorities seized a 70 million-year-old dinosaur skull from his fossil collection.

Dr. James Godwin argued that the government waited too long to file a forfeiture claim after it seized the Tyrannosaurus bataar skull that authorities said was among several fossils smuggled illegally out of Mongolia.

Under the National Stolen Property Act, the government has five years from the time an offense is discovered to file a forfeiture suit.

## Coast Guard probes ferry crash at docks

**CA** SAN FRANCISCO — The Coast Guard is investigating what caused a ferry boat to crash into docks at San Francisco's famed Ferry Building, slightly injuring two people aboard.

Coast Guard spokesman Chris Shih said investigators are looking into mechanical issues and other factors that led to Friday's crash.

A Golden Gate Ferry spokeswoman said the boat was traveling from Larkspur and carrying 53 passengers when it struck an outer berth before bumping into another dock, damaging the vessel's hull.

## Holiday passengers stranded on train

**NY** NEW YORK — Some people spent the end of their Thanksgiving holiday stuck on an Amtrak train for more than five hours.

The Boston-bound Acela had left Washington on Sunday when Amtrak says debris caused damage to the pantograph that connects the train to the overhead power line in Queens, N.Y.

The train sat on the tracks while Amtrak tried to make repairs from about 10 a.m. until shortly after 3 p.m.

From wire reports

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# McGee gets career rebirth with Lakers

Associated Press

There was a two-season stretch during which JaVale McGee scored a total of 141 points. He was a target of jokes, wildly misunderstood by many in the NBA, almost an afterthought of sorts whose career seemed to be closer to flaming out than taking off.

And in those darkest days, McGee kept asking himself the same question.

"Is it over?"

The answer now is obvious: No, it wasn't over. Fast forward, and it may just be getting started.

He's living the life that few in the NBA get to experience. He's teamed up with the best players of this generation — Kevin Durant, Stephen Curry, LeBron James. He's won two championships, part of Golden State's back-to-back titles over the last two seasons. And now he's the starting center for the Los Angeles Lakers, getting a chance to play big minutes and put up numbers for the first

time in nearly a decade.

In his 11th season, McGee has basically gotten a basketball rebirth.

"I played against him in the last two NBA Finals and I wanted him on this team because I know what he brings," said James, who lobbied the Lakers to get McGee. "It's his energy, his energy level, his ability at the rim and his ability to protect the rim. If you don't have that on your team, you're not going to have much, man. You need to have people with a high IQ, which he's got. That's why I wanted JaVale to be part of this."

McGee's numbers are so much better this season than they've been. But he cringes at the notion that he's gotten better.

What the Lakers have given him is a better chance. That's the difference. And he's certainly one of the reasons why they're off to a 11-8 start, winners in seven of their last nine games.

McGee's per-36-minutes

averages over his career have been remarkably similar: Never lower than 13.1 points in a full season, the majority of the time between 15 and 18 points per 36 minutes of play. But the numbers are spiking this year because he's actually getting minutes — the Lakers are starting him and playing him about 25 minutes per night, and he's responding with averages of 13.2 points, 6.5 rebounds and 2.8 blocks per game.

He's showing everyone else what James saw in the NBA Finals the past two years.

"He could have said get anybody," McGee said. "It's just a reassuring feeling, a confidence-builder I guess, knowing that you're going into a situation wanted as an option, like you're really wanted. That's pretty dope."

In those 2013-14 and 2014-15 seasons, when McGee was barely playing because of ongoing issues related to a stress fracture in his left leg, he wondered if his career was coming to a premature end. His physi-

cal game was failing, his mental game was in trouble as well, and basketball stopped seeming fun.

"Of course, I had all those feelings, all those thoughts," McGee said. "But what overshadowed all that was me just not being willing to prepare for the worst. I'm just going to keep preparing for the best. So I just kept working like I wasn't hurting, and it ended up being dealing with pain and the pain going away and then realizing the pain isn't even there anymore."

His game has taken off since.

The funny thing about McGee is that he came into the NBA with the skills that big men now are supposed to have — stretch defenses, make shots from the perimeter, have some guard-esque skills. That's the player he was at Nevada before getting picked by Washington at the No. 18 spot of the 2008 NBA Draft.

## Braves add veterans McCann, Donaldson to young core

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Brian McCann slipped on the No. 16 jersey he wore for so many years.

"It feels right," he said, over and over again.

Looking to improve on their first division title in five years, the Atlanta Braves agreed to one-year contracts with McCann and former AL MVP Josh Donaldson — a pair of low-risk moves that give the team a chance to make another postseason run while not hindering the long-term development of all those talented young players.

Donaldson agreed to a \$23 million deal, the Braves confirmed Monday night. The salary matches what the third baseman made during a forgettable 2018 season.

McCann's \$2 million contract reunites the team with a catcher

who was a seven-time All-Star from 2005-13. A native of suburban Atlanta, he was eager for a chance to return home with his wife and two children.

"This is as special a day for me as any I've had in my career," McCann said during a hastily called news conference at SunTrust Park. "To put this uniform back on, with the love I have for this organization, the love I have for everybody from top to bottom, people I've known since I was 18 years old, that's why I'm here."

While McCann's signing is sure to be popular with the fan base, the acquisition of Donaldson figures to be far more significant to the team's fortunes in 2019.

The Braves are counting on a return to form from the three-time All-Star, who turns 32 next month. It was only three

years ago that he captured the MVP award in his first season with Toronto, hitting 41 homers and leading the AL with 123 RBIs. While he followed up with two more 30-plus-homer seasons, a hip injury in 2016 and a strained right calf in 2017 cut into his production.

This past season, Donaldson was limited to 52 games by shoulder inflammation and calf issues, hitting .246 with eight homers and 23 RBIs. He was dealt to Cleveland by the Blue Jays on Aug. 31.

The short-term deal with the Braves gives Donaldson a chance to show he's healthy and back to form, potentially setting up a huge payday in the next free-agent market.

For Atlanta, it provides another much-needed slugger in the middle of the order to go with Freddie Freeman, especially since it's not known if the

team will make a serious run at bringing back free-agent outfielder Nick Markakis.

General manager Alex Anthopoulos attended the news conference for McCann but did not comment on the signing of Donaldson.

It was left to McCann to inadvertently mention the Braves' other acquisition, which the team did not officially announce until hours later.

"I don't know if I was supposed to say that," McCann said, sounding a bit embarrassed. "I just read it on Twitter."

"I don't even know who that is," Anthopoulos quipped.

Actually, Donaldson and the GM have a relationship that goes back to their days in Toronto. Anthopoulos served in the same post for the Blue Jays until 2015, working out the blockbuster trade that brought Donaldson from Oakland.



## College basketball roundup

## Texas Southern upsets No. 18 Oregon

Associated Press

EUGENE, Ore. — Trayvon Reed picked the right night to be perfect.

Reed scored 23 points and John Jones added 20 to help Texas Southern shock No. 18 Oregon with an 89-84 victory Monday night.

Reed, a 7-foot-2 senior, made all nine of his shots and also was 5-for-5 from the foul line for the Tigers (2-4), who were 24-point underdogs.

"Trayvon did an excellent job," Texas Southern coach Johnny Jones said. "It was his best game by far all year long. I thought he performed at a really good pace on both ends of the floor.

"Offensively, he was very effective and he played with a lot of energy on the defensive end. I thought he had them uncomfortable at both."

All nine of Reed's field goals came on dunks as the Ducks couldn't keep him away from the rim.

"We never got physical with him," Oregon coach Dana Altman said. "He kind of did what-

ever he wanted."

It was just the fourth non-conference loss at home for the Ducks since Matthew Knight Arena opened in 2011.

Jalyn Patterson had a double-double with 13 points and 11 assists, and Derrick Bruce added 13 points for Texas Southern, which scored 57 points in the second half.

Oregon led by 13 points early in the second half before the Tigers rallied. Reed's dunk with 9:59 left in the game capped a 23-8 run and gave the Tigers a 61-59 advantage.

Bol Bol, the Ducks' 7-2 freshman center, had 32 points and 11 rebounds for his third double-double. He hit two free throws with 3:20 left to tie the game at 75.

Reed then scored four straight points to give the Tigers a 79-75 advantage with 2:18 left. Will Richardson hit two free throws 12 seconds later to get Oregon back within two.

Bruce had eight points in the final 1:11 to seal the win, including making all six of his free throws in the final 43 seconds.

Payton Pritchard had 14 points, and Will Richardson and Victor Bailey Jr. added 13 each for Oregon (4-2).

**No. 1 Gonzaga 102, North Dakota State 60:** Brandon Clarke and Rui Hachimura each scored 18 points as the host Bulldogs beat the Bison to remain undefeated.

Corey Kispert added 17 points and Zach Norvell Jr. 15 for Gonzaga (7-0), which reached No. 1 in The Associated Press Top 25 earlier in the day by virtue of beating former No. 1 Duke at the Maui Invitational.

Vinnie Shahid scored 16 points for North Dakota State (2-5), which shot just 36 percent in the game.

Clarke made all nine of his field-goal attempts and added eight rebounds and five blocks for Gonzaga. Six Zags scored in double figures.

Gonzaga has beaten four teams from Power Five conferences already this season, and came in averaging 97 points per game to 71 for the Bison.

North Dakota State stayed close early, and led 19-18 with just over 10 minutes left in the

first half.

**No. 25 Mississippi State 88, Alcorn State 65:** Nick Weatherspoon and Lamar Peters both scored 17 points, Reggie Perry added 16 points and 11 rebounds and the host Bulldogs beat the Braves.

Mississippi State was efficient on offense, shooting 33-for-54 (61 percent) from the field. Weatherspoon shot 6-for-10, including 2-for-3 from three-point range. Peters was 6-for-9 shooting, including 5-for-8 from behind the arc.

The Bulldogs led by as many as 33 points in the second half. Quindary Weatherspoon added 14 points and Tyson Carter had 10.

Mississippi State (5-1) was a little careless with turnovers in the opening minutes, but recovered to push its lead to 44-29 by halftime. The Bulldogs shot 17-for-25 (68 percent) from the field in the first half, including 4-for-6 from three-point range.

Alcorn State (1-6) was led by Deshaw Andrews, who scored 26 points. The Braves shot just 37.3 percent from the field.

## Texans pummel Titans for eighth straight victory

Associated Press

HOUSTON — The Houston Texans wanted to honor their late owner and founder Robert "Bob" McNair, who died last week at age 81.

They knew the perfect way to do that Monday night was to keep their winning streak going.

Deshaun Watson threw two touchdown passes and ran for a score as the Texans set a franchise record with their eighth straight victory, 34-17 over the Tennessee Titans.

"The one thing Mr. McNair wanted was a winner," J.J. Watt said. "All he wanted was a winner. He wanted to win every week. He wanted a team that

could win and bring a championship to this city. So to be able to win eight straight and to be able to win tonight for him was good, and we're going to try to keep doing that for him."

Demaryius Thomas scored his first two touchdowns with Houston, and Lamar Miller ran for 162 yards, including a 97-yard TD.

The Texans (8-3) also saluted McNair by wearing decals in the shape of a football with white block letters bearing his initials of "RCM." With that tribute on the back of their helmets, they became the first team in NFL history to win eight games in a row after starting 0-3. They lead the

AFC South by two games over Indianapolis.

"We need to try and keep getting better," coach Bill O'Brien said. "We need to take the mantra that we're going to improve every day."

The Texans trailed by 10 early before reeling off 27 straight points.

Houston receiver DeAndre Hopkins said there was no panic after the team fell behind in the first quarter.

"We've been down 0-3 as a record, so being down 10-0 on the board is nothing to this team," he said.

Tennessee (5-6) finally scored again on a 48-yard reception by Corey Davis late in

the third quarter, but the second TD by Thomas — this one for 10 yards — made it 34-17 with just more than eight minutes left.

Marcus Mariota, who missed the second half of last week's game with a stinger, was 22-for-23 for 303 yards and two touchdowns. He completed his first 19 passes before an incompletion with just more than a minute remaining.

Miller's 97-yard breakaway in the second quarter made it 21-10. It was the longest run in franchise history and the longest in the NFL since his dash of the same length for a touchdown on Dec. 28, 2014, with the Dolphins.

## NBA roundup

# Wizards overcome Harden's 54 points

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Even the Wizards seemed surprised by the way they won.

Bradley Beal said he couldn't have imagined allowing the opposing starting guards to combine for 90 points and still get a victory.

"No sir. Absolutely not. No sir," Beal said. "Not at all. It's amazing we pulled it off still."

John Wall scored a season-high 36 points, including six in overtime, and Washington overcame James Harden's season-best 54 points to outlast the Houston Rockets 135-131 on Monday night.

Harden, the NBA's leading scorer, also had 13 assists, while Eric Gordon added a season-high 36 points.

Wall had two baskets in the extra period and finished with 11 assists. Beal equaled his season high with 32 points for

the Wizards.

Otto Porter hit a runner with 4:37 to play for the first basket in overtime and the Wizards remained ahead from there. Wall followed with a jumper to make it 129-125 and later made another jumper that pushed the lead to five. Beal's dunk extended it to 133-126 with 1:50 to play.

Harden had 44 points through three quarters but missed five of his seven shots in the fourth. In overtime, Harden whose career high is 60, was 1-for-2 from the field and had two free throws. He had 11 turnovers, three in overtime, and 13 assists.

"It's not even about myself," Harden said. "It's about our entire team. We had a really good start to the game and kind of let our guard down."

Harden scored 12 points in the first quarter, 11 in the second and 21 points in the third

quarter. In the fourth, he began the quarter on the bench, and scored six as the Wizards and Rockets headed to overtime with the score knotted at 125.

Houston raced to a 27-10 lead, but Washington clawed its way back. Markieff Morris had 22 points and 10 rebounds for the Wizards.

Clint Capela had 17 points and 14 points for the short-handed Rockets, who played without Chris Paul for the second straight game and fell to 9-10.

**Warriors 116, Magic 110:** Kevin Durant scored a season-high 49 points, giving his team the lead on a three-point play with 1:19 left before hitting a three-pointer with 22 seconds remaining to send host Golden State past Orlando.

**Celtics 124, Pelicans 107:** Kyrie Irving closed out a 26-point, 10-assist performance with a three-pointer and a

tough baseline fade over Anthony Davis, and Boston pulled away late for a victory over host New Orleans.

**Hornets 110, Bucks 107:** Kemba Walker and Jeremy Lamb each had 21 points, and host Charlotte held on to beat Milwaukee after nearly squandering a 25-point, third-quarter lead.

**Pacers 121, Jazz 88:** Doug McDermott scored a season-high 21 points and Indiana rolled to an easy victory without leading scorer Victor Oladipo, beating host Utah.

**Spurs 108, Bulls 107:** LaMarcus Aldridge scored 11 of his 20 points in the fourth quarter, and San Antonio held off Chicago.

**Timberwolves 102, Cavaliers 95:** Robert Covington scored 24 points, Karl-Anthony Towns added 21 and Minnesota beat Cleveland.

## NHL roundup

# Wilson scores 2 goals to power Caps past Islanders

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Tom Wilson had extra time to work on his skills while serving a suspension during the first 16 games of the season. It's paid off in a big way for the Washington Capitals since his return.

Wilson scored twice, Braden Holtby stopped 32 shots and the Capitals beat the New York Islanders and former coach Barry Trotz 4-1 Monday night for their season-high sixth straight win.

Wilson has six goals and five assists in eight games since joining the lineup, including goals in four straight games.

"I had lots of time, worked on a little bit of everything," he said. "I just tried to make sure I could pick up where we left off last year. We were playing

some pretty good hockey at the end of last year, some pretty good chemistry going. I just wanted to make sure I jumped in and do whatever I can to get up to speed."

Capitals coach Todd Rierden has noticed the difference in Wilson's play.

"His overall puck handling is at a different level than it's been in the past," Rierden said. "It comes back to him maximizing his opportunity and he's been outstanding for us."

Nic Dowd and Alex Ovechkin also scored for Washington, which won after giving up the first goal for the fifth time during its winning streak that has catapulted the defending champions to first place in the Metropolitan Division.

"We've had some slow starts recently," Rierden said. "It

seems to help engage our group right away and raise the desperation and urgency. That's not a real recipe for success but it seems to be working right now."

**Rangers 4, Senators 2:** Marc Staal, Lias Andersson, Chris Kreider, and Mika Zibanejad scored, and Henrik Lundqvist made 29 saves for New York.

The Rangers extended their dominance at Madison Square Garden, improving to 8-1-0 at home in their last nine games.

**Blue Jackets 7, Red Wings 5:** Pierre-Luc Dubois scored two goals as visiting Columbus raced to a three-goal lead in the first period and held on for the win.

Josh Anderson, Artemi Panarin, Markus Nutivaara, Boone Jenner and Seth Jones also

scored for Columbus. Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 27 shots for the Blue Jackets, who had lost two of three.

**Panthers 4, Devils 3 (OT):** Mike Hoffman scored 1:28 into overtime to lift host Florida.

With their goalie pulled for an extra skater, the Panthers tied it 3-all on Jonathan Huberdeau's 100th career goal with 1:29 left in the third period. Huberdeau also had two assists.

**Maple Leafs 4, Bruins 2:** Mitch Marner had three assists and Patrick Marleau added another in his 1,600th NHL game to lead host Toronto to the win in the 672nd meeting between the two Original Six teams in a rivalry that dates to 1924.

Travis Dermott, Igor Ozhinov, Josh Leivo and Zach Hyman scored for Toronto (17-8-0).