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Esper calls for unfettered military cases

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Mark Esper appealed to President Donald Trump this week to allow the military justice system to proceed unfettered in a number of high-profile cases, officials said, as concern intensifies among Pentagon leaders that presidential intervention could damage military discipline and morale.

Speaking to reporters at the Pentagon, Esper said he had a “robust discussion” with Trump on Tuesday about the cases of three current or former service

members charged with war crimes or other wrongdoing. Earlier in the week, Fox News reported that the president was likely to issue pardons or take other actions to assist them.

“I offered, as I do in all matters, the facts, the options, my advice, the recommendations, and we’ll see how things play out,” Esper said.

Officials said the meeting with Trump came a day after Esper convened military service leaders to discuss the cases, which include that of a Navy SEAL acquitted of killing an Islamic State prisoner but convicted on lesser charges.

A defense official, who like others spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations, said that Pentagon leaders were “acutely” concerned that action by Trump circumventing the military justice system would have “second and third order effects on good order and discipline.”

Earlier this year, the president pardoned a former Army lieutenant serving time for killing an Iraqi prisoner in 2008. He has also made comments about ongoing cases that critics have said could constitute undue command influence,

possibly leading to the dismissal of cases by military judges.

Any further intervention, the defense official said, also could undermine the authority of commanders who have overseen those cases, which most military leaders see as clear instances in which service members had to be prosecuted.

The issue constitutes a potential point of friction between Trump and the Pentagon at a time when defense leaders are scrambling to publicly align themselves with the president’s evolving policy on Syria, which some military officials have privately criticized.

Bergdahl trial to be reevaluated amid comments made

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The U.S. military’s top appellate court will consider whether former Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl received a fair trial in 2017 after he was repeatedly ridiculed as a traitor by President Donald Trump.

The Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces on Monday granted Bergdahl’s petition to review the case of the ex-soldier who spent five years in Taliban captivity after walking off his post in Afghanistan’s Paktika province in 2009. A U.S. court-martial convicted Bergdahl of abandoning his post and endangering troops.

The five-judge panel announced it would examine Bergdahl’s contention that his case was tainted before his court-martial by apparent unlawful command influence from scores of comments levied at him by Trump as a presidential candidate and statements by the late Sen. John McCain

that called for Bergdahl to be punished.

The court’s decision to review the case comes about two years after Bergdahl pleaded guilty in late October 2017 to the charges and he was sentenced to a reduction in rank to E-1 private, the forfeiture of about \$10,000 in pay and a dishonorable discharge after a weeklong trial. The decision by the judge, now-retired Army Col. Jeffery R. Nance, to spare Bergdahl prison time was largely interpreted as a mitigant to Trump’s campaign trail rhetoric, though Nance never explained his sentencing decision publicly.

Trump almost immediately lamented Nance’s decision via Twitter, calling Bergdahl’s lack of prison time a “complete and total disgrace to our country and to our military.”

Bergdahl’s civilian attorney, Eugene Fidell, has long sought the dismissal of all the charges and later the convictions, arguing Trump’s comments precluded his ability to receive a fair trial because members of

the military — including Nance — fall under the president’s command.

In July, the U.S. Army Court of Criminal Appeals denied a Bergdahl petition to dismiss his convictions. However, one member of the three-judge panel dissented, writing he supported dismissing Bergdahl’s dishonorable discharge, citing “the taint of post-trial unlawful command influence” due to Trump’s tweet just after sentencing.

The CAAF did not provide a hearing date for Bergdahl’s appeals petition in a short announcement of its decision to consider his case. Lawyers for Bergdahl will have at least 30 days to submit their arguments for dismissal of the charges and convictions. Government lawyers also will have at least 30 days to respond.

At the conclusion of the sentencing trial following Bergdahl’s guilty plea, prosecutors sought a 14-year prison term and appeared stunned by Nance’s sentence. But the

judge had hinted earlier in the proceedings that he would consider Trump’s comments as mitigating evidence, calling them “conclusory, condemning and disparaging.”

Earlier in court proceedings during Bergdahl’s case, Nance called McCain’s threats to host Senate hearings if Bergdahl was not punished “ill-advised,” but the judge said they did not amount to unlawful command influence.

Bergdahl, who is now 33, admitted in court that he left Observation Post Mest in eastern Afghanistan on June 30, 2009, in an attempt to walk to a larger base where he said he wanted to alert military brass of problems that he perceived within his chain of command. Instead, he was captured by Taliban insurgents within hours of leaving his post and eventually smuggled into Pakistan where he was held and tortured by Taliban-linked Haqqani network terrorists for five years.

Bill would protect troops' families from deportation

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A Senate bill introduced Wednesday protects an immigration program that prevents the deportation of undocumented relatives of service members, a response to reports that a number of military families would be permitted to use the program to stay in the U.S.

Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., introduced the Military Family Parole in Place Act to ensure the option stays available for many military families.

"Our troops serving overseas should be focused on doing their jobs, not worrying about whether their family members will be deported," Duckworth said in a prepared statement. "Ending these deportation protections would be a cruel, inhumane and a direct threat to our military readiness, which is why I'm introducing this legislation that would support our men and women in combat by protecting their families from deportation."

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services offers military families what they call a "Parole in Place" option that gives a spouse, widower, parent or child of a service member or a veteran who did not receive a dishonorable discharge the ability to stay in the country in one-year increments on a case-

by-case basis.

It only applies to people who have entered the country illegally, not if they overstayed a visa, according to USCIS.

The parole option is meant to protect military families from the threat of deportation, and it allows eligible people who receive the parole option to apply for a work permit and apply for permanent residence in the U.S., according to USCIS.

People who get the parole option can receive permanent residency or at least an interview for permanent residency within the year, said Margaret Stock, an immigration attorney and retired lieutenant colonel from the Army Reserve.

The parole in place option for military families has been a formal policy since 2007 and has helped thousands of people, according to Stock. Duckworth's statement did not say how many people this bill would affect.

In June, NPR reported immigration attorneys were being told a change in the option would make it so paroles would be granted in rare cases. An internal memorandum at the time between the Defense Department and Department of Homeland Security mentioned a plan to eliminate the option, according to Stock. The policy change has not gone into effect and parole applications that Stock has filed for clients are still being approved, she said.

Retired general faces 15 child porn counts

BY ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

A retired Air National Guard general was arrested and charged Wednesday with more than a dozen felony counts related to possession of child pornography after investigators found thousands of searches on his computer for explicit images, the Pennsylvania attorney general announced.

Retired Brig. Gen. Frank Sullivan's Mechanicsburg, Pa., home was raided last month by special agents from the Pennsylvania Office of the Attorney General, Homeland Security Investigations and the Hampden Township Police Department. The agents' search of the home revealed Sullivan's desktop and laptop computers were filled with searches of preteen children, which resulted in 15 second-degree felony counts of sexual abuse of children and one count of criminal use of a communication facility, according to a news release from the attorney general. In addition to finding child pornography on the laptop, a computer forensic analysis identified 37 search terms commonly used by people looking for child pornography.

Agents with the attorney general's office also discovered

Sullivan's penchant for viewing the illegal images during an investigation of a file-sharing network, according to the release.

"Gen. Sullivan's alleged actions disgrace his work and besmirch the Pennsylvania National Guard, an organization that has bravely and dutifully come to the aid of Pennsylvanians whenever they have been called," Attorney General Josh Shapiro said in a prepared statement. "I've said it time and time again — nobody is above the law. My office will investigate and prosecute anyone who harms Pennsylvanians, no matter what positions of power they may hold."

Sullivan, 67, spent 30 years as an engineer officer in the Pennsylvania Air National Guard and retired in March 2012, according to his official service record. He last served as the director of the joint staff at the Pennsylvania Joint Force Headquarters. As director, he managed programs and operations for the 100-plus member joint staff and oversaw issues that affect the 19,000-member Pennsylvania National Guard.

He deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan and received a Bronze Star Medal, among others.

New rating for some sailors: 'retail services specialist'

BY CARLOS M. VAZQUEZ II
Stars and Stripes

There's a new moniker for sailors charged with jobs like managing a ship's store, cutting hair or doing laundry aboard Navy vessels: retail services specialists.

The change from the old rating — ship's serviceman — took effect Oct. 1 and was made as part of a service-wide effort to align Navy jobs with their coun-

terparts in the civilian world, according to a statement from Naval Personnel Command.

The revision affects only the rating's name itself and will not affect advancement exams, selection boards or career paths, the message said. Sailors' uniforms will keep the same rating badges — a crossed key and quill.

Senior Chief Petty Officer Pablo Ayala, a retail services specialist at Yokosuka Naval

Base, Japan, said most sailors in his field were often faced with clearing up confusion when civilians asked about the duties of a ship's serviceman.

"We always have to follow that up with a brief description of what we do," he said in a separate Navy statement. "Retail services specialist will give a better understanding from a non-military perspective of what we do every day to support the fleet."

The change is part of the Navy's "Sailor 2025" initiative, which seeks to modernize how the service recruits, promotes and delivers information to sailors.

The retail services specialist rating took root in 1885, when the tailor rating was established. That was changed to ship's serviceman in 1943 to include other jobs like cobbler, barber and laundryman.

North Korea blasts planned US-South Korean exercises

BY KIM GAMEL
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea criticized U.S.-South Korean plans to hold joint air exercises next month, warning that hopes for dialogue are “on the verge of extinction.”

The Pentagon confirmed this week that the allies will hold a combined air exercise but would not call it Vigilant Ace, which was canceled last year to facilitate nuclear talks with the North.

The communist state hates all joint military exercises conducted by Seoul and Washington on the peninsula because it considers them rehearsals for an invasion.

Kwon Jong Gun, described as a roving ambassador, pointed out that President Donald Trump had promised to end the drills following his first summit with North Korean leader Kim

Jong Un last year.

“The U.S. reckless military frenzy is an extremely provocative and dangerous act of throwing a wet blanket over the spark of the [North Korean]-U.S. dialogue on the verge of extinction,” the diplomat was quoted as saying by the state-run Korean Central News Agency.

He also dismissed the name change and plans to scale back the scope of the exercise.

“No one will believe that the changed war exercises will change their aggression nature,” Kwon said in the statement posted Wednesday.

Seoul and Washington canceled Vigilant Ace and several other drills last year but have continued to conduct joint tactical training while keeping it low profile.

“There are no plans to skip upcoming combined exercis-

es,” Army Lt. Col. Dave Eastburn, a Pentagon spokesman, said Tuesday in Washington, giving it a generic name. “We are proceeding with the Combined Flying Training Event as planned.”

He didn’t give more details. South Korean officials told the Yonhap News Agency the drills will be conducted at a smaller scale than in previous years.

Seoul and Washington insist the exercises are aimed at ensuring they can operate together in joint missions, but they always infuriate the North, which has frequently responded with missile tests or fiery propaganda.

Kwon Jong Gun said the plan to conduct the air drills “amounts to a declaration of confrontation” and suggested that the North may consider resuming long-range missile and nuclear tests.

Macron says US to blame for NATO’s ‘brain death’

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — French President Emmanuel Macron claimed that a lack of U.S. leadership is causing the “brain death” of the NATO military alliance, insisting in an interview published Thursday that the European Union must step up and start acting as a strategic world power.

“What we are currently experiencing is the brain death of NATO,” Macron told *The Economist* magazine. He said the United States under President Donald Trump appears to be “turning its back on us,” notably by pulling troops out of northeast Syria without notice.

Trump surprised his NATO partners with last month’s troop withdrawal. NATO plays no role in Syria, apart from helping the coalition fighting Islamic State.

But the move was seen by Turkey, another NATO ally, as a green light to invade the region.

Trump also wrong-footed the allies by announcing a troop drawdown in Afghanistan and then declaring that peace talks with the Taliban were canceled after a bomb attack killed a U.S. soldier. NATO has played a major security role in the country since 2003, but its future there is now unclear.

Beyond that, the U.S. leader publicly berated other leaders at a May 2017 summit for failing to boost their military budgets. Trump’s preoccupation with defense spending has been a constant theme since he came to office in 2016 and is expected to feature at the next NATO summit, in London on Dec. 3-4.

Macron said that the European members of the 29-nation alliance “should reassess the reality of what NATO is in the light of the commitment of the United States.”

Recanvass set in close Ky. governor race

Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Republican Gov. Matt Bevin said next week’s recanvass of the vote count in Kentucky’s gubernatorial election won’t be his last move in challenging the results, which showed him more than 5,000 votes behind Democrat Andy Beshear.

Beshear, meanwhile, said he’s confident in the election outcome and is focused on taking office as governor in December. And some prominent Kentucky Republicans have begun calling on Bevin to concede.

“Whatever process that the governor chooses to go down, it’s not going to change this overall number of votes,” Beshear said at a news conference Wednesday. “We are going to take the steps to move for-

ward to make sure that we are ready ... on the day that we’re inaugurated.”

Beshear led by less than 0.4 percentage points in Tuesday night’s count of more than 1.4 million votes, which would trigger a recount in most states. Kentucky doesn’t have a mandatory recount law, but Secretary of State Alison Lundergan Grimes has scheduled a recanvass for Nov. 14 to ensure the vote count was added correctly.

Bevin said late Wednesday in Frankfort that his team is gathering evidence of what he’s calling “irregularities” in the voting. The governor claimed that thousands of absentee ballots may have been illegally counted, and suggested that people may have been improperly turned away from the polls. He offered no specif-

ics and said such claims need corroboration.

“We’re in the process of getting affidavits and other information that will help us to get a better understanding of what did or did not happen,” he said. Bevin added that any information turned up won’t be “followed through on” until after the recanvass — an indication he could seek further review of the election results.

Beshear’s campaign responded with a statement repeating that he hopes Bevin honors the results. The campaign noted that a recanvass has never led to a reversal of an election result in Kentucky. “I don’t know what information he’s working off of,” Beshear said earlier Wednesday when asked about Bevin’s claim of “irregularities.”

Top diplomat to be 1st to testify in public

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Democrats announced they will launch public impeachment hearings next week, intending to bring to life weeks of closed-door testimony and lay out a convincing narrative of presidential misconduct by Donald Trump.

First to testify will be William Taylor, the top diplomat in Ukraine, who has relayed in private his understanding that there was a blatant quid pro quo with Trump holding up military aid to a U.S. ally facing threats from its giant neighbor Russia.

That aid, at the heart of the impeachment inquiry, is alleged to have been held hostage until Ukraine agreed to investigate political foe Joe Biden and the idea, out of the mainstream of U.S. intelligence findings, that Ukraine interfered in the 2016 U.S. election.

The testimony of Taylor, a career envoy

and war veteran with 50 years of service to the U.S., is what Democrats said Wednesday they want Americans to hear first.

Taylor has told investigators about an “irregular channel” that the Republican president’s personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani set up for Ukraine diplomacy and how the White House was holding up the military aid, according to a transcript of his closed-door interview released Wednesday.

“That was my clear understanding, security assistance money would not come until the president committed to pursue the investigation,” Taylor said.

He was asked if he was aware that “quid pro quo” meant “this for that.”

“I am,” he replied.

Trump has denied any wrongdoing, and Republicans largely dismiss the impeachment inquiry, now into its second month, as a sham.

But Rep. Adam Schiff, the chairman of

the Intelligence Committee leading the probe, said that with two days of hearings next week Americans will have a chance to decide for themselves.

“The most important facts are largely not contested,” the California Democrat said. “Those open hearings will be an opportunity for the American people to evaluate the witnesses for themselves, to make their own determinations about the credibility of the witnesses, but also to learn firsthand about the facts of the president’s misconduct.”

Along with Taylor, the public will hear from former U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Marie Yovanovitch, whom Trump fired after what she and others say was a smear campaign against her, and career State Department official George Kent. Taylor and Kent will appear Wednesday, Yovanovitch on Friday.

Trump holds rally ahead of La. runoff

Associated Press

MONROE, La. — President Donald Trump worked up a sweat in a steamy Louisiana arena Wednesday night as he attempted to boost Republican businessman Eddie Rispone’s effort to unseat incumbent Democratic Gov. John Bel Edwards in the nation’s last governor’s race of the year.

“It may be 120 degrees in this room,” Trump told the crowd at the end of a rally in the northeastern Louisiana city of Monroe.

“Somebody is saving on air conditioning,” Trump joked. “That’s all right. You’ve

always got to save a little money. You go home and you lose about nine pounds and you say, ‘What happened?’”

The gubernatorial runoff election in Louisiana offers Trump an opportunity to pick up a win in a rare Democratic-held governor’s seat in the Deep South and change the narrative after a pair of apparent setbacks this week for the Republican Party in Kentucky and Virginia.

“You’re going out to replace a radical, liberal Democrat as your governor,” Trump said. “John Bel Edwards has not done the job.”

Trump is going all in with the Louisiana

governor’s race.

The White House confirmed he would visit Bossier City on Nov. 14, two days before Louisiana voters head to polls. Trump also visited Lake Charles last month to encourage voters to back one of the Republicans ahead of the state’s open primary. Because no candidate won a majority in the October primary, the top two vote-getters — Edwards and Rispone — advanced to the Nov. 16 runoff.

Trump told the friendly audience that a vote for Rispone is a vote for his agenda, which he said Democrats have tried to hamstring through an impeachment inquiry.

Democrats wary of 3rd-party bid from Gabbard

Associated Press

Tulsi Gabbard keeps making her fellow Democrats nervous.

The Hawaii congresswoman and Democratic presidential candidate appeared on Tucker Carlson’s show on Fox News. She wrote for the conservative-leaning editorial pages of The Wall Street Journal.

She denounced Hillary Clinton as the “personification of the rot that has sickened the Democratic Party for so long.” And facing a stiff primary challenge for her congressional seat, she recently announced her retirement from Congress.

That’s feeding fears among party leaders

and pundits that Gabbard isn’t necessarily aiming to win a Democratic primary but is laying the groundwork to run as a third-party candidate. Such a scenario, they fear, could slice off just enough support from the ultimate Democratic nominee that President Donald Trump could win reelection.

Gabbard repeatedly denies planning an independent candidacy, as she did Wednesday when she told ABC’s “The View” that she’s “running to build a new Democratic Party.”

Tom Perez, the chairman of the Democratic National Committee, also sought to quell the rumors Wednesday.

“Tulsi Gabbard and every single can-

didate running for president understands that it’s not about them,” he told reporters. “It’s about something much bigger.”

But the anxiety isn’t going away.

Often expressed privately for fear of pushing Gabbard further from the party, the concerns mirror the handwringing over the abortive presidential bid by former Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz earlier this year. Then, Democrats feared Schultz would peel off enough affluent, suburban voters to reelect Trump. Now, they worry Gabbard’s vocal anti-interventionist stance could do the same with younger liberal voters and others unhappy with the Democratic establishment.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Coworkers buy car for woman who walks home

GREER, S.C. — Coworkers bought a new vehicle for a woman who had to regularly walk 12 miles home from work after her car broke down.

Josh Lewis said he and his boss noticed Darlene Quinn, 60, on foot as they drove home from a FedEx facility near Greer. Lewis said they began offering Quinn rides, and she told them her car broke down three months ago and she couldn't afford to fix it.

Lewis told The Greenville News that Quinn had someone to drive her to work, but she had to walk home. Lewis created a GoFundMe page and 100 coworkers and strangers donated enough to buy Quinn a car.

Sheriff: Man with ax found in courthouse

TN DOVER — Authorities in Tennessee said a man wielding an ax walked into a courthouse and made his way to a judge's chambers before being seen and arrested.

News outlets reported Michael Dupont, 46, was charged with trespassing, possession of a weapon, disorderly conduct and drug possession with intent to manufacture or sell.

Stewart County Chief Deputy Dale Ward said Dupont walked into the county courthouse through a side door that led to the basement where the offices are located. Ward said Dupont was carrying a brush hook ax, which is a gardening tool.

University taking PB&J as payment for tickets

AK ANCHORAGE — Anyone with unpaid parking fines at the University of Alaska Anchorage campus has the option to reduce or cover the cost of their tickets

with peanut butter and jelly.

Officials said the food goes to students in need.

University officials said each person could use PB&J payments for two citations issued within the past 45 days; two 16-ounce jars offer a \$10 credit, three jars offer a \$35 credit and five jars offer a \$60 credit.

Sheriff: Wrongly freed murder suspect caught

MS COLUMBUS — Authorities in Mississippi said a man charged with murder was mistakenly free for days due to a clerical error.

The Commercial Dispatch reported Malcolm Hill, 26, was found in Foley, Ala., five days after being released from a detention center in Columbus. A Lowndes County sheriff's statement said Hill was back at the center, and the employee responsible for the error no longer works there.

Hill and his girlfriend, Victoria Slayton, 24, are charged with capital murder in a 2018 slaying. Hill was on parole for burglary and larceny at the time and initially held on a parole violation.

Man in stabbing attack banished from county

VA SPOTSYLVANIA COURTHOUSE — A Virginia man who stabbed another during a fight last year is now banned from the county where the crime happened.

The Free Lance-Star reported Conerison Jimenez, 23, pleaded guilty to unlawful wounding in the Spotsylvania County attack. He was banished from the county.

He also was sentenced to five years in prison with all but 10 months suspended. But he won't be returning to jail as he has already served 10 months in custody in the case.

Jimenez also was ordered to pay \$24,900 in restitution to the victim.

Baseball memorabilia to go up for public auction

OH MONTGOMERY — Historic baseball memorabilia displayed in Ohio will soon be available to the public for auction in Kentucky.

The Cincinnati Enquirer reported items from a collection displayed for years at the former Green Diamond Gallery in the Cincinnati suburb of Montgomery will be available during a live public auction Saturday at the Louisville Slugger Museum & Factory in Louisville. The collection includes over 100 Hall of Fame member jerseys and hundreds of game-used bats.

State Police look into stolen grave markers

MD ANNAPOLIS — Maryland State Police are investigating the theft of 30 American Legion grave markers from a cemetery.

The police said the thefts occurred at the Rosebank Cemetery in Calvert in Cecil County. A caretaker of the cemetery reported the thefts. The markers hold a miniature American flag and mark the graves of U.S. service members.

Caller leads police to \$800K in stolen art

CA LOS ANGELES — This time detectives didn't have to track down the stolen art — someone led them to it.

Los Angeles police said they recovered \$800,000 worth of prints by Scottish abstract expressionist Benjamin Creme after a caller told them they were in the person's home in

the Los Angeles suburb of San Fernando. Police believe the nearly 1,300 signed prints were there for several years but the caller who had them had only recently discovered they were stolen.

The caller, who was not identified, told police they were found among a relative's possessions after she died.

Sheriff: Man went bar hopping on electric cart

LA HOUMA — A Louisiana man avoided a driving while intoxicated charge by operating an electric-powered shopping cart to get from one bar to another.

A news release from the Terrebonne Parish Sheriff's Office said Brice Kendell Williams, 32, was accused of taking the cart from a Walmart in Houma to a bar about half a mile away.

The sheriff's office said Williams told the deputy he thought he might get charged with DWI if he drove his own vehicle from bar to bar. Williams was charged with felony "unauthorized use of a movable."

Fire chief accused of driving ambulance drunk

IA GRAND JUNCTION — A central Iowa fire chief was accused of being drunk while driving an ambulance and taking a patient to a hospital.

Greene County court records said Thomas Launderville, 39, was charged with operating while intoxicated, second offense. Launderville has since been dismissed as Grand Junction's fire chief.

Records said an officer arrested Launderville at the hospital, and a breath test showed Launderville had a blood alcohol content of more than twice the legal limit.

From wire reports

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Alabama-LSU shows offensive revolution

Associated Press

Gary Danielson has called the last 12 Alabama-LSU regular-season games for CBS Sports, including the Game of the Century in 2011, a No. 1 vs. No. 2 matchup that produced not one touchdown.

Before Danielson does the next Alabama-LSU game Saturday, another 1-2 event in Tuscaloosa, he planned to re-watch that '11 slugfest.

"One, to get into the mood. I don't really need it, but I kind of want to," Danielson said. "And the other is to get the feel of how much football has changed since then."

College football's most recent offensive revolution started in 2007 and is about to reach the final frontier: The Alabama-LSU rivalry.

The top-ranked Tigers (8-0) and No. 2 Crimson Tide (8-0) are playing a brand of football that bears little resemblance to the 2011 game, which LSU won 9-6 in overtime. This season, Alabama and LSU rank in the top five nationally in scoring, yards per play and — the one that really stands out — passing yards per game. With Joe Burrow pulling the trigger for the Tigers and Tua Tagovailoa leading Nick Saban's Tide, Alabama and LSU average a combined 715 yards passing and 95 points per game.

The star quarterbacks have combined to throw 57 touch-

down passes, and that's with Tagovailoa having missed the last game and a half. The SEC these days looks more like the Big 12.

So what happened? Are the days of teams winning championships with dominant defenses complemented by conservative offenses over?

"You just can't do that anymore because there are too many capable offenses that can move the ball at will even against some of the best defenders," said former Alabama quarterback and current ESPN analyst Greg McElroy, who won a national title with the Crimson Tide in 2009 while throwing 17 touchdown passes in 14 games.

Points and yards in college football have been steadily increasing for decades, but there was a surge in 2007 when Bowl Subdivision teams averaged a record 28.4 points and 392.6 yards per game. After a little regression the next year, it's been up, up and away ever since.

The 2011 season was the last in which FBS teams averaged fewer than 400 yards per game and 5.7 yards per play. With spread offenses, um, spreading and pace-pushers following Oregon's up-tempo lead, teams averaged 28.3 points per game that season — a mark that has been surpassed every season since.

The SEC, while in the middle

of a long run of national titles, was mostly still playing slow and steady on offense and relying on smothering defenses. It was seventh among 11 FBS conferences in scoring at 27.3 points per team per game in 2011 and ranked last in yards per team per game at 355. That was 15 yards fewer than the next lowest BCS league (Big East at 371.6) and almost 100 yards fewer than Big 12 teams (453.3).

The Crimson Tide won the national championship in 2011, winning a rematch with LSU in the BCS title game 21-0. That Alabama team is the last in major college football to hold its opponents below 10 points per game for a season (8.2).

This year, SEC teams are averaging 30.25 points, fourth among 10 FBS conferences, and 420.2 yards per game, second only to American Athletic Conference teams at 432.1.

To be clear: Alabama and LSU have usually had offenses that statistically rank among the best in the SEC, even the country. They have fielded dynamic offensive players such as Derrick Henry and Odell Beckham Jr. But nothing reveals the true identity of a college football team like a game against a physical peer. When LSU and Alabama have gotten together over the last decade, the games have generally been grinding affairs, where yards and points are hard to come by.

Since LSU's 9-6 victory in 2011, Alabama has won eight straight meetings by an average score of 24-9.

Danielson traces the evolution of offense in the SEC back past 2011 to Urban Meyer's Florida teams that won national championships in 2006 and '08. Meyer brought the spread with him from Utah, stressing the perimeters of a defense.

"There were a little bit of question marks: Would that work against the elite NFL players in the SEC? And Urban proved he could do it," Danielson said. "Now, the reason LSU and Alabama didn't change was because they didn't have to change. They were winning the way they were."

Saban also pushed back against the fast-paced offenses, questioning whether they were creating a more dangerous game. He said in 2012: "I just think there's got to be some sense of fairness in terms of asking: Is this what we want football to be?"

He, like just about every defensive coach, questioned whether rules should be changed to decrease how far down field an offensive lineman could block on a passing play from 3 yards to 1. Why? Because the run-pass option was creating still more problems for defenders who were getting turned inside out trying to decide whether to drop into coverage or play the run.

Swinney: Clemson again peaking at the right time

Associated Press

CLEMSON, S.C. — Clemson coach Dabo Swinney doesn't need a top-four College Football Playoff ranking to know his fourth-ranked Tigers are playing well and have developed the leadership and chemistry they need to defend their national championship.

Swinney said the team's talent and execution are on par with last year's 15-0 title winners.

"The similarities to where we are now to where we were then, we were playing our best football and the leadership and chemistry were really, really good," he said.

"And that's exactly where this group is."

The Tigers have won 24 straight games with their offense operating at level that statistically is better than a year ago. Clemson had has four games with 600 or more yards this season, the first time that's ever happened. And the Tigers' average of 7.58 yards per play this fall is also tops in school history.

Clemson's defense, expected to be a concern after losing seven starters from a year ago, is giving up fewer points per game than last season when it lead the country in that category.

"It's exciting as we go into the fourth

quarter of the season," Swinney said.

Clemson (9-0, 6-0 Atlantic Coast Conference) looks to keep its momentum going when it plays at North Carolina State (4-4, 1-3) on Saturday night.

No one should expect Swinney to pay much attention to the CFP rankings.

"If we're two, three, four or 15, it's not worth the brain cells," said Swinney, who has seen his team drop in the Top 25 despite the preseason No. 1 pick not losing a game.

Reigning ACC player of the year Travis Etienne lately has run for 640 yards and six touchdowns the past four games.

NFL: Little to celebrate in 100th season

Associated Press

The NFL's 100th season has not been worth celebrating even if the history of the league is.

Some teams appear to be tanking, penalties are wrecking the flow of games, some of the biggest stars have been sidelined, the new pass interference rule appears to have been adapted only to quiet the uproar that started after last season's NFC championship game and, even though ratings are up, it all looks like one big mess on TV.

The NFL opted for a history-tinged Packers-Bears opener and what it got was a throwback to the 1920s, with a knock-down-drag-out defensive clash that Green Bay won 10-3 in a rivalry rumpus that featured 20 penalties.

That foreshadowed a sea of yellow flags and another black eye for the league following the Antonio Brown head-to-toe, coast-to-coast saga and threatened to hijack the league's centennial celebration.

Although flags continue to fly, six-time Super Bowl winner Tom Brady's indignation helped whittle the whistles.

The NFL made backside offensive holding a point of emphasis this season, asking officials to flag what's known as a "lobster block" where O-linemen wrap their arms around a defender when blocking on the backside of running plays.

The officials went overboard, however, throwing flags for offensive holding all over the field, calling 178 through the first two weekends and 10 more in the Titans-Jaguars Thursday night game that kicked off Week 3, prompting Brady to tweet, "Too many penalties. Just let us play!!!"

By halftime, Brady was as disgusted as any fan. "I'm turning off this game I can't watch these ridiculous penalties anymore," he tweeted.

Analyst Troy Aikman noted Brady's tweets on the game broadcast, saying, "Tom Brady is one of the least controversial people we have in our game. He is league royalty. When he makes a statement like that, that should get somebody's attention."

It sure did.

Al Riveron, the league's senior vice president of officiating, held a conference call

with referees that Saturday, instructing crews to allow linemen more time to get their hands inside the frame of defenders on blocks, and the penalties began to plummet.

So have the coaches' challenges on pass interference that were approved for this season after the Saints were victimized by a non-call on interference in the NFC championship, helping the Rams advance to the Super Bowl.

The tipping point came in the Eagles-Packers game Sept. 26, when Green Bay challenged a non-call, believing Marquez Valdes-Scantling was interfered with on a deep pass. Eagles DB Avante Maddox had his left hand jammed into the receiver's facemask as the ball was arriving. But the league ruled "there was no clear and obvious evidence "that Maddox "significantly hindered" Valdes-Scantling.

"It looks clear and obvious to me," said Packers coach Matt LaFleur, who added, "I really don't know what pass interference is anymore."

Nobody does, Broncos coach Vic Fangio said a day later.

Tony Dungy argues that sub-

jecting subjective calls to review was a monstrous mistake.

"There are going to be things that are missed. That's part of the game," Dungy said. "The NFC championship game, there was a missed call — too bad. I feel bad for New Orleans. But it happens. It's happened every year since football began. So, to have this rule now and to say we're going to suddenly eliminate or help out this one particular call that everybody saw, now we've got all the unintended consequences (like wildly inconsistent rulings). I think this whole thing has been a disaster."

So has pass protection, which has starting to become a misnomer.

Starting with Andrew Luck, who retired at age 29 after dealing with a series of ailments, so many star quarterbacks have been hurt in 2019 that it's hard for fans to keep track of who's confined to the sideline.

The casualty list includes Super Bowl winners Ben Roethlisberger (elbow), Drew Brees (thumb), Nick Foles (collarbone) and Joe Flacco (neck) along with MVPs Patrick Mahomes (knee), Cam Newton (foot) and Matt Ryan (ankle).

NHL roundup

Pietrangelo helps Blues stretch streak to 6 games

Associated Press

EDMONTON, Alberta — The Stanley Cup champion St. Louis Blues are rolling again.

Alex Pietrangelo had a goal and two assists and St. Louis remained atop the Western Conference standings, beating the second-place Edmonton Oilers 5-2 on Wednesday night for their sixth straight victory.

Jaden Schwartz, Robert Thomas, Tyler Bozak and Ivan Barbashev also scored to help St. Louis tie Washington for the overall NHL lead with 25 points.

"We just find a way to get it done," said Thomas, whose team had won its last three

games in overtime. "We're winning a lot of 2-1, 3-2 games and close games at the end. I think that shows our character and being able to fight until the end and get some wins."

Jake Allen made 32 saves to improve to 3-1 on the season.

"I've felt like I've been getting better every game to be honest than at the start of the year," Allen said. "I felt a lot more comfortable and it felt good to get a lot of action and obviously it was good to get the win and the guys battled hard."

Connor McDavid and Zack Kassian scored for the Oilers. They have lost two in a row.

"This was a lesson for us,"

Oilers defenseman Oscar Klefbom said. "This was a playoff game and obviously we have a long way to go. We have to find a way to win these games because there are going to be many of them this year. We're going to play a lot of good teams and we have to be ready. They played last night, we gave them a little bit too much and it cost us."

Rangers 5, Red Wings 1: Tony DeAngelo had a goal and an assist in his team's three-goal second period, Henrik Lundqvist stopped 35 shots in his first start in 10 days, and host New York beat struggling Detroit.

The Rangers were coming off a 6-2 loss to an Ottawa team that had been winless on the road this season.

"We had to have a performance like this after what happened last game," Lundqvist said. "You need to learn from our ups and downs and I think we did."

Artemi Panarin and Ryan Strome also had a goal and an assist apiece, and Chris Kreider and Greg McKegg scored to help New York win for the fourth time in six games.

Valtteri Filppula scored for Detroit, which has lost four straight to fall to 1-11-1 in its last 13.

NBA Roundup

Harden, Rockets pound depleted Warriors

Associated Press

HOUSTON — James Harden had 36 points and 13 assists and the Houston Rockets routed Golden State 129-112 on Wednesday night, sending the short-handed Warriors to their sixth loss in eight games this season.

Harden again appeared to be moving past his early shooting woes, going 6-for-16 from three-point range. Since going 17-for-79 on threes in his first six games, Harden has made 13 of 32 the last two.

Russell Westbrook had 18 points, eight rebounds and six assists. P.J. Tucker had 22 points and 11 rebounds, Clint Capela added 19 points and 16 rebounds, and Austin Rivers was 4-for-4 from three with 12 points.

Alec Burks led Golden State with 28 points. Eric Paschall had 19 points, and Glenn Robinson III added 15 points and 11 rebounds.

Already reeling from injuries to Splash Brothers Stephen Curry (broken hand) and Klay Thompson (knee surgery) and the loss of Kevin Durant, the Warriors were without D'Angelo Russell (sprained

ankle) and Draymond Green (index finger) for a third straight game.

Bucks 129, Clippers 124: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 38 points and 16 rebounds, George Hill scored 24 off the bench and Milwaukee repelled every threat to win at Los Angeles for its fourth victory in a row.

The Bucks hit 18 three-pointers, led by six from Hill.

Jazz 106, 76ers 104: Donovan Mitchell had 24 points and eight assists and host Utah handed Philadelphia its second straight loss after a 5-0 start.

Bojan Bogdanovic added 20 points, Rudy Gobert had 14 points, 16 rebounds and three steals, and Joe Ingles scored a season-high 16 points.

Raptors 124, Kings 120: Pascal Siakam had 23 points and 13 rebounds, Kyle Lowry scored 24 points and host Toronto beat Sacramento.

Serge Ibaka scored 10 of his 21 points in the fourth quarter, and OG Anunoby had a season-high 18 for the defending champion Raptors, who won their fifth straight over the Kings.

Mavericks 107, Magic 106: Luka Dončić scored 27 points and host Dallas drew two charges on Aaron Gordon in the final minute of a win over Orlando.

Trying to protect a one-point lead, the Mavericks had two of their 17 turnovers on consecutive possessions before each of the fouls on Gordon, who was trying to drive on the first call and attempting to make a move at the three-point line on the second.

Pistons 122, Knicks 102: Tony Snell scored 24 points on 9-for-9 shooting in host Detroit's victory over New York.

Grizzlies 137, Timberwolves 121: Dillon Brooks scored 31 points, rookie Ja Morant added 26 and host Memphis held onto a lead to beat Minnesota.

Pacers 121, Wizards 106: T.J. Warren scored 21 points to help host Indiana beat Washington.

Bradley Beal had 30 points for the Wizards.

Bulls 113, Hawks 92: Tomas Satoransky scored 27 points in Chicago's victory at Atlanta.

College basketball roundup

No. 11 Virginia puts the clamps on Syracuse

Associated Press

SYRACUSE, N.Y. — Virginia picked up right where it left off in April — showcasing its Pack-Line defense in impressive fashion.

Mamadi Diakite scored 12 points, Jay Huff added 11 points and 12 rebounds, and No. 11 Virginia shut down Syracuse 48-34 on Wednesday night.

Syracuse's shooting numbers told the story: 13-for-55 (23.6%) from the floor, 5-for-29 (17.6%) from behind the arc against the defending national champions.

North Carolina 76, Notre Dame 55: Freshman Cole Anthony had 34 points and 11 rebounds in his college debut, leading the No. 9 Tar Heels to a win in their opener at home.

With his father — former UNLV and NBA guard Greg

Anthony — in the stands, the Atlantic Coast Conference pre-season freshman of the year broke Rashad McCants' 17-year-old scoring record by a freshman in his first game.

No. 18 Ohio State 64, Cincinnati 56: Kyle Young had a career-high 14 points and 13 rebounds for the host Buckeyes.

Young, a junior forward, made 6 of 7 shots from the floor.

No. 21 Arizona 91, Northern Arizona 52: Zeke Nnaji scored 20 points in his college debut for the host Wildcats.

Stone Gettings added 13 points and Nnaji hit 9 of 12 shots. Arizona led by 22 at half-time, shot 54% and had a 42-14 advantage in the paint.

No. 23 Purdue 79, Green Bay 57: Graduate transfer Ja-

haad Proctor scored 26 points and Eric Hunter Jr. added 15 to help the host Boilermakers beat the Phoenix.

UCLA 69, Long Beach State 65: Tyger Campbell scored 15 points, Cody Riley added 14 and the host Bruins rallied in the second half to defeat the 49ers in Mick Cronin's debut as coach.

Stanford 73, Montana 62: Oscar da Silva scored 21 points and the host Cardinal beat the Bobcats in the season opener for both teams.

Pittsburgh 63, Florida State 61: Xavier Johnson, Terrell Brown and Ryan Murphy scored 13 points apiece as the host Panthers slipped past the Seminoles in a rare Atlantic Coast Conference season opener.

Oklahoma State 80, Oral Roberts 75: Isaac Likekele scored 18 points, with nine rebounds and five assists, to help lead the host Cowboys past the Golden Eagles in the season opener for both squads.

Texas A&M 77, Northwestern State 63: Savion Flagg scored 22 points as the host Aggies started the Buzz Williams era with a victory over the Demons.

Butler 80, IUPUI 47: Sean McDermott had 26 points as the host Bulldogs rolled past the Jaguars.

Boston College 77, Wake Forest 70: Derryck Thornton scored a career-high 23 points and Nik Popovic had 19 to lead the host Eagles past the Demon Deacons in the season opener for both schools.