

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Trump says Taliban talks have restarted

Associated Press

BAGRAM AIR FIELD, Afghanistan — President Donald Trump paid a surprise Thanksgiving visit to Afghanistan, where he announced the U.S. and the Taliban have been engaged in ongoing peace talks and said he believes the Taliban want a cease-fire.

Trump arrived at Bagram Air Field shortly after 8:30 p.m. local time Thursday and spent 3½ hours on the ground during his first trip to the site of America's longest war. He served turkey and thanked the troops, delivered a speech and sat down with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani before leaving just after midnight. He arrived back in Florida, where he is spending the holiday weekend, early Friday local time.

Traveling with Republican Sen. John Barrasso, of Wyoming, and a small clutch of aides, including his acting chief of staff, press secretary and national security adviser, Trump appeared in good spirits as he was escorted around the base by heavily armed soldiers, as the smell of burning fuel and garbage wafted through the chilly air.

Unlike last year's post-Christmas visit to Iraq — his first to an active combat zone — first lady Melania Trump did not make the trip.

Trump's first stop was a dining hall, where the crowd erupted into cheers when he arrived. There, he served turkey to soldiers dressed in fatigues and sat down for a meal. But he said he only tasted the mashed potatoes before he was pulled

away for photos.

"I never got the turkey," he told the troops. "A gorgeous piece of turkey."

During his visit, Trump announced that the U.S. and Taliban have been engaged in peace talks and insisted the Taliban want to make a deal after heavy U.S. fire in recent months.

"We're meeting with them," he said. "And we're saying it has to be a cease-fire. And they don't want to do a cease-fire, but now they do want to do a cease-fire, I believe ... and we'll see what happens."

The trip came after Trump abruptly broke off peace talks with the Taliban in September, canceling a secret meeting with Taliban and Afghan leaders at the Camp David presidential retreat in Maryland after

a particularly deadly spate of violence, capped by a bombing in Kabul that killed 12 people, including an American soldier.

That ended a nearly yearlong effort by the U.S. to reach a political settlement with the Taliban, the group that protected al-Qaida extremists in Afghanistan, prompting U.S. military action after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. U.S. and international forces have been on the ground ever since.

It was not immediately clear how long or substantive the U.S. reengagement with the Taliban has been.

Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid said the Taliban's stance is unchanged. He said the United States broke off talks and when it wants to resume the Taliban are ready.

Iraq PM says he will resign to head off more protests

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Iraq's prime minister said Friday he would submit his resignation to parliament, a day after more than 40 people were killed by security forces and following calls by Iraq's top Shiite cleric for lawmakers to withdraw support.

The move by Adel Abdul-Mahdi 13 months after he took over as prime minister triggered celebrations by anti-government protesters who have been camped out in Baghdad's Tahrir Square for nearly two months. Young men and women broke out in song and dance as news of his imminent resignation reached the square, the capital's largest.

In a statement, Abdul-Mahdi said he had "listened with great concern" to Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani's sermon and

made his decision in response to his call and in order to "facilitate and hasten its fulfillment as soon as possible."

"I will submit to parliament an official memorandum resigning from the current prime ministry so that the parliament can review its choices," he said. Abdul-Mahdi was appointed prime minister just over a year ago as a consensus candidate between political blocs.

Al-Sistani said parliament, which elected the government of Abdul-Mahdi, should "reconsider its options" in his weekly Friday sermon delivered in the holy city of Najaf via a representative.

"We call upon the House of Representatives from which this current government emerged to reconsider its options in that regard," al-Sistani said in the statement — a clear

sign he was withdrawing his support for the prime minister.

It wasn't immediately clear whether Abdul-Mahdi's resignation would placate protesters, who are now calling for the removal of the entire political class that has ruled Iraq since the 2003 downfall of Saddam Hussein. Nearly 400 people have been killed in the bloody crackdown on protests since Oct. 1, most of them young protesters shot dead or killed by exploding tear gas canisters fired by security forces.

Amira, a 25-year-old protester, said the resignation should have come many weeks ago.

"We will not stop with the prime minister, we still have more fighting to do. We will push forward until our demands are met," she said, declining to give her full name, fearing retaliation.

Forty protesters were shot dead by security forces in Baghdad and the southern cities of Najaf and Nasiriyah on Thursday, in a sharp escalation of violence that continued Friday. Najaf is the headquarters of the country's Shiite religious authority headed by al-Sistani.

Three more protesters were shot and eight wounded by security forces in Nasiriyah on Friday when the demonstrators attempted to enter the city center to resume their sit-in, security and hospital officials said. Security forces had fired live rounds the previous day to disperse protesters from two key bridges, killing 31 people.

The Islamic Dawa party called for parliament to convene immediately and choose an alternative government, in a statement.

GAO: Navy shipyard plan to cost billions more

The Washington Post

A plan to refurbish the Navy's government-run shipyards could cost billions of dollars more than expected, a recent report from the Government Accountability Office concluded. Navy experts say the results show how some important public infrastructure projects have been neglected for decades, increasing the long-term cost of maintaining them.

The Navy's 20-year Shipyard Infrastructure Optimization Plan is meant to rebuild and modernize government-run shipyards at four U.S. ports where nuclear-powered submarines and aircraft carriers are repaired and maintained: Norfolk, Va.; Kittery, Maine; Puget Sound, Wash.; and Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

The cost of the project was initially estimated at \$21 billion. But researchers at GAO concluded the Navy's estimate underestimated the costs and risks associated with the shipyard recapitalization plan, something that could leave the Navy with inadequate resources to carry out the plan. The issue is likely to come up at a Wednesday hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee, when top Navy officials will take questions on fleet maintenance issues.

"The Navy's initial cost estimate for the plan did not use certain best practices in developing the estimate, such as documenting key assumptions, accounting for inflation, and addressing risks that togeth-

er could add billions to the ultimate cost," the GAO wrote in its report.

The GAO said poorly defined cost estimates threaten to lead the project astray.

"Without high-quality estimates, agencies are at risk of experiencing cost overruns, missed deadlines, and performance shortfalls," the GAO added.

The shipyard challenges could present an obstacle to the Pentagon's stated national security strategy, which emphasized competition with Russia and China for global military influence. Navy budget requests from recent years describe aging maintenance facilities that lack the necessary equipment to meet expectations, in some cases meaning fewer ships and submarines are available for their assigned missions.

President Donald Trump said on the campaign trail that he would increase the Navy's ship count to 350 if elected president. Although that goal is likely to be decades away, the Navy has closed out major acquisitions designed to build out its weapons capabilities. It recently finalized a \$15.2 billion deal with Virginia-based shipbuilder Huntington Ingalls for two Ford-class nuclear-powered aircraft carriers, for example.

But the health of America's public shipyard infrastructure has often been neglected in favor of other spending priorities, naval infrastructure experts said. And the Trump administration has in some cases diverted that funding to support other pri-

orities: shipyards at Bangor, Wash., and Norfolk were among those defunded to pay for Trump's border wall.

"If the U.S. wants to have the world's best Navy it needs to have the world's best Navy infrastructure," said Diana Maurer, GAO defense capabilities and management director.

"The Navy has been late in maintaining ships and submarines in part because of the poor conditions at Navy shipyards," she added.

Bryan Clarke, a Navy analyst with the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Analysis, said the Navy has done a good job of identifying what needs to be fixed. Finding the money for it is another problem entirely, he said.

Modernizing America's shipyards "will take more money and sustained effort than the Navy has currently laid in," Clark said. "The Navy will soon have to make a decision in the next budget to take money out of force structure — new ships, new airplanes, new capabilities — and put that money into shipyard maintenance."

A separate report from 2017 found that the average shipyard capital equipment — the large machinery used to repair large vessels — had already surpassed its useful lifetime. That report concluded that the poor condition of Navy shipyards has contributed to maintenance delays and caused the Navy to lose more than 1,300 "operational days," or days when ships were available for missions, over a 16-year period.

North Korea hails test of large-caliber missile

By KIM GAMEL
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un expressed "great satisfaction" Friday as the communist state said its test of a large-caliber multiple launch rocket system was successful.

Two missiles fired by the North at a 30-second interval on Thursday flew nearly 240 miles and reached a maximum altitude of 60 miles before splashing into the sea off the peninsula's eastern coast, South Korea's military said.

North Korea's state-run media didn't confirm details but said Kim oversaw the test of a "super-large multiple launch rocket system" to "examine the combat application."

The Korean Central News Agency suggested the test was a final review

and the weapons system was ready for deployment.

"The volley test-fire ... proved the military and technical superiority of the weapon system and its firm reliability," KCNA said. "The Supreme Leader expressed great satisfaction over the results of the test-fire."

The resumption of missile testing by the North has raised fears that it may be preparing for a return to tensions by signaling its growing frustration with stalled nuclear negotiations with the United States.

Kim Jong Un has given Washington an end-of-year deadline to offer a new proposal for restarting talks, which stalled after the two sides failed to agree on the extent of sanctions relief and denuclearization during a February summit in Vietnam.

South Korea expressed "strong regret"

over the test on Thursday, calling on the North to "immediately stop acts that escalate military tensions."

The North has conducted more than a dozen missile tests as well artillery drills since resuming activity in May. Senior officials also have warned that the North is not interested in continuing diplomacy unless Washington abandons its "hostile policies" toward their country.

Washington insists it remains committed to the diplomatic process but wants the North to agree to more extensive disarmament measures before relaxing the economic pressure campaign.

North Korea, which wants extensive sanctions relief and security guarantees, has stopped short of lifting its self-imposed moratorium on long-range missile and nuclear tests.

London police kill terror attack suspect

Associated Press

LONDON — Police shot dead a man suspected of stabbing several people near London Bridge on Friday in what detectives declared a terrorist incident.

The Metropolitan Police said “a number” of people were wounded but gave no information on the number or their conditions.

The force’s counterterrorism chief, Neil Basu, said the suspect was feared to be wearing a bomb vest but it turned out to be “a hoax explosive device.”

Basu said officers were keeping “an open mind as to any motive.”

The violence erupted two-and-a-half years after a van and knife attack in the same area in which eight people died.

Police said the incident began

with reports of a stabbing at a “premises” near the bridge; it ended with passersby tackling the fleeing knifeman before he was shot dead by armed-response officers.

The police force said officers were called just before 2 p.m. “to a stabbing at premises near to London Bridge,” which links the city’s business district with the south bank of the River Thames.

Scores of police, some armed with submachine guns, rushed to the scene, ushering bemused office workers and tourists out of an area packed with office buildings, banks, restaurants and bars. Staff in office blocks in the area were told to stay inside.

Witnesses reported seeing what appeared to be fighting on the bridge, as several people attempted to hold a man down.

One video posted on social media showed two men struggling on the bridge before police pulled a man in civilian clothes off a black-clad man on the ground. Shots then rang out.

Other images showed police, guns drawn, pointing at a figure on the ground in the distance.

Amanda Hunter said she was on a bus crossing the bridge when she heard shots.

“(The bus) all of a sudden stopped and there was commotion and I looked out the window and I just saw these three police officers going over to a man,” she told the BBC.

“It seemed like there was something in his hand, I’m not 100% sure, but then one of the police officers shot him.”

Karen Bosch, who was also on a bus, said she saw police “wrestling with one tall, beard-

ed man” and then heard “gunshots, two loud pops.”

She said the man “pulled his coat back, which showed that he had some sort of vest underneath, whether it’s a stab vest, or some sort of explosive vest, the police then really quickly moved backwards, away.”

Cars and buses on the busy bridge were at a standstill after the shooting, with a white truck stopped diagonally across the lanes. Video footage showed police pointing guns at the truck before moving to check its contents.

British Transport Police said London Bridge station, one of the city’s busiest rail hubs, was closed and trains were not stopping there.

City of London Police, the force responsible for the business district, urged people to stay away from the area.

Michigan and Illinois roll out legal weed on Sunday

Associated Press

ANN ARBOR, Mich. — James Daly is eager to make marijuana history on Sunday, when he plans to open the doors to Arbors Wellness, beckon the lengthy line outside and legally start selling recreational pot for the first time in the Midwest.

“We’ve worked very hard to be prepared,” said Daly, who owns the medical dispensary that, for now, is among just six shops in Michigan — mostly in Ann Arbor — also approved to start selling for adult use in December. The business is doubling staff and has fielded calls from potential customers across the state along with neighboring Ohio and Indiana.

“The end of prohibition is historic,” he said. “We wanted to rip the Band-Aid off.”

Both Michigan and Illinois, which allows sales starting on Jan. 1, are officially joining nine other states that broadly allow marijuana sales. Companies are rushing to complete

renovations at dispensaries, expand their growing facilities, and get staff hired and trained.

The Midwestern states’ launch into the potentially lucrative recreational market comes at a turbulent time for the industry, which has been rocked by layoffs, the vaping health scare and investor disappointment with Canada’s marijuana program.

In both states, a limited number of businesses have received state licenses letting them sell recreational products initially. But those same retailers must keep enough product on hand to supply people certified as patients under medical marijuana laws.

The conditions are “almost a guarantee” that Illinois and Michigan customers will experience long lines, product shortages and potentially high prices in the early stages, said Adam Orens, co-founder of the Marijuana Policy Group.

Winter weather lets up in US in time for Thanksgiving

Associated Press

Wintry weather temporarily loosened its grip across much of the U.S. just in time for Thanksgiving, but travelers were bracing for heavy snow and blizzard conditions in some areas as they made plans to return home.

The wind, ice and snow that tied up major highways and airports Tuesday and Wednesday largely let up Thursday, with a notable exception in California, where the main north-south Interstate 5 was shut down in Southern California as heavy snow blanketed the region. The lanes in both directions were reopened hours later.

High winds that had ripped a wooden sign from scaffolding on Chicago’s Willis Tower and nearly felled the Christmas Tree to close Cleveland’s Public Square on Wednesday were calm enough by Thursday morning to allow the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York to proceed, albeit with balloons flying at lower

levels.

The National Weather Service predicted things could get dicey — if not impassable — for holiday travelers’ trips home. Forecasters warned against travel Friday through Saturday in a stretch of country from northeast Wyoming to northwest South Dakota due to expected blizzard conditions.

The next storm system was expected to drop up to 2 feet of additional snow from the Sierra Nevada to the central and northern Rockies as it rolls across a large swath of the western and central United States.

High winds also caused power outages in parts of the country, which crews scrambled to address Thursday.

In Maine, heavy, wet snow and gusty winds caused more than 20,000 power outages. Central Maine Power Co. said in addition to its crews, at least 70 contractor crews, including 50 from Canada, were actively working Thursday to provide restoration support.

Shortened holiday shopping season begins

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The mad scramble between Thanksgiving and Christmas has begun — but with six fewer days.

Black Friday once again kicks off the start of the holiday shopping season. But with it will be the shortest season since 2013 because Thanksgiving fell on the fourth Thursday in November — the latest possible date it could be. That means customers will have less time to shop and retailers will have less time to woo them.

At Macy's Herald Square in

Manhattan, there was a steady stream of shoppers by 7 a.m. in search of deals from 40 % to 60% on everything from boots to sheets. But the crowds grew bigger an hour later.

Theodora Hatcher from Manhattan arrived with her son at around 6 a.m. Friday. She said she started holiday shopping two weeks ago, lured by online deals of up to 60 % at Walmart.com, Amazon and Old Navy.

As for the shortened calendar, she prefers it.

"It adds pressure," she said.

Seturah Winkler, 43, was shopping in the women's shoe

department with her friend. They were among the throngs of shoppers at Macy's 5 p.m. opening on Thanksgiving.

Winkler had already spent \$1,000 Thursday on coats, comforters and towels and was back for more.

"We took a break, and we are back at it again," said Winkler of Richmond, Va., who has made the pilgrimage to Macy's on Thanksgiving and Black Friday an annual tradition for several years. "I love the thrill of it. It's exciting."

Adobe Analytics predicts a loss of \$1 billion in online rev-

enue from a shortened season.

Still, it expects online sales will reach \$143.7 billion, up 14.1% from last year's holiday season.

The National Retail Federation, the nation's largest retail trade group, baked the shorter season into its forecast, but it says the real drivers will be the job market. It forecasts that holiday sales will rise between 3.8% and 4.2%, an increase from the disappointing 2.1% growth seen in the November and December 2018 period that came well short of the group's prediction.

Hong Kong cops end 12-day siege of campus

Associated Press

HONG KONG — Hong Kong police ended their blockade of a university campus Friday after surrounding it for 12 days to try to arrest anti-government protesters holed up inside.

Police removed a stash of nearly 4,000 gasoline bombs left behind by protesters, who fought pitched battles about two weeks ago with riot officers on surrounding streets.

The standoff at Hong Kong Polytechnic University was one of the most dramatic episodes in nearly six months of unrest that began in June with a huge march against

an extradition bill seen as an erosion of freedoms promised when the former British colony returned to Chinese control in 1997.

Protesters have since expanded their demands to include fully democratic elections and an investigation into police use of tear gas, rubber bullets and other force to suppress the demonstrations. Police have arrested 5,890 people since June, ranging in age from 11 to 83.

About 100 officers first entered the Polytechnic campus on Thursday to collect evidence and remove dangerous items. A police statement said that over two days,

they seized 3,989 gasoline bombs, 1,339 explosive items, 601 bottles of corrosive liquids and 573 weapons.

No protesters were found. One masked man told media the night before police came in that about 20 people were still hiding to avoid arrest.

They were the holdouts from perhaps 1,100 who had retreated inside after the battles with police. A few escaped the cordon, but police say they arrested 810 people and recorded the details of 300 minors who could face charges later.

Another 567 people were arrested in the vicinity of the university.

Part of relic from Jesus' manger returned to Holy Land

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Christians on Friday celebrated the return to the Holy Land of a tiny wooden relic they believe was part of Jesus' manger nearly 1,400 years after it was sent to Rome as a gift to the pope.

The thumb-sized relic was unveiled to worshippers Friday at the Notre Dame church in Jerusalem for a day of celebrations and prayer.

On Saturday, it will be sent to its permanent home at the Franciscan Church of St. Catherine, next to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the West Bank holy site where tradition says Jesus was born. Its arrival will coincide with Advent, a four-week period leading up to Christmas.

Christian tradition holds that Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem to register for

the Roman census and found no room at the inn, forcing her to give birth to Jesus in a manger where animals were held. The idea that the son of God was born in humble surroundings is central to Christian theology.

A wooden structure that Christians believe was part of the manger was sent by St. Sophronius, the patriarch of Jerusalem, to Pope Theodore I in the 640s, around the time of the Muslim conquest of the Holy Land.

Yisca Harani, an Israeli expert on Christianity, said many relics were relocated from the Holy Land in the Middle Ages as Rome and other cities were establishing themselves as centers of Christian life and pilgrimage. A relic from the manger would have been particularly useful for dispel-

ling heresies holding that Jesus was more of a spiritual than a physical being.

She said the return of such an important item "is definitely a statement saying the Vatican and the Holy Land are together."

Few relics have been submitted to scientific testing.

One of the most famous, the Shroud of Turin, the cloth purportedly used to wrap Jesus for burial after he was crucified, was tested by forensics scientists and dated to the 13th or 14th century.

Christians cite oral history and tradition for proof of the authenticity of the relics, including the wooden manger. They say the earliest Christian communities preserved and venerated objects connected to Jesus, handing them down through the generations like family heirlooms.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man found guilty of biting police officer

FL FORT MYERS — A Florida man has been convicted of biting a police officer.

Lee County court records show that Lawrance Washka, 37, was found guilty this week of battery on a law enforcement officer and resisting an officer with violence.

Deputies responded to a North Fort Myers gas station in February following reports of a man in a station wagon circling the pumps and asking people for their identification. When deputies attempted to make contact, Washka sped up and continued to drive in circles. He eventually parked but refused to leave his car.

Deputies say they went to pull Washka out of the station wagon, and he began flailing around and yelling that the uniformed deputies driving marked patrol vehicles “were not the real police.” Prosecutors say Washka then bit a deputy on the bare arm.

Teen rescued after getting stuck in chimney

AZ PHOENIX — A teenager has been safely rescued without injury after becoming stuck in the chimney of a Phoenix home.

Authorities say the 17-year-old girl and a friend were locked out of her home Wednesday night and tried to climb in through the chimney on the roof. Firefighters say she became stuck above the chimney’s flue and used her phone to call 911 and her sister. Phoenix firefighters were called to the home near 17th Avenue and Baseline Road around 5 p.m.

Firefighters say she was inside the chimney for about 45 minutes and remained in contact with rescue personnel.

Bear blamed for car damages in parking lot

AK KODIAK — A bear has been blamed for a pair of vehicle break-ins at an Alaska airport parking lot that resulted in \$15,000 in damage to one car.

The Fairbanks Daily News-Miner reported Wednesday that the vandalism occurred at the Island Air terminal parking lot adjacent to the Kodiak Benny Benson State Airport.

Vehicle owners Doreen Phillips and Alyssa Brenteson are both residents of Akhiok, a village about 90 miles from Kodiak.

Brenteson says she parked for two days at the airport lot and returned to find a caved-in roof, broken window, ripped seats, and muddy bear prints and fur covering the car.

Brenteson says she saw similar damage to Phillips’ car two days later and was told five other vehicles in the parking lot have experienced similar bear damage.

Sheriff: Chase ends as man runs out of gas

WV CHARLESTON — Authorities say a man who led officers on a long, high-speed chase through West Virginia was caught after he ran out of gas.

The Kanawha County Sheriff’s Office said Joshua Allen Harris, 28, is facing fleeing and stolen vehicle charges after the pursuit early Tuesday.

A news release from the sheriff’s office said Harris was driving erratically on an interstate near Burning Springs, then took off when a deputy tried to pull him over. He reached speeds of 125 mph as he led officials on a chase through four West Virginia counties before running out of gas near Jane Lew.

Town fed up with soiled diapers alongside roads

ME NORTH YARMOUTH — A Maine town has had enough of the soiled diapers.

The town of North Yarmouth is asking for the public’s help in tracking down the person who’s discarding bags of soiled adult diapers alongside local roads.

Officials used social media Tuesday to raise awareness of the “diaper bandit.”

Town officials said that public works crews are cleaning up such messes two to three times a week. Residents are urged to contact the Cumberland County Sheriff’s Department with any tips about the perpetrator.

Littering carries a fine of between \$100 and \$500 for a first offense. Second offenses carry a fine of up to \$1,000.

After 2 years, man is reunited with stolen dog

FL MIAMI — Two years after a dog was stolen from a man’s car, the pair was reunited when the pup was turned into a local animal shelter.

Four-month-old Schiele was stolen from Rian Maercks’ car two days before Christmas 2017. He hired a private detective, offered a \$2,000 reward and chased lead after lead. His dog was gone.

Until he got an unexpected phone call last week. The Miami Herald reported the county’s animal services department said a brown dog with a microchip linking back to Maercks had been dropped off.

When Maercks showed up at the shelter in Doral and saw the dog, he immediately began calling him by his name. Schiele started giving kisses.

The dog is five times the size of when he last saw him.

Man fishes WWI-era grenade from river

MI GRAND RAPIDS — A magnet-wielding angler has fished a World War I-era grenade from a western Michigan river.

WOOD-TV reported the angler found the explosive Tuesday after dangling the magnet from a bridge in the Grand River in Grand Rapids.

Joseph Alexander told the television station he “thought it looked like a grenade, but not one” he’d seen before. Alexander said he posted photos of it online and people commented that it was a grenade and he should call police.

Grand Rapids police say the device is a “German Granatenwerfer” and that it will be stored until detonated safely. Sgt. John Wittkowski said since the device was so old and had been submerged for a long time it likely was no longer very dangerous.

Stolen red kettles concern Salvation Army

NC WINSTON-SALEM — The Salvation Army is concerned that thieves who stole several donation kettles in North Carolina may try to pose as legitimate bell ringers.

News outlets report six red kettles, bells and aprons went missing from various locations Monday in Winston-Salem.

Salvation Army area commander Maj. Jim Rickard told WGHP-TV he can only envision the thieves using the kettles to “hoodoo the public and get somebody to donate to them.”

The charity’s goal this year is to raise \$150 million through the red kettle campaign, which typically makes up 10% of its annual budget.

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Saints down Falcons, clinch NFC South

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Taysom Hill's rare moment in the spotlight came in an important game for the New Orleans Saints.

Hill blocked a punt to set up his 3-yard touchdown catch before scoring again on a 30-yard run, and the New Orleans Saints clinched their third straight NFC South title by beating the Atlanta Falcons 26-18 on Thursday night.

Hill stole the show on a roster filled with more established stars.

"When you have guys like Mike Thomas, Alvin Kamara, Jared Cook, the list goes on, it kind of creates opportunities for little old me because it creates so much attention that's put on those guys," Hill said.

"Coach (Sean Payton) is one of the best at being creative and putting guys in positions to be successful. I got lucky because I was that guy tonight."

The Saints (10-2) atoned for their 26-9 home loss to the Falcons on Nov. 10, their only defeat in the last 10 games.

With Julio Jones inactive due to a shoulder injury, the

Falcons had too little offense to keep pace with Drew Brees and the Saints. Atlanta recovered two onside kicks in the closing minutes to make things interesting.

Matt Ryan was sacked by Cameron Jordan on fourth down from the New Orleans 44 with 38 seconds remaining. Ryan was sacked nine times, including four by Jordan.

"We had to drop back and pass at the end of the game," Ryan said. "When you do that and there's really no threat of run, it's tough sledding, particularly when you're going against a good defense, a very good defensive line and one of the better pass rushers in the game in Cam Jordan."

The versatile Hill blocked Ryan Allen's punt to end Atlanta's first possession. The Saints took over at the Falcons 30, and four plays later Hill scored his first touchdown on a short pass from Brees.

Hill took a direct snap and ran 30 yards for his first rushing touchdown of the season to give New Orleans a 17-6 lead late in the first half.

"If I can step on the field eight to 10 to 15 times, whatever that number is, my goal is to add a spark whenever I can," Hill said. "I love to be able to go in and add some energy."

The disappointing Falcons (3-9) solidified their hold on last place in the division with their second straight home loss.

Atlanta running back Devonta Freeman returned after missing two games with a foot sprain. Freeman ran for 51 yards on 17 carries.

Ryan committed three second-half turnovers — two interceptions and a lost fumble. Saints nose tackle Shy Tuttle and safety C.J. Gardner-Johnson had interceptions.

Ryan fumbled in the fourth quarter when hit by Marcus Davenport. Vonn Bell's recovery set up Wil Lutz's fourth field goal, from 45 yards.

Eli Apple's 22-yard pass-interference penalty helped extend an Atlanta drive that ended with a fourth-down incompleteness from the Saints 2.

Apple drew another pass interference call, this one a 35-yarder, and on the next play

Ryan found tight end Jaeden Graham for an 18-yard touchdown pass that cut the Saints' lead to 7-6, following Youngblood Koo's missed extra point.

Koo also missed a 42-yard field goal before making a 45-yarder with 3 seconds remaining in the first half. Koo was good from 43 yards late in the game.

Injuries

Saints: Kiko Alonso left the game with a thigh injury. ... The offensive line remained short-handed as left tackle Terron Armstead was inactive after leaving last week's win over Carolina with an ankle injury. Left guard Andrus Peat missed his third straight game since breaking his arm against Atlanta on Nov. 10.

Falcons: Left guard James Carpenter left the game with a concussion in the first half. Jamon Brown, who lost his starting job at right guard to Wes Schweitzer, returned to the game following Carpenter's injury. ... Backup offensive tackle Ty Sambrailo injured his hamstring.

NFL roundup

Beasley has memorable return to Dallas in Bills' win

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Cole Beasley savored a little extra time on the field with his former teammates after what had to be one of the most satisfying days of the Buffalo receiver's career.

And to think he didn't even have the most noteworthy play for the Bills' pass catchers.

John Brown became the first Buffalo receiver to throw a touchdown pass, Josh Allen set a franchise record by producing at least two touchdowns in an eighth consecutive game and the surging Bills beat the fading Dallas Cowboys 26-15 on Thursday.

Allen ran for a TD and threw

a scoring pass to Beasley, who had 110 yards receiving in the stadium where he spent his first seven seasons as the Bills (9-3) got their first Thanksgiving win since 1975 in their first appearance on the holiday in 25 years.

Buffalo is 5-1 on the road for the first time since 1966, and the nine wins through 12 games are the most since the Bills finished 10-6 in Hall of Fame quarterback Jim Kelly's final season in 1996.

"It'll be the most satisfying day when we win a Super Bowl," said Beasley, who was critical of the Cowboys after leaving, then had six catches and finished 2 yards shy of his

career high against them. "It's just another win, another step in the right direction."

The Cowboys (6-6) stumbled after scoring a touchdown on their opening drive.

Bears 24, Lions 20: Mitchell Trubisky threw a go-ahead, 3-yard touchdown pass to David Montgomery with 2:17 left, lifting visiting Chicago over the slumping Lions.

The Bears took the lead on the nine-play, 90-yard drive and sealed the victory on the ensuing possession with Eddie Jackson's interception.

Rookie quarterback David Blough led Detroit's last drive to the Chicago 26 in the final minute before losing 13 yards

on a sack to leave a desperation pass as the only option and Jackson picked off his heave.

Chicago (6-6) has won three of four games after losing four in a row to stay in the NFC playoff picture.

The Lions (3-8-1) have lost five straight for the first time under second-year coach Matt Patricia.

Detroit led for much of the game despite starting a third-string quarterback, who it acquired from Cleveland for a swap of seventh-round picks. Matthew Stafford was out for a fourth straight game with back and hip injuries and his backup, Jeff Driskel, was limited by a hamstring injury.

Celebration costs Ole Miss in Egg Bowl loss

Associated Press

STARKVILLE, Miss. — Mississippi flushed away a golden chance at the Golden Egg.

Luke Logan missed a 35-yard extra point after Ole Miss receiver Elijah Moore was penalized for celebrating a touchdown by crawling and pretending to urinate like a dog, and Mississippi State escaped with a 21-20 victory Thursday night in the 116th Egg Bowl.

“That’s not who we are. We’ve been a disciplined team all year, and so just disappointed that happened,” Rebels coach Matt Luke said. “That’s not who he is. Elijah is a good kid, and he just got caught up in the moment.”

Ole Miss (4-8, 2-6 Southeastern Conference) pulled within a point with 4 seconds remaining on Matt Corral’s 2-yard pass to Moore, but Logan hooked the extra point after Moore cost the Rebels 15 yards. The extra yards also prevented Mississippi from going for a winning 2-point conversion.

The penalty was another in a long line of unsportsmanlike conduct fouls between these two teams in recent years, and oddly not even the first one featuring a player pretending to pee. Luke said he knew that as emotions flared in the rivalry game that showboating would need to be avoided.

“Absolutely,” Luke said. “We talked about it. We had five penalties. We just wanted to play a clean game. Nothing after the whistles or before the whistles was going to help us win the ballgame.”

Mississippi State (6-6, 3-5 Southeastern Conference) beat Ole Miss at home for the first since 2013.

Mississippi State coach Joe Moorhead was fiery in his defense of the job his staff has done with this team, overcoming a litany of academic suspensions and several injuries to key players.

“To me it was an exclamation point on the narrative that I’m not the right man for this job or this team, or that I can’t coach in this league,” Moorhead said. “This is my

school, my team, and this is my program. They’ll have to drag my Yankee ass out of here.”

The Bulldogs scored two first-half touchdowns, the first on Nick Gibson’s 27-yard run and the second on the next possession on quarterback Garrett Shrader’s 1-yard run. Ole Miss responded with two touchdowns of its own, with J.R. Plumlee scoring on a 2-yard run and Jerrion Ealy on a 5-yarder to tie it at 14 at the half.

Midway through the third quarter, the Bulldogs sacked Plumlee three times on the same drive, the third forcing a fumble. Seven plays later, Shrader scored on a 5-yard run to put Mississippi State up 21-14.

After pulling Plumlee in favor of Corral, Ole Miss had two different red-zone opportunities in the fourth quarter. The other ended with a Marcus Murphy interception. On the final drive of the game, Mississippi State committed three penalties and Ole Miss ran nine plays inside the 15 before finally scoring.

Coleman, Devils down struggling Canadiens

Associated Press

MONTREAL — Carey Price repeatedly smashing his stick on the crossbar in frustration perfectly summed up the Montreal Canadiens’ struggles.

The Canadiens lost their sixth straight game in a mistake-filled 6-4 loss to the New Jersey Devils on Thursday night.

Price broke his stick after New Jersey’s fifth goal — Damon Severson’s winner in the third period.

“We know how good he is, it’s not his fault,” teammate Brendan Gallagher said about Price. “That’s on us. We make the mistakes. You can’t give up these high-danger chances. Too many chances against. Until we correct it, we’re going to continue having this feeling.”

Blake Coleman had two goals and two assists for New Jersey, Travis Zajac, Miles Wood, Jesper Boqvist and Severson also scored and Nikita Gusev had three assists for his first career multipoint game. Mackenzie

Blackwood stopped 44 shots to help New Jersey beat Montreal for the seventh straight game.

Four of New Jersey’s goals came off odd-man rushes or breakaways.

“They were aggressive, they were pinching,” Devils forward Taylor Hall said. “With their game lately, they were going to be a little overzealous to get in and pinch. If you can beat that forecheck, that pressure, there are going to be odd-man rushes.”

Gallagher, Jesperi Kotkaniemi, Joel Armia and Artturi Lehkonen scored for Montreal. The Canadiens are 0-4-2 on the skid that began Nov. 16 with an overtime loss to the Devils at Bell Centre. They have conceded at least four goals in five of their past six games.

“If I’m being honest, I don’t feel for Carey Price because he’s the best goaltender in the world,” former teammate P.K. Subban said. “Is he going to bounce back? I can guarantee you he will. But he can’t be the best goaltender every night.”

Young stars embrace their creative sides

Associated Press

Matthew Tkachuk watched Carolina’s Andrei Svechnikov from 20 feet away and knew something special was about to happen.

Svechnikov picked the puck up behind the net, cradled it on the end of his stick and rammed it past the goaltender from behind the net. Someone in the NHL actually pulled off the lacrosse-style move made famous by Mike Legg in a college game in 1996.

The highlight-reel goals seem to be piling up. Thanks to an infusion of talented young players motivated to raise the bar with GIF-worthy goals, coaches willing to encourage risk-taking in the name of offense and revamped rules designed to light the lamp, there is more freedom than ever for players to express themselves creatively in the NHL. Svechnikov, for example, routinely gathers 10 pucks behind the net to work on his nontraditional move at practice.

“A lot of these kids now, they’re growing up trying these moves, practicing these moves,” Vegas forward Cody Eakin said. “Skill work has been such a huge part of kids’ development, now that when there is opportunities or time or space, they can get creative. When there’s room and the guys have the skill to make the plays, there’s some fantastic plays being made out there.”

Arizona’s Clayton Keller checks out the highlights every day.

“I try to watch all of them every morning,” Keller said. “When you see different goals and stuff like that, maybe you try it in practice. It’s something I did as a kid, whether it was watching (Sidney) Crosby or (Patrick) Kane, seeing their breakaway moves and I would do it the next time in practice.”

Capitals center Evgeny Kuznetsov is a little bit older but still turns to YouTube to get his fix of beautiful plays across soccer and hockey.

College basketball roundup

Michigan stuns No. 6 North Carolina

Associated Press

PARADISE ISLAND, Bahamas — Eli Brooks matched his career high with 24 points and Michigan ran off 19 straight points in the second half to upset No. 6 North Carolina 73-64 on Thursday to reach the Battle 4 Atlantis championship game.

Isaiah Livers added 12 points for the Wolverines (6-0), who led by five early in the second half before pulling away with the big run for first-year coach Juwan Howard's first marquee victory. Michigan will face No. 8 Gonzaga in the final Friday.

The 19-0 burst included a dazzling run of five straight baskets. At one point, Brooks buried a three-pointer to push the lead to 19 and left Tar Heels coach Roy Williams standing on the sideline with both hands resting on top of his head.

No. 8 Gonzaga 73, No. 11 Oregon 72 (OT): Drew Timme hit a free throw with 20.6 seconds left in overtime and the Bulldogs survived Payton Pritchard's shot for

the win to beat the Ducks in the Battle 4 Atlantis semifinals.

Pritchard missed a jumper against Ryan Woolridge, and Gonzaga's Filip Petrushev tied up the rebound during a tussle in the paint. The possession arrow favored Gonzaga with 0.2 seconds left, allowing the Bulldogs to secure the win by inbound to Joel Ayayi.

No. 5 Maryland 76, Temple 69: Anthony Cowan Jr. scored five of his career-high 30 points in the final 3 minutes, helping the Terrapins overcome a slow start against the Owls in the opening game of the Orlando Invitational in Lake Buena Vista, Fla.

Eric Ayala had 13 points and Jalen Smith finished with 12 points and nine rebounds for Maryland (6-0).

Iowa 72, No. 12 Texas Tech 61: Jordan Bohannon had 20 points and six assists, Luka Garza added 17 points and 12 rebounds and the Hawkeyes held off the Red Raiders to reach the Las Vegas Invita-

tional championship game. Iowa will face San Diego State for the title.

No. 13 Seton Hall 81, Southern Miss 56: Myles Powell scored 18 points to help the Pirates beat the Golden Eagles in the Battle 4 Atlantis.

Sandro Mamukelashvili added 14 points for Seton Hall, which was playing in the losers' bracket after blowing a 19-point lead in the second half against No. 11 Oregon on Wednesday. This time, the Pirates (5-2) shot 51% and led by double figures throughout the second period.

No. 14 Arizona 93, Pepperdine 91: At Anaheim, Calif., Nico Mannion's fast-break layup with 4 seconds remaining gave the Wildcats a hard-fought victory over the Waves at the Wooden Legacy in Anaheim, Calif.

No. 16 Memphis 83, North Carolina State 78: Boogie Ellis scored 21 points to help the Tigers beat the Wolfpack at the Barclays Center Classic in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Michigan State's Winston plays through grief

Associated Press

LAHAINA, Hawaii — Cassius Winston's voice, already measured and low-key, has been tinged with melancholy these past weeks. A glint of sadness has been evident behind droopy eyelids. His game, until a recent outburst at the Maui Invitational, lacked the usual rhythm, high level of production.

The Michigan State star lost his brother and best friend to a tragic death less than three weeks ago.

Winston was an All-American last season, a preseason All-American this year and a popular pick for national player of the year in 2019-20 after deciding the NBA could wait.

Winston's return and a loaded roster led the Spartans to a No. 1 ranking in The Associated Press preseason poll.

Michigan State took a hit before the ball went in the air for the first time, losing starting shooting guard Joshua Langford until at least January to

another foot injury.

Then the unfathomable happened.

According to police, on Nov. 9, Zachary Winston took his own life by stepping in front of a train in Albion, Mich. The 19-year-old known as "Smoothie" was a son, a brother, a friend, seemingly a beacon of joy to everyone who came into his orbit.

Zachary's death rocked the foundation of the Winston family and sent shockwaves across the Michigan State basketball program and campus.

The next day, Cassius Winston, took the floor to face Binghamton. A moment of silence was held before tipoff to honor Zachary. Cassius had the game's first assist, sank his first shot, and finished with 17 points and 11 assists in the Spartans' rout.

Winston and his two families grieved quietly until he broke his public silence on Nov. 18. Speaking after a blowout win over Charleston Southern, he took the microphone and

thanked the Breslin Center crowd for all the flowers, messages and cards with a short, heartfelt speech.

"I really appreciated it from the bottom of my heart," Winston said, tapping his chest. "I lost a piece of my heart, but you guys are keeping me going."

A basketball player at Division III Albion College, Zachary was not just Cassius' younger brother. He was his best friend.

"I've been told by the people that there's going to be these ups and downs," Michigan State coach Tom Izzo said. "So somewhere, if one guy says I'm making an excuse, there's going to be a fistfight, because the facts do matter. They matter. And the fact is the best friend in his life lost his life. And we're struggling, as a team, but he is struggling as a human being."

With his team warming up on the Lahaina Civic Center court for a game against Georgia, Izzo was summoned to the locker room by freshman

guard Rocket Watts. When Izzo arrived at the locker room, he found his senior guard sitting on a bench, head down, a puddle of tears growing at his feet.

"We've got an All-American that's probably gone through one of the toughest things that any human being would go through," Izzo said. "We're just going to have to keep working him day-to-day through that."

Through some coaxing, Winston took the floor with his teammates. Winston scored 28 points, had eight assists and made huge plays down the stretch to help the Spartans overcome Georgia freshman Anthony Edwards' 37-point night for a 93-85 win.

"Once I got out there, I was able to find my rhythm, find my peace out there on the court and that was really good for me, getting up and down, just having that rhythm that I usually play with," Winston said. "I feel like this is the first time I kind of had it in a while."