

STARS AND STRIPES®

Thursday, October 8, 2015

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

NATO to broaden reach in eastern Europe

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

BRUSSELS — NATO agreed on Thursday to push further into eastern Europe with the establishment of two new military headquarters as a check against a more assertive Russia.

With Russia's recent moves in Syria, allies also must keep up their guard to the south, where more NATO assets could eventually be needed, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said during a meeting of defense ministers.

"In the coming months, we will also consider further needs along our southern borders," said Stoltenberg, who offered few details on the range of options.

On Thursday, defense ministers agreed to increase the number of so-called force-integration units, which stretch from the Baltics to Bulgaria, from six to eight, with the addition of military posts in Hungary and Slovakia. Military

equipment will be pre-positioned in those two countries to speed troop movements through the region.

NATO also approved a previously announced plan to double the size of its crisis-response force to 40,000.

"This is essential to enhance our ability to reinforce allies in the east quickly and effectively, if needed," Stoltenberg told journalists. "They will ensure that our forces can move quickly and effectively if they need to deploy."

Those decisions came as defense ministers pondered the implications of an intensifying Russian military operation in Syria.

U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter blasted Russia's military offensive, saying that it would only further isolate Moscow.

"I also expect in the coming days, Russia will begin to suffer casualties in Syria," Carter said during a news conference.

During the past week, Russia's military operation in Syria entered alliance territory with

the incursion of Russian fighters into Turkish airspace.

One measure allies will soon need to consider is whether NATO's soon-to-expire air defense mission in southern Turkey, which involves Patriot missiles, should be extended into 2016, Stoltenberg said.

Russia's military role in Syria follows its intervention in Ukraine last year, which served as a wake-up call for the transatlantic alliance. In the past year, NATO has responded in various ways to enhance its readiness.

Carter, who has been traveling all week through Europe, said allies also considered the look of NATO's future mission in Afghanistan.

Heading into closed-door talks, German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen told reporters that NATO would need to consider extending its mission in that country, although allies aren't expected to make firm commitments on the future size and scope of the mission until later this year.

Carter indicated that the future U.S. force structure in Afghanistan could change.

"It is widely understood the United States is doing an assessment, and as other countries have, a number of countries today have indicated a willingness to change their own plans and posture," he said.

After a meeting of the North Atlantic Council — NATO's highest decision-making body — Stoltenberg said the current situation in the embattled Afghan city of Kunduz was discussed, as was the U.S. bombing of a Doctors Without Borders hospital there.

"We underlined the importance of a full, thorough and transparent investigation," Stoltenberg said. "We need to have all the facts on the table."

During their talks, ministers signaled that NATO would maintain a more robust troop presence in eastern Europe, with Britain announcing it would increase the number of troops it rotates through the Baltics and Poland.

Putin may force Obama to act or yield on Syria

The Washington Post

Russia's military moves in Syria are fundamentally changing the face of the country's civil war, putting President Bashar Assad back on his feet, and may complicate the Obama administration's plans to expand its air operations against the Islamic State group.

So far, the administration has not budged in its two-fold strategy: direct airstrikes against the Islamic State group and significant aid for those fighting against it, and a push for negotiations to end what has been the largely separate Syrian civil war.

Senior administration offi-

cial acknowledge that Russia has already made some tactical gains in the civil war, even as they insist President Vladimir Putin will ultimately pay

ANALYSIS for what they describe as a strategic blunder that will undercut his already tenuous reputation in the world, and will encourage the spread of the militants.

If Putin's goal was "to get attention," one senior official said, "then it was brilliant ... if it was to end the fighting in Syria, that's where we think it's a strategic error." At the same time, the official said, "Russia is now going to be viewed as

being anti-Sunni ... attracting the ire of extremist groups," including the Islamic State.

But others within the administration, and many outside experts, are increasingly worried that if President Barack Obama does not take decisive action — such as quickly moving to claim the air space over northwestern Syria and the Turkish border, where Russian jets are already operating — it is the United States that will suffer significant damage to both its reputation and its foreign policy and counterterrorism goals.

Putin has said he does not intend to launch military ground

operations in Syria, and senior administration officials said Wednesday they see no evidence of any ground combat units there. But the Russian deployments include sophisticated electronics, some of them designed to jam aviation electronics. Other than Russia and the Syrian government, only the U.S.-led coalition against the Islamic State is flying planes in Syria.

The current internal administration debate is largely the same one that has kept the administration out of significant intervention in Syria's civil war for the past four years.

Defense bill goes to Obama

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The U.S. defense policy bill for 2016 passed Congress on Wednesday and is headed to President Barack Obama, setting up what will likely be a protracted political battle over military and federal spending.

The National Defense Authorization Act, comprising a \$515 billion base defense budget and an \$89 billion overseas war fund, includes a historic overhaul of 20-year military pensions, increases to Tricare prescription copays and eased restrictions for guns on bases. But the White House vowed again this week to veto it — a rare move — in an effort to force Republicans to lift caps on federal spending. The president could make a decision this week.

A veto will send the NDAA back to Congress, and it was unclear if Republicans could rally enough votes to override Obama. If the bill is scuttled by a veto, the Defense Department will be left waiting for policy guidance while lawmakers face the task of repealing mandatory spending caps that have shackled federal budgets for the past four years.

“This veto threat is about one thing and one thing only: politics,” Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., said on the Senate floor. “The president wants to take a stand for greater domestic spending, and he wants to use the vital authorities and support our troops need to defend the nation as leverage.”

Obama wants Congress to solve one of its most intractable issues — the spending limits that resulted from the Budget Control Act of 2011. Lawmakers agreed to set limits and stick to them or the act mandates deeper, across-the-board cuts called sequestration.

Dems tepid on Afghan extension

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — House lawmakers weary of the war pushed back Thursday against the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, who has advised the White House to keep more troops deployed there and to abandon a plan to end the conflict.

Members of the House Armed Services Committee, many of them Democrats, said they are frustrated by a lack of progress in training a capable Afghan army and police force to take over security, despite a 14-year war, now the longest in American history.

The comments came during testimony by Gen. John Campbell, who urged the committee to have patience with the

security forces, which are still unable to protect the entire country from a resurgent Taliban. Earlier this week, he told the Senate that he has advised President Barack Obama to maintain higher troop levels in 2016 and to remain in the war.

As Campbell spoke in Congress on Thursday, Defense Secretary Ash Carter met with NATO officials. They indicated a U.S. military presence larger than the planned embassy force will remain past 2016, though the final troop numbers were yet to be decided.

“General, I’ve heard this for 14 years,” Rep. Loretta Sanchez, D-Calif., said, referring to Campbell’s assurances that Afghans are increasingly capable of security operations but not quite yet ready to operate on their own.

Obama had planned to end the war by the end of his second term, but the continuing shortcomings of Afghan forces and new Taliban attacks have forced him to slow the drawdown.

Earlier this year, he made an agreement with the Afghan government to keep 9,800 troops in the country through this year, instead of 5,000.

Now, Campbell has advised against a planned drawdown to an embassy force by the end of 2016 following a tough fighting season for the Afghans and a surprise Taliban siege of the provincial capital of Kunduz last week.

He said the Afghans are still deficient in key military abilities, such as command-and-control and intelligence gathering.

Man who helped stop train attack stabbed

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — U.S. Airman 1st Class Spencer Stone, one of three Americans hailed as a hero after helping thwart a gunman on a Paris-bound train in August, was stabbed early Thursday morning in Sacramento, Calif., an Air

Force official said.

Stone was transported to a local hospital, where he was in stable condition as of early Thursday afternoon, Air Force Lt. Col. Christopher Karns said.

The Sacramento Police Department declined to name Stone as the victim in the attack, which took place at about

12:45 a.m. in the area of 21st and K streets, an area with a number of nightclubs nearby. In a statement, the police said they were investigating the incident but have not yet made an arrest.

Stone is assigned to Travis Air Force Base, outside of Sacramento.

Study: Cancer up in kids near Fukushima

Associated Press

TOKYO — A new study says children living near the Fukushima nuclear meltdowns have been diagnosed with thyroid cancer at a rate 20 to 50 times that of children elsewhere, a difference the authors contend undermines the government’s position that more cases have been discovered in the area only because of stringent monitoring.

Most of the 370,000 children in Fukushima prefecture have

been given ultrasound check-ups since the March 2011 meltdowns at the tsunami-ravaged Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant. The most recent statistics, released in August, show that thyroid cancer is suspected or confirmed in 137 of those children, a number that rose by 25 from a year earlier. Elsewhere, the disease occurs in only about one or two of every million children per year, by some estimates.

“This is more than expected

and emerging faster than expected,” lead author Toshihide Tsuda told The Associated Press during a visit to Tokyo. “This is 20 times to 50 times what would be normally expected.”

The study was released online this week and is being published in the November issue of *Epidemiology*, produced by the Hurdon, Va.-based International Society for Environmental Epidemiology. The data come from tests overseen by Fukushima Medical University.

Dodgers have good 1-2 punch

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Michael Cuddyer and the New York Mets are well aware of the challenge ahead.

First, they get Clayton Kershaw in Game 1 of the playoffs against the Los Angeles Dodgers.

And then, Zack Greinke.

It's an imposing 1-2 pitching punch that manager Terry Collins referred to last month as "those two animals."

"Did we expect to see anybody else? That's what the game's about, to face the best," Collins said Wednesday.

Kershaw, last year's NL MVP, struck out 301 hitters this season and finished 16-7 with a 2.13 ERA. He went 11-1 with a 1.22 ERA and four complete games, including three shutouts, in his final 17 starts. The left-hander has won three of the past four NL Cy Young Awards.

Greinke, the 2009 AL Cy Young winner, was 19-3 with a 1.66 ERA this year — lowest in the majors since Hall of Famer Greg Maddux posted a 1.63 mark for Atlanta in 1995.

"We all know that they're both two of the best pitchers in the game," Cuddyer

said this week. "I think it does help to have faced them before. Whether you win or lose, I don't think that really plays into it. But the fact that you faced them before, the fact that the guys have had at-bats against them, they know the arm angles, they know what the pitches look like, they know the shapes of the pitches. That all helps."

Cuddyer, a respected veteran in his first season with the Mets, is slated to start the Division Series opener in left field Friday night against Kershaw because he bats from the right side. Impressive rookie Michael Conforto, called up directly from Double-A in late July, hits left-handed and likely will play left field when Greinke takes the ball.

"While I know that this team has faced these pitchers before, I personally haven't. But they're pitchers, just like anyone else. They're going to throw the same pitches," Mets slugger Yoenis Cespedes said through a translator.

New York won four of seven meetings between the teams this season, all in July before Cespedes arrived from Detroit in a trade that helped transform a punchless Mets lineup into a powerful one. The clubs split the four games started by

Kershaw and Greinke.

Collins plans to start three left-handed hitters against Kershaw: Curtis Granderson, Daniel Murphy and Lucas Duda.

On the mound, the Mets will counter with Jacob deGrom (14-8, 2.54 ERA) in the opener followed by hard-throwing rookie Noah Syndergaard (9-7, 3.24) in Game 2.

"I think we're going to do just fine. I think we're going to be able to go out there and play our game," Collins said. "I think you've got to like the two guys I'm pitching. I know who we're facing, and I don't want to say anything, but they're facing a couple pretty good guys, too."

The 66-year-old Collins, the oldest manager in the majors, is set to make his post-season managerial debut. He has deep roots in the Dodgers organization after spending about two decades playing and working in their system.

"I'm a little fired up. When we land in Los Angeles, it's going to be exciting," Collins said. "If I had to pick some place I could go in my first playoff game, it would have been against the Los Angeles Dodgers. It's going to be a lot of fun. I'm going to enjoy it and get them ready to play."

Astros better at home

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Astros slugger George Springer attributes the trouble his team had on the road all season to the color of their jerseys, gray and drab, which might seem preposterous except for one thing: His manager, A.J. Hinch, offered up the exact same reason.

"I think when we started wearing the orange unis on the road, turned the tide," Hinch said this week, only somewhat tongue-in-cheek. "I have no idea."

The Astros entered Thursday night's AL division series opener against the Kansas City Royals after going 33-48 on the road this season, the second-worst winning percentage for any postseason team in history. The 1987 Minnesota Twins went 29-52 away from home, according to STATS.

Incidentally, the Twins went on to beat the St. Louis Cardinals to win the World Series in seven games, though Minnesota lost all three on the road.

"It's something I haven't been able to figure out. There's really no rhyme or reason why we've done that," Hinch said. "We haven't been uncomfortable on the road. If you're around our team this series, you'll notice a very calm vibe, a very even-keel group."

"We're not intimidated by the road," he insisted. "We haven't backed down. We've played some bad baseball at times where we just haven't pulled out wins. I mean, the facts are the facts."

Here is another fact, though: The Astros already proved they can win on the road when it really matters. They beat the New York Yankees 3-0 on Tuesday in the AL wild-card game, earning the right to open against Kansas City at Kauffman Stadium.

Houston dropped two of three in Kansas City earlier this season.

Part of the reason may be that the Astros' offense is predicated on power. They smashed 230 homers this season, second only (by two) to league-leading Toronto.

They were built to take full advantage of their bandbox ballpark, where a 315-foot popup clears the wall in left and a 326-foot blooper is a homer to right. Evan Gattis hit 27 long balls by himself, and Luis Valbuena and Colby Rasmus hit 25 each. Even diminutive second baseman Jose Altuve had 15 homers, more than all but five of the Royals.

Away from Minute Maid Park, they'll be playing in a big yard. Kauffman Stadium is 330 feet down the lines, 410 to center, while the massive gaps make the outfield feel like a prairie.

The Royals were built with the ballpark in mind. General manager Dayton Moore placed an emphasis on solid starting pitching, a tough bullpen and the kind of speedy, stingy defense that is in many ways a throwback to a bygone era, when teams had to scratch out runs.

Arrieta solid as Cubs shut out Pirates

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — These Chicago Cubs are supposed to be too young to be here. Or maybe they're just too good to care.

Jake Arrieta allowed four hits in nine dominant innings and the Cubs rolled to a 4-0 win over the Pittsburgh Pirates in the NL wild-card game on Wednesday night.

Arrieta struck out 11 without a walk. He also dusted himself off after getting plunked by Pittsburgh reliever Tony Watson to send the Cubs to the NL Division Series in St. Louis starting on Friday.

"I'm exhausted. I haven't felt this way all year," said Arrieta, who led the majors with 22 wins. "This atmosphere, the energy was unbelievable. Tried to use it to the best of my ability. They were loud; they were really loud."

Dexter Fowler homered and scored three times for the Cubs. Kyle Schwarber added a two-run shot off Pittsburgh starter Gerrit Cole as Chicago raced to an early lead and let Arrieta do the rest.

The largest crowd ever at PNC Park failed to rattle Arrieta or one of baseball's youngest teams. First-year manager Joe Maddon's club played with swagger and confidence and looked right at home while snapping a nine-game playoff losing streak that dated to the 2003 NL Championship Series.

"It's tremendous for the city. It's been a while," Arrieta said. "Chicago's been waiting for this, but it's only step one."

Pittsburgh was knocked out after finishing second in the majors with 98 victories this year. Last season, the Pirates also were shut out on four hits at home in the wild-card game, losing to San Francisco.

"Well, sports is hard. Life's not fair. You go out and play. You get beat, you move

on," manager Clint Hurdle said.

The bearded, 29-year-old Arrieta, still unbeaten since July 25, stretched his remarkable second half — in which he posted an 0.75 ERA — into the opening round of the playoffs. He threw the first complete-game shutout for the Cubs in the postseason since Claude Passeau tossed a one-hitter in the 1945 World Series against Detroit.

Arrieta even laughed off a weird sequence in the seventh when Watson's fastball hit him in his left side. The benches and bullpens cleared when Watson was issued a warning, leading to little more than a few heated exchanges along the first base line.

"I hit two guys, unintentionally. I'm not trying to hurt or hit anybody," Arrieta said. "Balls were slick tonight. I just lost it a couple of times, it kind of ran away from me."

"I expected that. They're going to take care of their own guys. It's understandable. Everything after that was fine," he said.

Pirates utility player Sean Rodriguez, who'd already been pulled, was ejected and proceeded to give an unsuspecting water cooler a series of one-two combinations, eventually sending it tumbling to the ground.

Pittsburgh had no such luck against Arrieta, with Hurdle seemingly flummoxed on how to get to attack a right-hander who has matured from raw project into overpowering force.

Hurdle shelved slugger Pedro Alvarez — whose 27 homers led the team but whose 23 errors made him a defensive liability — in favor of more sure-handed Rodriguez. Hurdle pointed to the athleticism Rodriguez brought as a major fac-

tor, figuring the Pirates would need to get creative to score against Arrieta rather than hope Alvarez runs into the kind of mistake Arrieta has avoided nearly all season.

Maddon took a decidedly different approach, starting Kris Bryant in left and Schwarber in right and Tommy La Stella at third — positions each had played only sparingly during the regular season — because it was the lineup that presented the most firepower.

Chicago took a 1-0 lead two batters into the game when Fowler led off with a single, stole second and scored on a single to left by Schwarber.

The two hooked up again in the third. Fowler singled with one out and Schwarber turned an 88 mph slider from Cole into a massive two-run shot that appeared destined for the downtown Pittsburgh skyline before disappearing over the stands in right field.

It drained whatever juice remained from a crowd that spent the buildup to the showdown between the teams with the second and third best record in the majors trying to get a rise out of Arrieta. The 29-year-old embraced it, tweeting back "whatever helps keep your hope alive, just know, it doesn't matter."

Maddon has preached a "keep it simple" approach since taking over last winter. When Arrieta is on the hill, Maddon's job tends to get pretty easy.

Fueled by sometimes impeccable control, Arrieta worked both sides of the plate — and sometimes a little more — to continue one of the most torrid stretches by a pitcher in baseball history. He threw 20 of his first 25 pitches for strikes and Pittsburgh struggled to generate anything resembling momentum.



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US on top at Presidents Cup

Associated Press

INCHEON, South Korea — The Presidents Cup wasn't an hour old when Nick Price looked at the scoreboard and had that sinking feeling.

It was filled with American red. And there wasn't much Price or the International team could do about it Thursday in an opening session that ended just like so many others in this one-sided affair.

Phil Mickelson and Zach Johnson capped off a performance that was as businesslike as their handshakes, and the Americans had a 4-1 lead after four-somes in which they never trailed in any match except the one they lost.

"A tough day for us," Price said. "Having said that, we are only five points into 30. We still have another 25 points left out there. So we've got a long way to go, and that's that I told my team. Just to keep their chins up and do the best they can tomorrow."

The International team was adamant that the number of matches be reduced — it was lowered from 34 to 30 — to keep it a close contest. After one day, maybe having one less match on Thursday helped. It could have been worse.

The Americans, who have lost the Presidents Cup only one time since it began in 1994 and are going for their sixth straight victory, had a lead after the opening session for the fifth straight time. The margin was their largest since a

four-point lead in 2007 at Royal Montreal.

That makes the five matches of four-balls on Friday even more critical.

U.S. captain Jay Haas put Jordan Spieth and Dustin Johnson in the first match, followed by Rickie Fowler and Jimmy Walker.

"He's going for the kill," Price said. "If we get momentum going, it can change things."

All the momentum belonged to the Americans on Thursday.

Bubba Watson and J.B. Holmes ran off four straight birdies early in their match against Adam Scott and Hideki Matsuyama, and that set the tone. They wound up winning a tight match when Scott and Matsuyama missed key putts and ended it on the 16th hole.

Watson and Holmes didn't deliver the first point. That came from Fowler and Walker, who are unbeaten as a team but picked up their first win. They halved their three matches at the Ryder Cup last year, and they had the shortest match at the Jack Nicklaus Golf Club Korea, 5 and 4, over Anirban Lahiri and Thongchai Jaidee.

The lone International victory came from Louis Oosthuizen and Branden Grace of South Africa, who took advantage of some sloppy play by Matt Kuchar and Patrick Reed in a 3-and-2 victory. Kuchar hit a tee shot into the water on No. 11, and he hit a wedge so far on No. 14 that it didn't even reach the creek.

The Americans got help from top to

bottom.

Spieth, coming off a year of two majors, the FedEx Cup and the No. 1 ranking, and Dustin Johnson made for a formidable duo. They set the tone early when Spieth holed a 20-foot birdie putt on No. 2, and Johnson stepped up on the next hole and hammered a tee shot nearly 350 yards.

They halved that hole, but a message was sent.

"Me hitting bomb drives, Jordan holing putts," Johnson said. "That's what you want to get in their heads."

Mickelson had to rely on a captain's pick for the first time since the inaugural Presidents Cup. Players wanted him on the team for his experience and enthusiasm, and the Hall of Famer showed he was more than capable with a club in his hand. Mickelson holed a bunker shot on the par-3 13th to go 2 up, and he came up big with a key drive on the 18th with water down the right side.

Jason Day, coming off a five-win season that included his first major, did his part to extend the match. Day holed a 40-foot birdie putt on the 17th hole to keep alive hopes of at least earning a half-point. But on the closing par 5, Mickelson's big drive set up nothing more than a 7-iron for Zach Johnson, and he put it 10 feet below the hole.

Day's eagle putt from about 18 feet slid by on the left, and he and fellow Aussie Steven Bowditch conceded the eagle to Mickelson for a 2-up U.S. win.

FIFA suspends Blatter, Platini for 90 days

ZURICH — Sepp Blatter and UEFA President Michel Platini, the man who had been favored to take over as FIFA leader, were both suspended for 90 days Thursday, plunging soccer's governing body deeper into crisis.

Blatter and Platini were suspended by the FIFA ethics committee in the wake of a Swiss criminal investigation. The decision seemingly ends Platini's bid to succeed Blatter as FIFA president in the emergency election in February.

Another presidential hopeful, Chung Mong-joon, was suspended for six years in a separate case and FIFA secretary general Jerome Valcke was banned for 90 days.

The suspensions can be extended by up to 45 days.

Issa Hayatou, the longtime head of the African soccer confederation who was reprimanded in 2011 by the International Olympic Committee in a FIFA kick-backs scandal, will take over as acting president.

The Cameroonian, who has a serious kidney illness that requires regular dialysis sessions, is in Yaounde and is expected to travel to Zurich immediately.

Hayatou said he would not stand for president but remained committed to the reform process.

The interim leader of UEFA will be Spanish federation head Angel Maria Villar, who remains at risk of being sanctioned from the FIFA ethics committee in its investigation of the 2018 and 2022 World Cup bidding contests.

2016 equestrian event may not be held in Brazil

RIO DE JANEIRO — The head of the Brazilian Equestrian Confederation has warned that equestrian events at next year's Rio de Janeiro Olympics might have to take place outside Brazil.

Luiz Roberto Giugni blasted the country's Agriculture Ministry for delays in issuing documentation needed to allow horses brought into Brazil from Europe, the United States and Canada to leave the country.

He warned that if the ministry doesn't act before the end of the month, "we run the risk of not having the event in Brazil." Regulations for bringing horses to and from Brazil are strict. The country is still subject to diseases affecting horses, including glanders, a lethal bacterial infection recently diagnosed in several horses here.

Knicks' Fisher, Grizzlies' Barnes in altercation

NEW YORK — Knicks coach Derek Fisher was involved in an altercation with Memphis Grizzlies forward and former teammate Matt Barnes in California on Saturday, a person with knowledge of the details said.

The New York Post, citing an anonymous source, reported Wednesday that the altercation was because Fisher is dating Barnes' estranged wife. Fisher filed for divorce from his wife, Candace, in March.

The person said Fisher traveled to Los Angeles after practice Saturday to see his children and the altercation happened that night while Fisher was attending a gathering at the home of Gloria Govan, Barnes' estranged wife. The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because no comments were authorized.

Fisher and Barnes were teammates with the Los Angeles Lakers from 2010-12.

From The Associated Press

Rangers top Blackhawks in opener

Associated Press

CHICAGO — The New York Rangers waited and waited while the Chicago Blackhawks celebrated another championship.

When the puck finally dropped for the first game of the season, Henrik Lundqvist and Co. were more than ready — they were a little annoyed, too.

Oscar Lindberg, Kevin Klein and Derek Stepan scored in the first period, and New York ruined Chicago's Stanley Cup party with a 3-2 win on Wednesday.

"It's probably very emotional for them to be out there and see the flag go up and share that with all the fans. It's a great moment for them, obviously," said Lundqvist, who had 32 saves.

"But we were sitting in here and they delayed a little bit, I may be a little bit upset so you want to go out there and pay back. But to try to kill the atmosphere a little bit like that was huge for us."

J.T. Miller added two assists for New York, which begins the year with title aspirations of its own. The Rangers won the Presidents' Trophy last season for the most points in the NHL, and then lost to Tampa Bay in seven games in the Eastern Conference final.

Cheered on by a sellout crowd of 22,104, with many dressed in their usual red jerseys, the Blackhawks raised the banner for the franchise's sixth NHL title during a colorful pregame ceremony.

All-Star winger Patrick Kane, the subject of a sexual assault investigation in western New York, heard loud cheers when he skated onto the ice for the Cup celebration. Kane hasn't been charged, and has said he expects to be exonerated.

Kane almost had the tying goal with a minute left, but it was waved off. Lundqvist said he heard a whistle before

Kane knocked the puck in from under his pad.

Artemi Panarin scored in his first NHL game for Chicago, which is trying to become the first team to successfully defend the title since the Detroit Red Wings in 1997-98. Teuvo Teravainen also scored, and Corey Crawford made 24 stops.

The banner had only been in the rafters for a short time when New York issued a stern reminder of the difficulty of repeating as champion. Just 1:43 into the game, Miller passed to Lindberg for a beautiful one-timer for the rookie's first career goal. After a wide-open Panarin responded for Chicago off a pass from Kane, the Rangers went ahead to stay on another one-timer — this one for Klein off a pass from fellow defenseman Keith Yandle. Stepan then made it 3-1 with 59 seconds left when he scored on a rebound off an odd-man rush.

"I thought we were real good in the first period," New York coach Alain Vigneault said. "I liked our execution. After that, I thought we lost momentum a little bit."

The Blackhawks controlled most of the second and third periods, but were unable to overcome New York's fast start. Marian Hossa set up Teravainen's one-timer at 6:55 of the second, and Chicago had several opportunities late in the third, but Lundqvist was there each time.

Canadiens 3, Maple Leafs 1: Carey Price made 36 saves and Montreal beat host Toronto, spoiling Mike Babcock's coaching debut with the Maple Leafs.

Canadiens captain Max Pacioretty scored on Montreal's first shot against Jonathan Bernier a few minutes in for the first goal of the NHL season.

Alex Galchenyuk broke a tie midway through the third period, and Pacioretty added an empty-netter.

James van Riemsdyk had a power-play

goal for Toronto early in the second period.

Babcock made the first coach's challenge in NHL history and was successful in overturning a goal. He challenged Jeff Petry's apparent goal in the second period, arguing that Tomas Plekanec interfered with Bernier.

Sharks 5, Kings 1: Captain Joe Pavelski had a goal and two assists, and Joonas Donskoi scored in his NHL debut for visiting San Jose.

Joe Thornton and Brent Burns had a goal and an assist apiece, and Tomas Hertl also scored as the Sharks thoroughly dominated their California rivals in coach Peter DeBoer's successful debut.

Pavelski was outstanding in his first game since being named the permanent captain of the Sharks, who won a season opener at Staples Center for the second straight year.

Martin Jones made 19 saves in his own debut for the Sharks against his former team, stopping everything after the Kings' first shot. Nick Shore scored 1:49 into the first period.

Canucks 5, Flames 1: Daniel Sedin had a goal and two assists to lead visiting Vancouver.

Jannik Hansen, Brandon Sutter, Alex Burrows and Henrik Sedin also scored for the Canucks in a rematch of last April's Western Conference quarterfinals. The Flames won that series in six games to advance to the second round, where they lost in five to Anaheim. Vancouver defenseman Ben Hutton recorded his first point in his NHL debut with an assist on Hansen's goal. Canucks goalie Ryan Miller made 29 saves.

Jiri Hudler scored for Calgary and Karri Ramo finished with 39 saves.