

STARS AND STRIPES[®]

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Kabul helo crash at NATO facility kills 5

The Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — On Monday, NATO announced the nationalities of five servicemembers killed in Kabul when their helicopter crashed a day earlier while landing at the headquarters of Resolute Support Mission, which is training Afghan security forces. A witness told AP that the helicopter appeared to strike a monitoring balloon.

The crash killed two British servicemembers, two American servicemembers and a French civilian contractor, NATO said in a statement. Five others were injured. NATO did not release the victims' identities, saying it left that to the relevant national authorities.

"We're deeply saddened by the loss of our teammates," Brig. Gen. Wilson A. Shoffner, Resolute Support's deputy chief of staff for communications, was quoted as saying in a statement.

"Our heartfelt condolences go out to the families and friends of those affected in this tragic incident, and we pray for the full recovery of those injured."

An Afghan security guard who witnessed Sunday's crash told The Associated Press that the helicopter struck a monitoring balloon as it was landing.

"It seemed like the cable was turned around the helicopter rotor," said the security guard, Najibullah. Like many in Afghanistan, he goes by one name. He said the helicopter went down and then black smoke rose from the area.

A second helicopter circled the area three or four times and then landed at a nearby airport, he said.

U.S. Army Col. Brian Tribus, a spokesman in Afghanistan for U.S. and NATO forces, confirmed the accident involved a NATO aircraft and an observation balloon, according to the

Military Times. The monitoring balloon was severed from its mooring in the incident, he said.

Meanwhile, a female U.N. worker was shot and killed on Monday while traveling to work in the city of Kandahar, an Afghan official said.

Toorpakai Olfat, an Afghan national, was killed by two unidentified gunmen on a motorcycle after she left her home to go to work, said Samim Akhpolkwak, spokesman for the Kandahar provincial governor. There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan confirmed Olfat's death in a statement and said authorities were investigating.

Also on Monday, Taliban insurgents attacked Afghan security forces in multiple locations in Ghazni province, said Sediq Sediqqi, spokesman for the Afghan Interior Ministry.

Insurgents began attacking police checkpoints in Giro district about 6:30 a.m., and sporadic gunbattles continued throughout the day, he said.

Militants also attacked the police station in Ghazni city "from three different directions," Sediqqi said, adding that Afghan army helicopters had been deployed to the scene to support police.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said in a statement that the militant group had shut down the Kabul-Kandahar highway in Ghazni province.

In a separate incident, a C-208 Afghan army plane crashed as result of a technical problem in central Bamyán province, the Afghan Defense Ministry said in a statement Monday. Two crewmembers were killed and five were wounded as the plane went down while traveling from Bamyán toward Kandahar province.

Hundreds march in Turkey to condemn rally attack

Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey — Hundreds of people marched through Istanbul and the Turkish capital of Ankara on Monday to condemn the attack by suicide bombers at a weekend peace rally, with many venting their anger at the Turkish government itself.

Some demonstrators chanted: "The killer state will be held to account!"

Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, however, rejected accusations by opponents that the government was to blame for the nearly simultaneous attacks Saturday, calling them "dangerous" and "dastardly."

He also denied that they were a result of Turkey's involve-

ment in war in Syria and that the government was dragging the country into the Middle Eastern quagmire.

The government believes two male suicide bombers killed at least 97 people and wounded hundreds at a rally Saturday in Ankara by opposition supporters and Kurdish activists.

"These attacks won't turn Turkey into a Syria," Davutoglu said.

Government opponents have also accused President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of fomenting violence and ethnic tensions to gain votes for the ruling party in Turkey's Nov. 1 election — an accusation that the Turkish leader rejects. In the last election in June, a Kurdish party

gained support from voters, taking away the ruling party's majority in parliament — and Erdogan wants that majority back.

Turkish investigators were close to identifying one of the two suicide bombers, the prime minister said Monday, adding that the Islamic State group was the "No. 1 priority" of its investigation.

The rally Saturday was organized by Turkish and Kurdish activists to call for increased democracy and an end to the renewed fighting between Turkey's security forces and Kurdish rebels that has killed hundreds of soldiers, rebels and citizens since July.

On Monday, Yeni Safak, a newspaper close to the gov-

ernment, said authorities investigating the bombings were focusing on the Islamic State group, comparing DNA samples of the suspected bombers with those obtained from the families of some 20 extremists they suspect could have carried out the attacks.

No one has claimed responsibility, but the attack bears similarities to a suicide bombing in July that killed 33 Turkish and Kurdish peace activists near the southern town of Suruc, which borders Syria. The government blamed that attack on the Islamic State group.

Hurriyet newspaper said the type of device and explosives used in Ankara were the same as those used in Suruc.

Obama: No Syria strategy shift

The Washington Post

SAN DIEGO — President Barack Obama indicated in an interview with “60 Minutes” that he isn’t mulling any major changes to his approach to Syria following the failure of his administration’s plan to train more than 5,000 moderate rebels and the unexpected emergence of Russia as a major military player in the conflict.

Obama has been heavily criticized in recent months as lacking a strategy to stem Syria’s chaos and defeat Islamic State militants. He made it clear, though, that his plans for Syria were guided by an overriding goal: He wants to keep the

United States from becoming more deeply involved militarily in a place where he believes that the American force offers no viable, long-term solutions.

“We are prepared to work both diplomatically and where we can to support moderate opposition that can help convince the Russians and Iranians to put pressure on Assad for a transition,” Obama told the CBS News program in the interview, which aired Sunday night. “But ... what we are not going to do is to try to reinsert ourselves in a military campaign inside of Syria.”

The Obama administration announced last week that it was ending a blighted \$500 million

effort to train Syrian rebels to fight the Islamic State in favor of a new plan that will provide direct aid to existing rebel units that the Pentagon thinks has a better chance of succeeding against the militants.

Obama, who resisted pressure from some of his top national security advisers to arm the moderate rebels in the early months of Syria’s civil war, told “60 Minutes” that he had grave doubts about the training program before it even began. But he pressed forward with it last year out of an instinct to “try different things” to improve the chaotic and deteriorating situation.

Russia: Attack by militants thwarted

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Highlighting a new terror threat to Russia raised by its air campaign in Syria, security officials said Monday they have thwarted a planned attack on Moscow’s public transport system by militants trained by the Islamic State group.

Sunday’s arrest of several terrorism suspects — some of whom, intelligence officials say, were trained by the Islamic State group in Syria — has brought back memories of the string of deadly bombings that struck the Russian capital just a few years ago.

President Vladimir Putin has acknowledged the new danger, but insisted that launching the Russian airstrikes in support of Syrian President Bashar Assad’s army was necessary to fight Islamic State and other militant groups before they pose an even bigger security challenge to Russia.

“If we just stood by and let Syria get gobbled up, thousands of people running around there now with Kalashnikovs would end up on our territory, and so we are helping President Assad fight this threat before it reaches our borders,” Putin said in an interview with Rossiya state television broadcast Sunday.

Bergdahl case upsets ex-soldier

Associated Press

HOUSTON — A former member of Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl’s platoon said Sunday he’s angered by an Army officer’s recommendation that Bergdahl face a lower-level court-martial and be spared the possibility of jail time for leaving his post in Afghanistan.

Josh Korder, a former U.S. Army sergeant, said Bergdahl should face life imprisonment because he holds him responsible for several deaths that occurred after Bergdahl abandoned his post in 2009, leaving his platoon in Blackfoot Company.

“Was it during the search for Bergdahl that we lost men in Blackfoot Company? No. But was it as a result of that search and as a result of him leaving that we lost members of Blackfoot Company? Yes,” Korder said in a telephone interview.

The Pentagon has said there’s no evidence anyone died searching for Bergdahl. But his commanding officers in Afghanistan testified last month at an Article 32 hearing — which reviewed evidence against Bergdahl — that a 45-day search for him put soldiers in danger.

Bergdahl was captured by the Taliban after leaving his

post in June 2009, and was held until last year, when he was exchanged for five Taliban commanders. Bergdahl was charged in March with desertion and misbehavior before the enemy, a charge that carries up to life in prison.

Eugene Fidell, Bergdahl’s attorney, said Saturday that Lt. Col. Mark Visger has recommended that Bergdahl’s case be referred to a special court-martial, which is a misdemeanor-level forum. It limits the maximum punishment to reduction in rank, a bad-conduct discharge and a term of up to a year in prison.

9 former American WWII POWs return to Japan, reminisce

Associated Press

YOKOHAMA, Japan — Nine former American servicemen who were held as prisoners during World War II were in Japan on Monday to revisit some of the places where they were held seven decades ago and recount their memories.

The men, all in their 90s,

opened their tour with a memorial service for their fellow fallen soldiers at the Commonwealth War Graves in Yokohama, near Tokyo.

As they marked the 70th anniversary of the end of the war, the emphasis was on reconciliation.

George W. Rogers, of Lynchburg, Va., said he had no hard

feelings. Now 96, he was taken captive by the Japanese after surviving the infamous Bataan Death March in April 1942 and forced to work at the Yawata steel plant in southern Japan, or today’s Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal Corp.

During his nearly 3½ years of captivity, Rogers was given

meager food rations and sometimes beaten up.

He said he was lucky to survive, but that he harbored “no hard feelings” toward his captors. “Just like we do what we’re told to do as far as the Army is concerned, your (Japanese) men do the same thing. They tell them to do it, they do it,” he said.

Fans wait for playoffs before saying Bengals not 'Bungles'

Associated Press

A lot of folks are going to want to wait and see what happens in the playoffs before declaring that Andy Dalton and the Bengals are done being the Bungles.

Certainly seems fair, given Cincinnati's recent history: The team hasn't won a postseason game since the 1990 season, when its current QB was 3 years old.

Still, give Dalton and his club this: After scoring the last 20 points to come back and beat the two-time reigning NFC champion Seattle Seahawks 27-24 in overtime Sunday, the Bengals (5-0) are gaining believers.

"We imploded in the third quarter, but we righted ourselves," Cincinnati coach Marvin Lewis said, "and started putting one play on top of another and kept going."

Dalton threw for two touchdowns and ran for another. He also got picked off once, though, and that big deficit against Seattle was telling. The big knock on Dalton is that he produces in the regular season — just not when it matters more. He is 0-4 in the playoffs, with one touchdown and six interceptions in those games.

There's a long way to go until Dalton will need to confront those demons.

The Bengals are not the only NFL team with a perfect record so far that hasn't put on perfect performances.

Atlanta is also 5-0, and also was pushed to overtime on Sunday, except not against

Seattle but by a flawed Washington club, before winning 25-19. The Falcons are the first NFL team to open with five wins that include four after trailing in the fourth quarter.

Denver is a shaky 5-0, too — and that record is despite Peyton Manning, not because of him. He threw two picks Sunday, has more interceptions (seven) than touchdown tosses (six) through five games for the first time since his rookie season, and the Broncos' offense failed to produce a touchdown for the second time in five games yet pulled out a 16-10 win at Oakland.

Even Aaron Rodgers had his problems, throwing his first two interceptions of the season, and his first two interceptions at home since 2012, as Green Bay got to 5-0 with a 24-10 victory over St. Louis.

Meanwhile, Tom Brady and the New England Patriots just keep on keepin' on: They're 4-0 after easily defeating Dallas 30-6.

Next Sunday, if New England can win at Indianapolis (hmmm, think they'll check the footballs' air pressure?), and Carolina (4-0 with a bye this week) can win at Seattle, this would be the first season in NFL history with six teams starting 5-0.

In case you missed it, here are other top topics after the NFL's fifth regular-season Sunday:

He did what?! One of the wildest catches of this, or any, season was made by Cleveland tight end Gary Barnidge in

the fourth quarter of a 33-30 victory at Baltimore. He somehow corralled the ball with his legs while on the ground. Sounds hard to believe, right? Go see it for yourself on NFL.com here: <http://bit.ly/1G7YWIH>

Ageless: Both of Manning's picks were by Charles Woodson, who turned 39 last week and became the oldest player in NFL history with two interceptions in a game. He's hardly the only old guy looking good: Matt Hasselbeck, 40, led the Colts to a win Thursday night; Brady, 38, has 11 TD passes and zero picks this season.

Benched: Detroit QB Matthew Stafford's third interception of the day got him yanked from a 42-17 loss to Arizona that dropped the Lions to 0-5. Backup Dan Orlovsky came in. But coach Jim Caldwell made it clear he'll stick with Stafford as the starter against Chicago next week, saying: "There is no quarterback controversy or anything of that nature." Less clear is the situation in Dallas, which is 0-3 with Brandon Weeden playing in place of the injured Tony Romo. The Cowboys have a bye now, and coach Jason Garrett wouldn't rule out the possibility of switching to Matt Cassel.

Giants on a roll: Sure, it was a narrow victory over a bad team, but the Giants' 30-27 escape against the 49ers at night gave New York a three-game winning streak after an 0-2 start and sole possession of first place in the mediocre NFC East.

USC coach forced to take leave

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Southern California coach Steve Sarkisian is taking an indefinite leave of absence after athletic director Pat Haden determined that the troubled coach is "not healthy."

Haden announced the decision in a hastily called news conference Sunday after Sarkisian didn't show up for practice.

"I think it's the right thing for our team, and I've always got to do what's right for our team and for our school," Haden said.

Offensive coordinator Clay Helton will take charge of the Trojans (3-2, 1-2 Pac-12), who have lost two of their past three games and were dropped from the AP Top 25. USC visits No. 14 Notre Dame (5-1) on Saturday.

Haden wasn't specific about the reasons for Sarkisian's absence, only saying that "it was very clear to me" that the second-year USC coach was unwell. Haden asked Sarkisian to take a leave during a phone conversation.

Sarkisian publicly apologized before the season after he appeared to be intoxicated while making an unsteady public statement at the Salute to Troy pep rally. He announced he would be getting unspecified treatment, but didn't believe he had a drinking problem, blaming his appearance on combining alcohol and medication.

Also Sunday, the Trojans announced center Max Tuerk will miss the rest of the season with a torn knee ligament.

Falcons take down Redskins in OT on pick-six

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Robert Alford returned an interception 59 yards for a touchdown, keeping the Falcons unbeaten with a 25-19 overtime win over the Washington Redskins.

The Redskins had the first possession of OT, and Kirk Cousins moved the team to midfield. When wide receiver Ryan Grant slipped on a pass route, Alford caught Cousins' pass and was left with open field down the Falcons' sideline for the touchdown.

Devonta Freeman's apparent 13-yard TD catch in the final minute of regulation was ruled incomplete on a review. Freeman scored on 6-yard run two plays later to give Atlanta a 19-16 lead. Dustin Hopkins' 52-yard field goal on the final play of regulation forced overtime.

The Falcons (5-0) overcame two interceptions and a lost fumble by Matt Ryan. Freeman had 27 carries for 153 yards and the touchdown.

Bengals 27, Seahawks 24 (OT): Andy Dalton led host Cincinnati from a 17-point fourth-quarter deficit to an overtime victory, keeping Cincinnati undefeated

with the second-biggest comeback in its history.

Trailing 24-7 as the fourth quarter started, Dalton threw for a touchdown, ran for another and led the Bengals on a 69-yard drive without a timeout. Mike Nugent tied it with a 31-yard field goal on the final play of regulation.

Nugent was good again from 42 yards with 3:36 left in overtime, the ball deflecting off the left upright before going through.

Giants 30, 49ers 27: Larry Donnell's spectacular catch over two 49ers with 21 seconds remaining lifted host New York past San Francisco, capping Eli Manning's sensational clutch performance.

Manning had a career-best 41 completions and his perfect throw to Donnell finished off an 82-yard drive with a 12-yard touchdown. It made him the winningest quarterback in team history with 102.

Browns 33, Ravens 30 (OT): Travis Coons kicked a 32-yard field goal in overtime and Josh McCown threw for a team-record 457 yards to lift Cleveland past host Baltimore.

Packers 24, Rams 10: Aaron Rodgers threw for two touchdowns and 241 yards

for host Green Bay, but his impressive string of not being intercepted at Lambeau Field ended.

Rodgers was 19 of 30 with long scoring strikes to receivers Ty Montgomery and James Jones. But Rodgers' streak of not being intercepted at home ended in the first quarter on linebacker James Laurinaitis' diving pick of a tipped ball for the Rams (2-3).

Patriots 30, Cowboys 6: Tom Brady threw for two touchdowns, with a 1-yard plunge for another score, as visiting New England pulled away from a powerless Dallas offense missing Tony Romo and Dez Bryant.

Broncos 16, Raiders 10: Chris Harris Jr. returned a fourth-quarter interception 74 yards for a touchdown as visiting Denver overcame a shaky day from Peyton Manning.

Manning was intercepted twice by 1998 draft classmate Charles Woodson and failed to lead the Broncos (5-0) to an offensive touchdown for the second time in five games this season.

Cardinals 42, Lions 17: Carson Palmer threw for three touchdowns, while Matthew Stafford was benched

after throwing a third interception as St. Louis topped host Detroit.

Bears 18, Chiefs 17: Jay Cutler led visiting Chicago to a pair of fourth-quarter touchdowns, the second an alert toss to Matt Forte with 18 seconds left.

Kansas City lost star running back Jamaal Charles to a potentially season-ending right knee injury.

Eagles 39, Saints 17: Sam Bradford overcame two red-zone interceptions and threw for 333 yards and two touchdowns, while Fletcher Cox forced two fumbles on sacks as host Philadelphia topped New Orleans.

Bills 14, Titans 13: Tyrod Taylor threw a touchdown pass, ran for another and even caught a pass in rallying visiting Buffalo.

With their top two running backs and top wide receiver injured, Taylor ran for 77 yards as the Bills (3-2) snapped a five-game skid against Tennessee.

Buccaneers 38, Jaguars 31: Doug Martin ran for 123 yards and scored three touchdowns against Jacksonville, helping Jameis Winston rebound from his worst pro performance in host Tampa Bay's victory.



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Blue Jays avert elimination

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Troy Tulowitzki settled down at the podium after helping the Toronto Blue Jays extend the AL Division Series, his left shoulder and arm constantly pulsating from the medical device attached to him.

Tulowitzki, still far from 100 percent from a collision that forced him to miss 19 games after being acquired by the Blue Jays, had certainly flexed his muscles on the field Sunday night in Game 3, a 5-1 win over the Texas Rangers.

"Good enough to go, good enough to play. Tons of treatment to be honest with you. I could do it all day," Tulowitzki said. "But just go out there and play and see what happens."

Tulowitzki drove in four runs, including three with a homer for his first hit in these playoffs, and the Blue Jays cut their deficit to 2-1 in the best-of-five series.

The victory was Toronto's first in the postseason since Joe Carter's home run won the 1993 World Series.

Marco Estrada limited the Rangers to one run and five hits over 6¹/₃ innings, with four strikeouts and no walks.

Tulowitzki's drive to left with two outs in the sixth inning put the Blue Jays up 5-0.

"It was definitely huge and in the moment I was definitely pumped up. Got back to the dugout and everybody's obviously excited to put us up by five," Tulowitzki said. "A little breathing room, I think that's the goal down 2-0."

That was two innings after he drew a bases-loaded walk. He missed most of the final three weeks of the regular season because of a cracked shoulder blade and bruised muscles in his upper back.

"Tulo needed that, he really did," manager John Gibbons said. "He had that long lay-off after the injury and then it's been kind of a battle for him. Maybe that sets him off. ... If he catches fire, we're real dangerous."

Texas has another chance Monday to clinch the series at home. If not, a deciding Game 5 will be played Wednesday in Toronto, where the Rangers won the first two games.

Game 3 came a week after the Rangers clinched the AL West title on the final day of the regular season, in their third chance to do so.

"We've been in this situation before. This is not new to this ballclub," manager Jeff

Banister said. "We knew that Toronto was going to be ready to play today."

Texas left-hander Martin Perez, somewhat a surprise pick as the Game 3 starter over veterans Derek Holland and Colby Lewis, gave up four runs and six hits while pitching into the sixth.

Holland (4-3) starts Game 4 against knuckleballer R.A. Dickey (11-11).

The Blue Jays had their leadoff hitter at second base to start each the third through fifth innings, a span that included three double plays ignited by second baseman Rougned Odor.

Toronto started the sixth with consecutive singles to chase Perez, and Edwin Encarnacion then drew a 10-pitch walk from rookie reliever Chi Chi Gonzalez to load the bases before the Rangers' fourth double play in an as many innings.

First baseman Mitch Moreland fielded Chris Colabello's hard-hit hopper, threw home for the first out and got back to the bag to take the return throw.

Tulowitzki, then 0-for-11 in the series, followed with his homer on a full-count changeup.

Logano secures spot in 3rd round

Associated Press

CONCORD, N.C. — Joey Logano has been to Victory Lane four times this season, and all four trips required him to beat reigning Sprint Cup champion Kevin Harvick.

The latest win, Sunday at Charlotte Motor Speedway, was a critical and confidence-building victory. He again shrugged off Harvick to earn an automatic berth into the third round of the Chase for the Sprint Cup championship.

Harvick, who has 11 second-place finishes this season, has been runner-up to Logano three times. Harvick finished third in Logano's win at Watkins Glen, where Harvick ran out of gas while leading on the last lap.

"When you can beat [Harvick] any day, any time, that's a big deal for us," team owner Roger Penske said. "I think that it was good that we could at least be on a level playing field with him today."

Harvick led 581 laps in the opening round of the Chase and routed the field last week at Dover to advance into the second round. But he never made it to the front at Charlotte, the opening race of the second round of NASCAR's playoffs, as Logano led 227 of the 334 laps.

Now Logano, who made it to the finale last season, doesn't have to worry about this daunting second round of the Chase. The series races next week at Kansas and then four drivers will be eliminated Oct. 25 at Talladega.

Martin Truex Jr. finished third — his career-best eighth top-five of the season.

The top six finishers were Chase drivers as Denny Hamlin finished fourth and was followed by Kurt Busch and Carl Edwards.

Austin Dillon, who is not racing for the title, was seventh. Jeff Gordon, making the final start of his career at Charlotte, struggled for the first half of the race but salvaged an eighth-place finish.

Hamilton closes in on Formula One title

SOCHI, Russia — Lewis Hamilton took a huge step toward retaining his Formula One title by winning the Russian Grand Prix on Sunday as his main rival Nico Rosberg failed to finish.

Hamilton can now win his third career title at the next race in Texas, while his Mercedes team retained the constructors' title after a season in which the silver cars have dominated almost every race.

Hamilton started second behind Rosberg but took over the lead when his Mercedes teammate experienced a throttle problem that forced him to slow to a crawl and then come into the pits to retire.

Hamilton then cruised to victory by 5.9 seconds over Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel, with Sergio Perez third for Force India, 23 seconds further behind.

It was Hamilton's ninth victory of the season and the 12th for Mercedes. With four races to go, Hamilton leads Vettel by 66 points and Rosberg by 73.

From The Associated Press

Keuchel remains perfect at home as Astros take 2-1 lead

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Dallas Keuchel's perfect performance in Houston this year has the upstart Astros one win away from the American League Championship Series.

Keuchel remained undefeated at Minute Maid Park with seven gutsy innings and Chris Carter homered Sunday, leading the Astros to a 4-2 win over the Kansas City Royals for a 2-1 edge in their Division Series.

The Astros could wrap up the best-of-five matchup with a win over the defending AL champions in Game 4 on Monday.

Houston's remarkable run comes just two years after the team lost a franchise-worst 111 games in a third-straight 100-loss season.

"I think that success is a lot more sweet when you kind of go through hardship like we did the first couple years that I was up here," Keuchel said. "But it's really not

a confidence that has grown. It's been here the whole time ... just now that we're getting to the playoffs and on a national stage ... it's a shock to a lot of people."

Keuchel, who shut down the Yankees in the AL wild-card game, worked out of jam after jam, allowing five hits and one run with seven strikeouts after going 15-0 at home this season, a modern major league record. He has a 1.45 ERA at Minute Maid Park in 19 starts this year.

"The ball in Dallas Keuchel's hand brings an awful lot of confidence to a lot of people. Including me," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "And he came up with some excellent pitches."

Luke Gregerson gave up a leadoff homer in the ninth to Alex Gordon before finishing off the Astros first playoff game in Houston in 10 years with a four-out save. It was his first save of more than three outs in three years.

Jason Castro drove in two runs with a single in the fifth that made it 2-1. Carlos

Gomez, who has a rib muscle strain, started for the first time in the series and had an RBI single in the sixth.

Carter's soaring solo homer, which landed on the train tracks atop the wall in left-center, and came on Danny Duffy's first pitch of the seventh pushed the lead to 4-1.

Carter, batting .199 in the regular season but .455 in the postseason, was a triple shy of the cycle for the Astros, who were hosting a playoff game for the first time since the 2005 World Series.

"After struggling so much this year and just having the success I've been having in the last couple of weeks, it's been nice to contribute and helps us win games," Carter said.

Lorenzo Cain hit a solo homer in the fourth for the Royals, who are on the brink of elimination after reaching the World Series last season.

Condon earns win in his Canadiens debut

Associated Press

OTTAWA, Ontario — Mike Condon got all the help he needed in his NHL debut for the Montreal Canadiens.

Condon made 20 saves, and Tomas Plekanec scored twice in the first period in the Canadiens' 3-1 victory over the Ottawa Senators on Sunday night.

The 25-year-old Condon allowed only Jean-Gabriel Pageau's short-handed goal midway through the second period in the Senators' home opener.

"It was exciting and I thought the guys played an awesome game," Condon said. "I think we only had 15 shots against going into the third period and then only maybe five or six scoring chances, so it made my workload very light."

The former Princeton star spent the past three seasons in the minors.

Montreal improved to 3-0-0, with star goalie Carey Price in goal for the first two games.

"[Condon] made some key saves at the right time," Canadiens coach Michel Therrien said. "This is just something that he did through the course of the training camp and he played really well for us to get the first win is always something special for any player."

Torrey Mitchell added a goal for Montreal in the third period.

Matt O'Connor made 31 saves for Ottawa in his NHL debut. The Senators are 2-1-0.

"I felt better as the game went on, but obviously I wanted to win," O'Connor said. "It was a bit of a goalie duel with

Condon getting his first NHL game as well. There's some stuff to work on, but overall felt pretty comfortable and felt like I made a good effort."

"I think after the first goal I thought Matt was good," Ottawa coach Dave Cameron said. "He certainly wasn't our issue."

Plekanec opened the scoring at 9:41 of the first period, beating O'Connor with a sharp angle shot. Plekanec added his third of the season with 1:26 left in the first, breaking in alone and beating O'Connor through the legs.

Mitchell redirected P.K. Subban's shot from just inside the blue line at 5:41 of the third, leaving O'Connor with little chance.