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US to delay Afghanistan withdrawal

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
AND JOSH SMITH
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Thousands of U.S. troops will remain in Afghanistan through the conclusion of Barack Obama's presidency, a major shift in policy he announced Thursday to help ensure the country does not slip back into control of extremist groups.

With the Taliban on the offensive and casualties rising among Afghan security forces and civilians, Obama said he would keep 5,500 troops in Afghanistan into 2017, leaving future decisions about the American efforts there to his successor.

"While America's combat mission in Afghanistan may be over, our commitment to Afghanistan and its people endures," Obama said, alluding to America's ending of Operation Enduring Freedom in December. "As commander in chief, I will not allow Afghanistan to be used as a safe haven for terrorists to attack our nation again."

Obama's new plan calls for a force of 9,800 troops to remain there through most of next year, continuing their two-fold mission to advise and assist Afghan forces and target the remnants of al-Qaida. The troops will operate from several U.S. bases including in Bagram, north of the capital, Kabul; in Kandahar, in the country's south; and in Jalalabad, in the country's east.

Obama's original plan would have seen all but a small, embassy-based contingent of troops withdrawn from Afghanistan by the end of next year. But recent gains by the Taliban, including the brief capture of Kunduz in the country's north, worried military leaders, who in recent months have advised Obama to leave a larger presence in the country.

"Given what's at stake in Afghanistan and the opportunity for a stable and committed ally that can partner with us in preventing the emergence of future threats and the fact that we have an international coalition, I am firmly convinced that we should make this extra effort," he said, acknowledging the American public has grown weary of the longest war in its history.

Sexual assaults reported in integrated Marine unit

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Seven sexual assaults were reported by servicemembers in a unit established within the last year by the Marine Corps to research how to better integrate women into combat roles, according to an analysis of the integration effort obtained by *The Washington Post*.

The alleged assaults have not previously been disclosed, but are detailed in a 103-page report released to *The Washington Post* by two researchers who have been vocal advocates of fully integrating women in the military. The documents are part of a broader written analysis by the Marines to assess how women in the unit performed compared with men. The Marines initially described the research in a four-page summary last month, which quickly attracted controversy over findings that women were injured more frequently and shot less accurately than the men.

The report was signed and dated Aug. 27 by several officials at Quantico, Va. It was labeled as not releasable through the Freedom of Information Act.

The unit was known as the Ground Combat Element Integrated Task Force, and included about 300 men and 100 women. Its members spent about four months training at Camp Lejeune, N.C., before carrying out a simulated deployment to bases in California at Twentynine Palms and Bridgeport to perform combat skills ranging from shooting to hiking while under monitoring.

"Starting with the most recently integrated unit, Marines in the ITF report sexual assault histories at levels similar to those in other military populations," the document said. "Sexual assaults reported during the life of the ITF were at a rate slightly higher than those experienced in other military populations. One sexual assault was formally reported and six sexual assaults were reported anonymously."

The Marines reported being assaulted during a survey of unit members carried out in March at Twentynine Palms by the Naval Health Research Center, said a Marine source with knowledge of the re-

search, speaking on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the issue. They were asked whether they had been assaulted in the previous six months, which at that point included time both in the unit and before it was formed in October 2014.

Maj. Chris Devine, a Marine Corps spokesman at the Pentagon, said in a statement released to *The Washington Post* that the service takes all allegations and acts of sexual assault seriously.

"This behavior — whether on duty, on liberty, or online — is not in keeping with our core values and is detrimental to victims and to unit cohesion and readiness," Devine said. "Without violating the confidentiality of our Marines, it's impossible to tell if the sexual assaults they experienced occurred at the ITF, while on liberty or leave, or at a prior unit. Because of the anonymous reporting, these cases of sexual assaults could have occurred [as a member of the integrated task force] and could have occurred prior to joining."

The report does not specify what occurred nor whether men or women reported being assaulted. But the reports come amid a broad review in the U.S. military to assess how women can be more fully integrated into ground combat units, which have long been closed to women. The Marine Corps is widely seen as more opposed to fully integrating women than the other services.

The alleged assaults were reported during a multiyear effort to rein in sexual abuse in the military. There were 6,131 reports of sexual assault in fiscal 2014, according to the Pentagon's annual report to Congress on the issue. It is widely believed that thousands more go unreported each year.

The assault reports caught some of the Marines in the task force by surprise.

"I never experienced, saw or heard of any sexual assault cases while I was with the unit," said Sgt. Danielle Beck, a female anti-armor gunner in the task force, which was formed last October and was deactivated in July after the research was completed. "If there were any, it should have been addressed to the entire unit."

CNO: Freedom of navigation critical in South China Sea

BY ERIK SLAVIN
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — Naval patrols in the South China Sea are part of a multipronged approach to resolve tensions over the area's hotly contested territories, the Navy's top officer said Thursday.

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson described the Navy's navigation in what the United States and several other countries consider international waters — but China considers its territory — as part of a strategy that includes diplomatic discussions with Beijing.

"We see these navigation operations as contributing to a peaceful resolution," said Richardson, who spoke with reporters before meeting with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and top Japanese defense officials.

The U.S. is considering tran-

siting close to Chinese-occupied land within the Spratly Islands, a collection of islands, rocks and reefs claimed entirely by China, according to recent media reports.

Chinese officials have warned the U.S. against undertaking what Washington refers to as "freedom of navigation" operations in the area, but Richardson defended the Navy's right to do so.

"It should not be a surprise to anybody that we will exercise freedom of navigation wherever international law will allow," Richardson said. "We do this all over the world. We're present in the South China Sea routinely."

Richardson declined to address any details on prospective operations, including whether the U.S. would communicate with any of the nations with territorial disputes in the area of its operations. Vietnam and

Taiwan also claim the Spratlys, and the Philippines and Malaysia hold claims on individual islands.

China has been most assertive in its claims. Since 2014, it has moved thousands of acres of fill on top of land features that formerly consisted of little more than rocks and reefs barely breaking the ocean surface, according to U.S. officials.

At least three Chinese-occupied Spratly reefs show partially or fully constructed runways long enough for military aircraft, according to satellite imagery. In May, Secretary of Defense Ash Carter said China had placed self-propelled artillery on at least one territory.

The U.S. maintains it takes no position on whether any nation owns the islands. However, U.S. leaders have emphasized that its ships should be able to undertake operations outside of any nation's territorial waters.

Richardson sees shorter sea stints, more Pacific ships

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Sailors can expect to spend shorter times at sea and see more ships forward deployed to the Pacific, the Navy's new chief of naval operations told an all-hands briefing Thursday.

Adm. John Richardson, who is visiting the region for the first time since his appointment last month, said the Navy is planning to cap all future deployments at seven months, with the new tempo fully in place after 2017.

The Navy has recently made changes to its Pacific forces, sending more ships to Yokosuka and replacing older vessels with newer or modernized ones as part of Washington's "Pacific pivot," which has a goal of sending 60 percent of the Navy assets to the region by 2020.

— Tyler Hlavac

Payment ordered in London Zoo fracas

LONDON — A former meerkat expert at London Zoo has been ordered to pay compensation to a monkey handler she attacked with a wine glass in a love spat over a llama-keeper.

A judge at Westminster Magistrates' Court said Wednesday that Caroline Westlake must pay \$1,235 to Kate Sanders for assaulting her in a dispute over colleague Adam Davies, who had dated both women.

Judge Jeremy Colman also sentenced Westlake, 30, to 12 months' community service for assault. The judge said Sanders had suffered a "nasty" face injury in the fracas at a zoo Christmas party on Dec. 8.

Westlake claimed that Sanders punched her first, and said she did not remember hitting her colleague with the glass. She was fired after the incident.

From The Associated Press

Navy tests new 'flight suit' coveralls at sea

BY STEVEN BEARDSLEY
Stars and Stripes

ABOARD THE USS CARNEY IN THE ATLANTIC OCEAN — Sorry, pilots, your flight suits may not be exclusive for much longer.

Crewmembers aboard this guided-missile destroyer are testing new flame-resistant "flyers coveralls" as part of a Navy trial of new working uniforms at sea. Although blue instead of green, they otherwise resemble the jumpsuits worn by aviators. As of last month, they were earning positive reviews.

"It's convenient because I got so many pockets," said Petty Officer 2nd Class Richard Woodland, eyeing the zippers across his chest, pants and back.

The Carney is the first of three ships performing a wear

test of two new sets of coveralls for the service's Fleet Forces Command in Norfolk, Va., an effort to find an alternative to the Navy's much-maligned first-generation flame-resistant coverall.

Ushered into the fleet last year after the service discovered its patterned working uniforms were highly flammable, the coveralls, known as FRVs, proved to be duds themselves.

The material wasn't breathable, sailors complained. It shrank in the wash, forcing sailors to constantly ask for new ones. And the material faded and wrinkled quickly.

"If you go out in the rain for 20 seconds in the old FRVs, you're not going to be able to wear those things again for at least another day," Carney Command Master Chief Jon Lonsdale said. "See how the

(air conditioning) is here? And down in the berthing, it's like an icebox. They just don't dry. Those kind of things in shipboard life can be problematic."

Yet fires at sea are a concern for warship crews, who operate in tight spaces with high-pressure machinery, fuels and explosive ordnance on board.

More than half of the Carney's crew is now testing the improved variants of the coveralls. Participants received two pairs each of the new styles, one a utility coverall that resembles the unisex first-generation coveralls, the other the flight suit, which comes in men's and women's versions. Both are made from synthetic fiber blends, not the chemically treated cotton of the first-generation coveralls, and they protect against arc flash hazards, according to the Navy.

Cueto's gem lifts Royals back to ALCS

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Johnny Cueto knew the Kansas City Royals had wagered much of their future on him, trading away a bevy of prospects in late July so that he could pitch in moments like this.

The decisive game of a playoff series, their season on the line.

He responded with a masterpiece on his biggest stage yet, eight dominant innings Wednesday night that allowed the resilient Royals to rally once more for a 7-2 victory over the Houston Astros that sent them back to the American League Championship Series.

"I woke up today on the right foot," Cueto said. "As soon as I woke up, I felt something magic, that this was Game 5 and I had to show up for everybody, for this team and the fans."

Cueto allowed two hits, a single by Evan Gattis followed by Luis Valbuena's second-inning homer, before retiring the final 19 batters he faced. He struck out eight without a walk in the kind of clutch performance the Royals expected when they got him from the Reds.

When Wade Davis breezed through the ninth, the Royals poured onto the field to celebrate.

"Johnny Cueto was unbelievable,"

Royals manager Ned Yost said. "He knew the magnitude of this game. I think we all did. And he came out from the first pitch and had everything going."

The defending AL champs will host the Toronto Blue Jays in Game 1 on Friday night. The teams have met once before in the ALCS with the Royals winning in seven games in 1985 — they would go on to beat the St. Louis Cardinals for their only World Series triumph.

"They're a great team," Davis said. "It'll be a fun series to watch."

The Royals trailed the Astros 2-1 in the fifth when Alex Rios led another comeback with a go-ahead, two-run double. Eric Hosmer and Ben Zobrist also drove in runs, and Kendrys Morales capped the festive night with a three-run homer off Dallas Keuchel in the eighth to put it away.

Collin McHugh (1-1), who won the divisional series opener for Houston, allowed three runs in four-plus innings. His bullpen fared little better just two days after it blew a four-run, eighth-inning lead to send the series back to Kauffman Stadium for Game 5.

"The good version of Johnny Cueto is really tough," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "Hats off to him. He pitched a great game. ... We didn't scratch much off

him."

Nothing, actually, after the second inning. And even that came thanks in part to a rare series of lapses by the Royals defense that briefly quieted a charged Kansas City crowd.

With two outs in the second, Gattis sent a slow hopper down the line that third baseman Mike Moustakas fielded cleanly. But with plenty of time, his throw across the infield went wide, and first baseman Hosmer had the ball pop from his glove trying to make a swipe tag.

On the next pitch, Valbuena sent his two-run homer streaking into the Astros bullpen.

It wasn't until the fourth that Kansas City got a run back, on back-to-back singles by Cain and Hosmer. But by the fifth, the Royals had figured out McHugh's darting curveball.

Salvador Perez was hit by a pitch, and Alex Gordon hit a ground-rule double to right. Hinch brought in Mike Fiers in relief, and Rios sent a double bouncing down the chalk of the third-base line, scoring two runs and giving the Royals the lead.

Following a sacrifice bunt, Zobrist's lazy sacrifice fly made it 4-2.

That was plenty of support for Cueto, who was acquired from the Reds for a package of left-handed prospects just

before the July 31 trade deadline precisely for moments like this.

Mixing quick-pitch fastballs with hesitation changeups, Cueto made the Astros look foolish most of the night. He jawed with Houston outfielder Carlos Gomez, strutted around like a Wild West gunfighter, and had the unmistakable swagger of an October ace.

After all, Cueto was finally proving that he was one.

"After the homer he settled in. He was able to use deception, quick-pitch, slow us down and disrupt our timing," Astros slugger George Springer said. "He's got electric stuff."

Cueto's star turn came after going 0-2 in his first four postseason starts, including a forgettable outing in Game 2 against Houston. He allowed four runs in six innings in that game, though Kansas City's offense and its stingy bullpen ultimately bailed him out.

There was no need for any help this time. Cueto was good enough on his own.

"Tonight was Cueto's night," Hinch said. "We didn't get a baserunner after the second, is that right? By my book. I thought the crowd got behind him, and he pitches with emotion. He rose to the occasion. This was his night."

Blue Jays top Rangers in wild Game 5

Associated Press

TORONTO — Jose Bautista wiped out the need for protests or umpire reviews with the Toronto Blue Jays' biggest home run since Joe Carter's historic shot.

Toronto earned its first trip to the American League Championship Series since Carter's World Series-ending drive in 1993, overcoming one of the craziest plays in playoff history when Bautista hit a three-run homer after three Texas Rangers errors for a 6-3 victory Wednesday in the deciding Game 5 of the Division Series.

"It's the most emotionally charged game that I've ever played," Bautista said.

The Blue Jays became the third team to win a best-of-five series after losing the first two games at home. The 2001 Yankees also did it against Oakland, and the 2012 Giants did it against Cincinnati. Both of those teams went on to reach the World Series.

"The odds were against us but I don't think these guys ever thought we were out of it," Blue Jays manager John Gibbons said.

Toronto, who led the majors in homers this season, will play the Royals, who beat Houston in Game 5 of their series, a rematch of the 1985 ALCS. Game 1 is Friday night in Kansas City.

"It doesn't really matter, we're just happy we're going to the next round," Blue Jays slugger Josh Donaldson said. "Whoever we play is a very, very good opponent."

Bautista's homer capped an event-filled, 53-minute seventh inning that

took a turn when Toronto catcher Russell Martin's seemingly routine throw back to the pitcher deflected off batter Shin-Soo Choo and allowed the tiebreaking run to score.

"That was crazy," Blue Jays starter Marcus Stroman said. "With all that happened, we did a good job of keeping our emotions in check."

The Blue Jays filed a protest after an umpire review ruled Rougned Odor was allowed to cross home plate. Toronto fans pelted the field with debris during the 18-minute delay.

No need for the paperwork, though. The Rangers started the bottom half by making errors on three straight groundballs, and Toronto rallied. Benches cleared twice in the Blue Jays' half of the inning.

Roberto Osuna got the final five outs for his first postseason save.

Osuna turned toward the outfield after striking out Wil Venable, looked to the sky and was mobbed by his teammates as jubilant fans rocked the Rogers Centre.

After Edwin Encarnacion tied it 2-all with a second-deck drive off tough-luck loser Cole Hamels in the sixth, Odor led off the seventh with a single and went to third on a sacrifice and groundout.

With Choo up, Martin's throw back to reliever Aaron Sanchez deflected off Choo and dribbled toward third base.

Home plate umpire Dale Scott initially ruled it a dead ball but, after Rangers manager Jeff Banister questioned the call, the umpires huddled and Odor was sent home. Martin was given an error.

"I just caught the ball and threw it back

very casually and it hit his bat and then next thing you know run scores," Martin said. "It's never happened in my life before. It's just one of those moments, and it created an opportunity for us to do something special."

Scott acknowledged making a mistake with his initial ruling.

"I was mixing up two rules," Scott said. "If there's no intent, if he's not out of the box, that throw is live."

Fans littered the field with objects during the delay as umpires sorted out a play that is certain to rank up there with Derek Jeter's Jeffrey Maier homer in 1996 or Reggie Jackson's hip block of a throw in the 1978 World Series as one of the craziest in the postseason.

"We went in the tunnel back there (behind the dugout) to get out of the way," Rangers pitcher Sam Dyson said of the barrage of bottles and other items.

According to rule Major League Baseball rule 6.03(a)(3), the batter is not to be charged with interfering with the catcher if the batter is still in the batter's box and doesn't make a movement to block or disrupt the throw.

This type of play is not subject to manager's review but Scott, the crew chief, after discussing the ruling with Blue Jays manager John Gibbons, called an umpire's review. After a delay of 2 minutes, 32 seconds, the play stood and fans continued to throw objects on the field.

The Blue Jays filed a protest.

The Rangers made three consecutive errors to start the bottom half, with Martin reaching on a fielding error by shortstop Elvis Andrus to start it off.

Kevin Pillar followed with a grounder to first, but Martin was safe at second on an errant throw by Mitch Moreland.

After Dalton Pompey pinch ran for Martin, Ryan Goins followed with a sacrifice bunt. Adrian Beltre fielded the ball and threw to third, but Andrus dropped the ball for his second error of the inning, loading the bases for Ben Revere.

"This is the toughest moment of my career so far," Andrus said. "I feel like I let down my team and my city."

Revere grounded into a fielder's choice, with Moreland throwing Pompey out at the plate.

After Sam Dyson relieved Hamels, Donaldson tied it at 3 with a flare just beyond the reach of Odor at second, but Revere was forced out.

Bautista followed with a towering drive into the second deck, glaring at Dyson as he stood at home plate to admire his go-ahead drive, enthusiastically flipping his bat away.

"He's been known to hit dramatic home runs and there ain't a better time," Gibbons said. "This is his first opportunity on a national stage and he rose to the occasion."

With some fans continuing to litter the field, Encarnacion turned to face the crowd and appealed for calm, lifting his bat and helmet over his head. Dyson took exception and walked over to confront Encarnacion, leading to both dugouts and both bullpens emptying.

"I told him Jose needs to calm that down, respect the game a little more," Dyson said.



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Ravens' leaky defense defies franchise's tradition

Associated Press

OWINGS MILLS, Md. — The Baltimore Ravens have long been known for their rugged, stingy defense.

That reputation has been soiled this season by a unit that would make Ray Lewis cringe.

The Ravens rank 24th overall in total defense, are yielding an average of 27.4 points per game and have allowed the opposition to convert nearly half its third-down plays. In a 33-30 loss to Cleveland last Sunday, Josh McCown threw for 457 yards and the Browns racked up 505 yards of offense.

Thus, the Ravens (1-4) are off to the worst start in franchise history.

Baltimore won two Super Bowls behind a defense that featured Lewis clogging the middle and Ed Reed keeping tabs on the back end. From 1999 through 2011, the Ravens finished in the top 10 in defense every year but one.

The cast of characters has changed, and so have the results. Lewis and Reed retired, 350-pound tackle Haloti Ngata was traded to Detroit in March and sack-specialist Terrell Suggs is lost for the season with a torn Achilles tendon.

Those who remain are intent upon up-

holding a standard that has carried this team for two decades.

"Ray Lewis, Ed Reed, Terrell Suggs, those guys are remarkable players that set up our organization's tradition," cornerback Jimmy Smith said Wednesday.

"It's huge for us to keep that alive and keep it going. They taught us a lot before they left — how to prepare and all that — and that's something I have to relate to the younger guys to keep that tradition alive here."

The Ravens defense has a reputation for being physical, brash and in-your-face nasty. This season's version has displayed none of that.

"We have to play with more aggressiveness, play with more confidence," coach John Harbaugh said. "Play it. Go cover people. Go attack the quarterback."

Middle linebacker Daryl Smith left Jacksonville after nine seasons in 2013 to join the Ravens because he wanted to carry on a defensive tradition that was well known around the league. Smith led the team with 123 tackles in his first season in Baltimore, had 127 last season and leads the club with 46 this season.

He derives little satisfaction from those numbers because this defense is not as it once was.

"It feels terrible," Smith said. "Everything

this franchise has done in the past, we don't want to be the guys to offset that. So we've got to find our way, and I believe we will."

Defensive coordinator Dean Pees is trying to do his best, but it's obviously been a struggle. Heck, even Oakland's Derek Carr threw for 351 yards and three touchdowns against this bunch.

"We have success a high percentage of the time, but then we give up big plays," Harbaugh said.

Penalties have hurt, too. The Ravens were flagged 12 times Sunday, twice lining up offside during a fourth-quarter touchdown drive that put Cleveland in front.

The problems are so vast, it's impossible to focus on just one.

"It's quite a few things," Smith said. "We're searching for it, and hopefully we find the answer this week."

Baltimore faces San Francisco on Sunday. It's being billed as a Super Bowl rematch from February 2013, but both teams are 1-4.

"It's unfortunate that we're both in the same situation right now," quarterback Joe Flacco said, "because we feel as though we have a better team. I'm sure they feel the same way."

NASCAR adopts new rules package for 2016

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — NASCAR's ever-changing plans to design a rules package that improves the racing has finally landed on the configuration the drivers desperately wanted.

NASCAR said Wednesday it will use a base package that features a lower-downforce configuration in 2016. The package was used this summer at Darlington and Kentucky and received rave reviews from the competitors.

NASCAR said before the start of the season it had hoped to have a rules package determined early in the year that could be tested at the All-Star race at Charlotte Motor Speedway in May. The sanctioning body then backed away from that plan and indicated the 2016 rules would likely be very similar to this year's package.

But drivers were vocal in their disdain for the 2015 rules because of a difficulty to pass on the track. They began to push publicly for a package that decreased downforce and made the cars more difficult to drive; that forces the drivers to up their game, leading to more competitive racing.

Seahawks' Coleman arrested in hit-and-run

BELLEVUE, Wash. — Seattle Seahawks fullback Derrick Coleman has been arrested and is under investigation of vehicular assault and felony hit-and-run. The team said he has been suspended indefinitely pending further information.

According to jail records, Coleman was booked into King County Jail in Seattle early Thursday and bail was denied. He was arrested by Bellevue police but details were not immediately available.

Coleman is in his fourth season with the Seahawks. He spent the 2012 season on the practice squad before making the 53-man roster in 2013.

Bouchard sues USTA over fall at US Open

NEW YORK — Tennis star Eugenie Bouchard filed a lawsuit Wednesday against the United States Tennis Association that alleges the sport's national governing body was negligent, leaving her to slip and fall in a locker room during the U.S. Open.

Bouchard has suffered severe pain and economic loss after the Sept. 4 incident, she said in the federal lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court in Brooklyn that seeks unspecified monetary damages.

The fall left the 21-year-old Bouchard with a concussion and "serious head injury." She later withdrew from the U.S. Open and tournaments in China and Japan.

The Associated Press

Young A&M QB ready for 'Bama

Associated Press

COLLEGE STATION, Texas — Kyle Allen is still a teenager. However, the second-year quarterback with No. 9 Texas A&M doesn't feel like one heading into the game against No. 10 Alabama.

"I feel a lot older than 19 right now," said Allen, shaking his head.

The sophomore might feel that way because he's been on campus since age 17 and will make his 11th career start on Saturday.

"I felt old when I came here when I was 17, when I was stressed out with college when my friends were at prom," he said.

Receiver Josh Reynolds laughed when asked if it's funny to think that Allen still hasn't reached his 20s.

"Yeah, I forget he's on 19 sometimes, too," Reynolds said. "It's always good to have a young quarterback that's as confident as him. That's what we need with this big game coming up. It's always good to have him in the pocket relaxed."

Allen didn't start against the Crimson Tide last season, but took over a week later after Kenny Hill was benched following the embarrassing 59-0 loss by A&M. He came in late in the fourth quarter of the blowout loss and prefers to forget the results of his brief work.

"I think my first snap was right over my head into the end zone," he said. "So I'm hoping it's going to be a little different this year."

Though that game was one that Aggies would prefer to forget, the previous two

meetings with Alabama helped Allen shape his ideas about the school and its football program.

Johnny Manziel boosted his stock as a Heisman Trophy winner when he led Texas A&M to a 29-24 win over top-ranked Alabama in 2012 in Tuscaloosa, Ala.

"I think it changed a lot of people's mind on A&M in general," Allen said of that game. "I think everyone thought A&M was a good team in the SEC, but being able to beat a No. 1 opponent on the 2:30 CBS game is huge. And I think that is what really put A&M on the map and has kept us on the map."

This time it's Allen who will be at the center of things when the Aggies try to keep their record unblemished.

Neuvirth, Flyers shut down Blackhawks

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Michal Neuvirth stopped 30 shots in his second straight shutout, leading the Philadelphia Flyers to a 3-0 win over the Chicago Blackhawks on Wednesday night.

Sam Gagner, Claude Giroux and Matt Read scored to lead the Flyers to their 12th straight regular-season home victory over Chicago. The Flyers have not lost to the Blackhawks in Philly during the regular season since Nov. 9, 1996.

The Blackhawks beat the Flyers in the 2010 Stanley Cup Final and clinched with a Game 6 win in Philly.

Filling in for Steve Mason, Neuvirth was sensational in his ninth career shutout. Mason missed a second straight game because of unspecified family reasons and there was no word when he would return.

Neuvirth had 31 saves in a 1-0 win over Florida on Monday for his first shutout since 2012.

Giroux punched in a rebound for his first goal of the season in his 500th career NHL game.

Read scored his second goal of the season in the final minutes to secure the win.

Coyotes 4, Ducks 0: Anthony Duclair

scored the game's first two goals en route to his first career hat trick and Mike Smith made 37 saves for his 28th career shutout to lead visiting Arizona.

Rookie Max Domi had a goal and an assist and Martin Hanzal had three assists for the Coyotes, who are off to a 3-0 start for the first time since 2003-04.

Bruins 6, Avalanche 2: Jimmy Hayes had a goal and three assists, Jonas Gustavsson stopped 20 shots and visiting Boston avoided its worst start in more than 50 years.

The Bruins raced out to a 5-0 lead by the second period and cruised from there to end a three-game slide.

Kevan Miller and Hayes scored 2:22 apart in the first period, with Tyler Randell, Chris Kelly and Ryan Spooner scoring in the second.

Senators 7, Blue Jackets 3: Bobby Ryan and Mika Zibanejad each had a goal and two assists, Erik Karlsson added a career-high four assists, and visiting Ottawa improved to 3-0-0 on the road for the first time since the start of the 2007-08 season.

Kyle Turris had a goal and an assist, and Marc Methot, Milan Michalek, Jean-Gabriel Pageau and Mike Hoffman also scored for the Senators. Craig Anderson made 37 saves.