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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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A new age of brutality in Afghanistan

Islamic State's harsh rule makes some long for days of the Taliban

The Washington Post

SAR SHAHI, Afghanistan — When Islamic State fighters seized the Mahmand Valley, they poured pepper into the wounds of their enemies, said villagers. Then, they seared their hands in vats of boiling oil. A group of villagers was blindfolded, tortured and blown apart with explosives buried underneath them.

“They pulled out my brother’s teeth before they forced him to sit on the bombs,” recalled Malik Namos, a tribal elder who escaped the valley along with thousands of other villagers. “They are more vicious than the Taliban, than any group we have seen.”

At war for more than three decades, Afghans are familiar with violence perpetrated by a raft of armies and militias. But even by their jaded standards, the emergence here of the Islamic State group has ushered in a new age of brutality.

The radical group adds a fresh dimension to the contest for Afghanistan’s future, a key reason why President Barack Obama is considering a plan to keep as many as 5,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan past next year. Their decrees threaten in some areas to reverse U.S.-funded gains in education and women’s rights. And they have made the Taliban, who have also committed atrocities, an appealing alternative in ungoverned regions.

A rare portrait of the group’s rise and of life inside its domain emerged from traveling in Nangahar province, and in interviews with local officials, tribal elders and more than two dozen villagers who fled areas under the militants’ control. They had found themselves trapped in a fierce new battle for power and

territory between Islamic State fighters and the Taliban — with U.S. warplanes bombing both sides — that ended in victory that day for Afghanistan’s latest tormentors.

The majority of fighters are disaffected Afghan and Pakistani Taliban, their desertions fueled partly by the revelation this summer that their one-eyed supreme leader, Mohammad Omar, had been dead for more than two years.

‘A new drama’

Unlike the conflict in Syria and Iraq, which straddles Sunni-Shiite fault lines, in Afghanistan both victims and attackers are typically Sunni Muslims from the same ethnic Pashtun tribes. The struggle in Nangahar is as much for control of the lucrative narcotics trade as it is for religious and regional influence, according to officials from the United Nations.

“In our areas, the time of the Taliban is now over,” declared Ahmad Ali Hazrat, a lawmaker in Jalalabad, the provincial capital — a dusty city where Osama bin Laden first lived when he arrived in Afghanistan in 1996. “We are in a new drama.”

Since the withdrawal of most U.S. and international troops in December, the Islamic State group has steadily made inroads in Afghanistan. A report last month from the United Nations’ al-Qaida/Taliban Monitoring Team found that the group — also known by its Arabic acronym Daesh — has a growing number of sympathizers and was recruiting followers in 25 of the nation’s 34 provinces.

Even so, conversations with villagers, as well as with Afghan officials and elders, suggest that the group’s extremist ideology

does not have strong support among most Afghans.

In Nangahar, on the Pakistani border, the militants have gained the largest foothold, with a significant presence in more than a quarter of the districts of the province.

Since late July, tens of thousands have fled the region on foot. Many come to Sar Shahi, a hamlet roughly 20 miles east of Jalalabad, where they have squatted in unfinished houses or in the craggy yards of friendly residents.

How their valley died

On a recent day, as a gentle breeze blew through the hulk of a half-constructed dwelling, the villagers clamored to tell an outsider of how their valley died.

In the summer of 2014, about 100 fighters from the Pakistani Taliban arrived from across the border. They were fleeing an offensive by the Pakistani military to flush out insurgents and soon joined forces with a faction of the Afghan Taliban, ethnic Pashtuns like themselves.

“We gave them sanctuary,” said Omar Jan, an elderly laborer. “We gave them houses to live. We gave them the land.”

It was an opportune time for a militia to emerge. A new U.S.-backed power-sharing government was paralyzed by infighting. Overstretched Afghan security forces were preoccupied fighting a resurgent Taliban. The Taliban itself was in the midst of an internal factional struggle.

Pakistan, too, was under pressure from the United States to tackle the Taliban insurgents it had long supported and permitted to build havens on its soil. That had the unexpected consequence of pushing more hard-

line militants across the border into Afghanistan.

In January, the Islamic State group’s leaders in Syria announced the creation of their “Khorasan” branch, using an ancient term for an area that includes Afghanistan and Pakistan. By the spring, reports of Taliban defections and Islamic State recruitment surfaced. At first, the visitors and local Taliban remained allies.

“For almost one year, they were friends,” recalled Zirak, another villager. “They were walking with each other.”

By this summer, though, there were hints of a transformation. At mosques, villagers noticed that the Pakistanis and some Afghan allies had adopted the austere Wahhabi branch of Sunni Islam, though the vast majority of Sunni Afghans practice the moderate Hanafi strain.

“They were telling everyone they were better Muslims than us,” said Nazar, 38, a laborer who, like many Afghans, uses only one name.

In July, clashes erupted after the Afghan Taliban raided the homes of the Pakistanis and found a large cache of weapons. On that day, the visitors — who now included dozens of defectors from the Afghan Taliban — put aside their white Taliban flags and raised the black flag of the Islamic State.

“That’s when we understood they had become Daesh,” said Rostam Sayeed, 20, also a laborer.

The Taliban and the Islamic State militants fought fiercely for control of the valley. As many as 25 civilians, including children, were killed.

“The bullets were coming and going from both sides,” said Zirak. “All we could do was lie on the floor and pray.”

Flaw in F-35 ejector seats poses fatal risk to pilots

CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — Nearly 1 in 3 pilots who will fly the F-35, the military's \$159 million fighter jet of the future, runs a heightened risk of fatal whiplash during an emergency ejection, according to defense officials and internal documents obtained by CQ.

What's more, the Pentagon lacks information to assess the safety of a substantial portion of its remaining pilots.

The Defense Department has acknowledged this risk to its lightest-weight pilots. But those who are closer to average weight are also potentially in danger, according to the documents and experts.

This is just the latest of many afflictions to beset the program to acquire 2,457 F-35s for nearly \$400 billion, plus about \$1 trillion to operate them — the most expensive military initiative in history. Fourteen years into its development, the F-35 program is seven years behind schedule, the cost per plane has roughly doubled and the jets are still plagued by everything from engine fires to structural cracks to software glitches.

An ejection from any fighter jet in flight is a violent, if relatively rare, event. It is also inherently risky. But the ejection seat in the F-35 jet makes it more dangerous than it needs to be, some officials say.

During an ejection from the F-35, the canopy over the pilot is deliberately shattered by an

explosive charge. Then the entire seat is blasted skyward with tremendous force. Mannequin tests this summer showed that the lightest F-35 pilots, in particular, are more likely to be rotated into a position where they face all but certain death or serious injury from the parachute rocketing into their heads — at least in cases when the plane is flying low and relatively slowly.

This is “potentially fatal whiplash,” said Air Force Lt. Gen. Christopher Bogdan, the manager of the F-35 program, in a previously undisclosed summary of the problem written last month.

According to the September documents from the jet program, for F-35 pilots weighing 135 pounds or less, there is a 98 percent “probability of fatal injury” during ejections from the jet at 160 knots, a typical speed at takeoff or landing.

Martin-Baker, the ejection seat manufacturer, did not return emails requesting comment. A Lockheed Martin spokesman said the F-35 program office is answering queries about the ejection seat.

The F-35 office did not reply to a series of detailed questions but provided a statement. “The safety of our pilots is paramount and the F-35 Joint Program Office, Lockheed Martin and Martin-Baker, continue to work this issue with the US Services and International Partners to reach a solution as quickly as possible,” said Joe DellaVedova, the F-35 program spokesman.

Hacker charged with stealing troops' data

The Justice Department has charged a hacker in Malaysia with stealing the personal data of U.S. servicemembers and passing it to the Islamic State terrorist group, which urged supporters online to attack them.

Ardit Ferizi, a citizen of Kosovo, was detained in Malaysia on a U.S. provisional

arrest warrant, officials said. He was arrested a month ago, according to Malaysian news media.

Ferizi is accused of passing the data to Islamic State member Junaid Hussain, a British citizen who in August posted links on Twitter to the names, email addresses, passwords, locations and phone numbers of 1,351 U.S. military and other government personnel.

From The Washington Post

Accused VA exec to head Phoenix facility

By **TRAVIS J. TRITTEN**
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A Department of Veterans Affairs executive accused of giving false testimony about patient wait times to Congress will oversee the agency's Phoenix hospital system — the epicenter of its nationwide scandal, the agency confirmed Friday.

Skye McDougall, the acting director of the VA's Desert Pacific Healthcare Network, is tapped to be director of hospitals providing veteran care in Arizona, New Mexico and half of Texas beginning in November, said James Hutton, an agency spokesman.

In sworn testimony to the House in February, McDougall said patients at Los Angeles VA hospitals had a four-day wait for appointments on average, despite a follow-up investigation by CNN that found it was about 48 days.

She will be responsible for shepherding Phoenix and other regional hospitals through a historic realignment ordered by VA Secretary Bob McDonald, who was appointed in 2014 to fix the agency after revelations it was hiding long and potentially

dangerous patient wait times in Arizona and elsewhere.

“As the network director for (Veterans Integrated Service Network) 18, Dr. McDougall will ensure that each facility maintains continuity of operations and implements critical improvements to the delivery of care to veterans,” the VA said in a statement to Stars and Stripes.

The nationwide realignment of the hospital system, unveiled last winter, will eventually eliminate the 18th service network and the rest of the 23 VISNs, replacing them with a simplified system of five geographic regions. It is expected to ramp up over the coming year and be completed within two years, the VA said.

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., sent a letter to McDonald on Thursday, saying he was “extremely concerned” by the selection of McDougall to oversee hospitals in his state and asked the agency to reconsider. “I believe that this selection does nothing to regain veterans' confidence that the VA has been reformed. ...” McCain wrote.

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Cybersecurity fears spur sailors to navigate by stars

The Washington Post

Steering a ship by the stars fell out of favor with the rise of radio-wave and GPS navigation. In fact, the U.S. Naval Academy stopped teaching the skill nearly 20 years ago.

But now this ancient navigation method is making a comeback at the Annapolis, Md., school thanks to cybersecurity fears, according to the Capital Gazette.

“We went away from celestial navigation because comput-

ers are great,” Lt. Cmdr. Ryan Rogers, the deputy chairman of the academy's Department of Seamanship and Navigation, told the Gazette. “The problem is, there's no backup.”

After the Naval Academy cut celestial navigation training, the practice began to peter out. It ended for the Navy at large in 2006, but was brought back for ship navigation officers in 2011. The Navy is now rebuilding a program for all enlisted ranks, the Gazette reported.

Mets edge Dodgers in Game 5

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Two teams with plenty of history, just none against each other in the postseason, will decide who represents the National League in the World Series.

Faced with a winner-take-all scenario against the Los Angeles Dodgers on Thursday night, the New York Mets made the long trip back to California worth it and came through with a gritty 3-2 victory in Game 5 of the division series.

"We're going to enjoy this now and start thinking about the Cubs tomorrow," a bubbly-soaked David Wright said after the Mets celebrated in the Dodger Stadium clubhouse for the first time since the 2006 NLDS.

Now they face the Chicago Cubs in the best-of-seven NLCS that starts in New York on Saturday. Lefty Jon Lester is set to start Game 1 for the Cubs, likely facing New York's Matt Harvey. The Mets will be looking to reach the World Series for the first time since 2000.

"We've got a lot more to accomplish. Hopefully, we can do this two more times," outfielder Michael Cuddyer said. "We're going to enjoy this now, but we know we've still got a tough Cubs team

that we're going to have to play and it's going to be a hard-fought series. They're a good team and they're playing really well."

Game 5 hero Daniel Murphy became only the second batter to homer off Dodgers aces Clayton Kershaw and Zack Greinke this season, joining Kole Calhoun of the Angels.

"We earned it," Cuddyer said.

Murphy's homer off Greinke in the sixth inning Thursday night gave the Mets the 3-2 lead.

"The Dodgers had the home-field advantage with Kershaw and Greinke pitching four times in a best-of-five series. That's about as challenging as it gets," Wright said. "I can't think of another team that has that type of 1-2, and we happened to win two games against those guys. That's an incredible feat, and we should be proud of that."

Murphy had a hit in each of the five division series games, including a 3-for-4 effort in the clincher, and he finished the series 7-for-21 with a double, three homers and five RBIs.

"He's about as locked in as I've ever seen him," Wright said. "I mean, to be able to have this type of series and have those kind of at-bats against that pitching staff

shows you how well he's seeing the ball and how dangerous he can be."

Jacob deGrom, who won a 3-1 duel against Kershaw in Game 1 and tied Tom Seaver's franchise record for strikeouts in a postseason game with 13, yielded two runs and six hits in six innings and fanned seven in Game 5. He stranded a runner in scoring position in each of the first five innings.

DeGrom was 2-0 with a 1.38 ERA in two starts against the Dodgers in the series, and struck out 20 while walking four.

Noah Syndergaard, who lost to Greinke in Game 2, relieved deGrom and pitched a hitless seventh before Jeurys Familia posted the first six-out save of his career.

"It was just an incredible job by this team," Wright said. "It seemed like down the stretch in September and October, somebody stepped up for this team every day — a new guy."

"Tonight was no different — Daniel Murphy stepping it up. DeGrom not having his best stuff but finding a way to win. Jeurys Familia coming in to get a six-out save. Syndergaard coming in out of the bullpen. I mean, this team understands that on any given day, somebody can step in and be that guy."

Bat flips prevalent in playoffs

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Anthony Rizzo was waiting for his turn for batting practice when he mimicked a big swing, and then flung his bat into the top of the cage and glared out at the field.

Oh yes, the Chicago Cubs were watching when Toronto slugger Jose Bautista unleashed his epic bat flip, and it was met with mischievous grins in the home clubhouse at Wrigley Field. For fans of celebratory flying lumber, this has been quite the postseason.

Asked Thursday about Bautista's memorable display, Cubs rookie Kyle Schwarber chuckled and said, "I thought it was awesome."

The playoffs are in full swing, and baseball's long-running debate about the appropriate amount of on-field celebration is jogging alongside the postseason like an intriguing subplot of a best-selling novel. As the bat flips go higher and higher into the air, the conversations pick up in frequency.

When it comes to how much is too much, it seems as if a new generation of ballplayer is moving the needle toward time, place and circumstances rather than the practically outright prohibition of the past. And of course, the winners seem a lot more tolerant than the losing players.

"I don't know how long it's been going on. But it's kind of taken over baseball now," Toronto manager John Gibbons said.

The Blue Jays and Rangers were tied at 3 in Game 5 of their AL Division Series when Bautista crushed a three-run homer to left with two out in the seventh inning. After taking a quick look at where the drive was going, he tossed his bat off to the side as if he was angry that the ball wasn't traveling with even more velocity.

"I can't really remember what was going through my mind, to be quite honest with you," Bautista said. "After I made contact, I just, you know, I didn't plan anything that I did and so I still don't even know how I did it. I just enjoyed the moment, rounded the bases and got to the dugout."

Video of Bautista's moment Wednesday night spread quickly on social media, and Major League Baseball fanned the flames by tweeting the clip several times from its main account. But Sam Dyson, who gave up the homer, said Bautista needs to "respect the game a little more," and Rangers ace Cole Hamels also was critical of the display.

Elsewhere, it seemed as if many players felt the situation justified the celebration. The home run was the big blow in a crazy game that put Toronto in the AL Championship Series for the first time since it won the title in 1993.

"It's a really exciting moment," Cubs infielder Starlin Castro said Thursday. "I think every time you go up to the plate, you hit the ball hard and far, I think that the emotion will make you do something that sometime you don't even understand."

Fantasy sports sites shut down in Nevada

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Daily fantasy sports sites have been dealt a setback with Nevada regulators ordering them out of the state unless they get a gambling license — a decision that's likely to be closely watched by other states that allow gambling.

DraftKings and FanDuel — sites that have insisted they aren't gambling and have promised to make millionaires out of sports fans — both pulled out of Nevada by Thursday evening.

That day's decision from the Nevada Gaming Control Board allows for daily fantasy sports in the state as long as the operator has or gets a gambling license. No one operating a daily fantasy site has one.

"If you're licensed in Nevada, you're good to go," said A.G. Burnett, chief of the state's Gaming Control Board. That includes traditional sports books where gamblers generally wager on the outcome of a given game.

The decision comes amid growing backlash by regulators and investigators, including New York's attorney general, after it was revealed employees often played on competing sites, raising questions about possible insider information being used to win.

Nevada regulators govern the country's main gambling hub in Las Vegas, and their actions could hold sway with regulators elsewhere.

In less than two weeks, the two high-profile companies in the ever-growing industry had gone from being a seemingly unstoppable, untouchable force to facing intense scrutiny of their business practices and legality from investigators, lawmakers, regulators and even their own players.

Thursday night, DraftKings spokeswoman Sabrina Macias emailed a company state-

ment that implied Nevada regulators acted to protect the gambling industry in the state.

"We understand that the gaming industry is important to Nevada and, for that reason, they are taking this exclusionary approach against the increasingly popular fantasy sports industry," the statement said. It mentions the company had thousands of customers in Nevada but didn't provide an exact amount.

FanDuel said it was disappointed regulators decided that only existing casinos in Nevada could offer fantasy sports.

"This decision stymies innovation and ignores the fact that fantasy sports is a skill-based entertainment product loved and played by millions of sports fans," the statement said. "We are examining all options and will exhaust all efforts to bring the fun, challenge and excitement of fantasy sports back to our Nevada fans."

Participants on the unregulated sites can compete in games involving professional or college sports, paying an entry fee that goes into a larger pool. They try to assemble teams that earn the most points based on real-life stats in a given period with a certain percentage of top finishers earning a payout.

Entry fees on DraftKings range from 25 cents to more than \$5,000. Some prizes top \$1 million.

The Nevada Gaming Control Board determined that daily fantasy sports, "involves wagering on the collective performance of individuals participating in sporting events," making it a sports pool and requiring a gambling license in the state.

The decision didn't appear to affect season-long fantasy sports but the definition could be used to describe those sites, too, that accept wagers or fees to play.

Fantasy sports, both daily and season-long, are barred in five states: Arizona, Iowa, Louisiana, Montana, Vermont and Washington.

The fantasy sports industry has argued the sites provide games of skill and not chance and are therefore protected by the 2006 Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act, which carved out a specific exemption allowing fantasy sports.

The distinction has been an important one for the industry, which has dodged the type of regulation that governs traditional casinos and sports books. Avoiding being labeled "gambling" also has made the contests palatable to professional sports leagues that have partnered with the sites or, in some cases, invested directly.

Seth Young, chief operating officer of the much smaller site Star Fantasy Leagues, said he took it a step further than most, commissioning the same lab that tests casino slot machines to determine if the site's games were skill-based. Young said the tests confirmed it, but "it doesn't mean we can disrespect state laws." He noted his company pulled out of 10 states before Thursday, to stay on the right side of the law. His site pulled the plug in Nevada, too.

"We saw regulation on the horizon," he said, adding he hopes to return.

Daniel Wallach, a sports law expert from Florida, said the board's decision is not going to "cause an extinction of fantasy sports from Nevada, forevermore." But it confirmed what Wallach and other observers familiar with the gambling industry have long contended.

"Fantasy is a form of gambling that should be licensed just like sports betting, just like any other form of gambling," he said.



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Saints serve Falcons 1st loss

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — The memory of Steve Gleason's blocked punt against Atlanta in 2006, and the emotional, spine-tingling, ear-splitting, drink-spilling pandemonium that accompanied it, has always been a special and personal one for current Saints linebacker Michael Mauti.

Mauti was a New Orleans-area high school football player and part of the crowd that jammed the Superdome for its reopening after Hurricane Katrina, and he'd celebrated the Saints' victory over the rival Falcons that night.

A decade later, with Gleason watching from the sideline, Mauti blocked a punt against — of all teams — Atlanta, then scooped it up and scored to help the recently reeling Saints rebound with a 31-21 upset of the previously unbeaten Falcons on Thursday night.

"I was a fan of Steve Gleason. He's a special-teams guy, and my dad played special teams," Mauti said, referring to his father, Rich, who also played for the Saints. "To do this is a dream come true. I'm going to meet (Gleason) as soon as I can. He's one of my heroes."

Gleason, now paralyzed by ALS, but world-renowned for the way he lives with his condition and his efforts to improve

the lives of those similarly afflicted, was watching from his motorized, computer-equipped wheelchair. He reacted to Mauti's big play with this Twitter post: "Hey, Falcons. #NeverPunt."

"The cool thing was that Steve was here to see that," said Saints quarterback Drew Brees, who was Gleason's teammate and remains his good friend. "It brought back some good memories. Obviously we got to add to that tonight as well."

Mark Ingram scored on a pair of short runs for the Saints, and Watson added a fourth-down touchdown catch.

The Falcons (5-1) were left to wonder why their punt protection broke down against New Orleans (2-4) when such plays seemed routine in their five previous games.

"The mistakes were ones we executed before, so why did they come up tonight?" said first-year Falcons coach Dan Quinn, speaking for the first time after a loss. "For us to have those come up tonight is hard. I'm going to give a lot of credit to New Orleans, just in terms of the effort they played with. We knew it would be a battle."

Some things we learned from the Saints' surprising triumph over rival Atlanta:

Better Brees: There have been questions about the extent to which a Week

2 throwing shoulder injury to Brees was affecting his performance. His efficiency against the Falcons — 30 of 39 for 312 yards, one TD and no interceptions — should quiet such talk going forward, particularly with the Saints having about 10 days until their next game at Indianapolis. Brees summed up the performance of the Saints' offense as "validation," adding, "For it all to come together like that, it just gives us a glimpse of what we can be."

Freeman's form: Second-year running back Devonta Freeman once again turned in a solid performance. He gained 100 yards on the ground, highlighted by his 25-yard TD early in the fourth quarter. He also finished with a team-high eight catches for 56 yards, including a 13-yard touchdown.

Big Ben: Tight end Ben Watson, now more active in the passing game since Jimmy Graham was traded away, gained a career-high 127 yards receiving while tying a career-high with 10 catches. The 12th-year veteran also had a touchdown catch on a fourth-and-goal play late in the third quarter. "Either his number was called or he was just getting open," Brees said of Watson. "He was getting some opportunities and, man, he made the most of it."

Malkin ends drought, leads Pens by Senators

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Evgeni Malkin scored his first goal in nearly seven months and Marc-Andre Fleury stopped 22 shots for his 39th career shutout as the Pittsburgh Penguins beat the Ottawa Senators 2-0 on Thursday night.

Rookie Daniel Sprong picked up the first goal of his career for Pittsburgh, which won for the first time this season.

Craig Anderson made 34 saves for Ottawa but the Senators failed to muster significant momentum a night after dropping seven goals on Columbus. Ottawa went 0-for-3 on the power play and rarely tested Fleury over the final two periods as the Senators lost on the road for the first time in four tries.

Islanders 4, Predators 3: John Tavares and Nikolay Kulemin scored in the third period and host New York handed Nashville its first loss of the season.

Anders Lee and Kyle Okposo scored in the second period to tie the score for the Islanders after they fell behind by two, and Thomas Greiss finished with 44 saves. Tavares and Lee also had an assist and Mikhail Grabovski added two as New York won its second straight and improved to 2-0-1 in its new Brooklyn home.

Capitals 4, Blackhawks 1: Braden Holtby stopped 26 shots, Alex Ovechkin scored a goal in his return to the lineup and host Washington beat punchless Chicago.

John Carlson, T.J. Oshie and Matt Niskanen also scored for the Capitals, who welcomed back Ovechkin following a one-game disciplinary absence.

Stars 5, Lightning 3: Jason Spezza scored a momentum-shifting goal in the third period and had an assist to lead visiting Dallas.

Tyler Seguin, Jamie Benn, Cody Eakin and Jason Demers also scored for the Stars.

Steven Stamkos had two goals and an assist, and Vladislav Namestnikov also scored for the Lightning.

Panthers 3, Sabres 2: Jaromir Jagr scored twice in the first period and added an assist to lead host Florida.

The 43-year-old Jagr stayed hot with his third and fourth goals of the season and continues to climb the all-time leader board in scoring. Linemate Aleksander Barkov had a goal and an assist.

Canadiens 3, Rangers 0: Carey Price made 25 saves and host Montreal made franchise history by starting a season with a fifth straight win.

Tomas Fleischmann, Dale Weise and Tomas Plekanec, with an empty-net effort, scored for as the Canadiens handed the Rangers (3-2-0) their second straight defeat.

Blues 4, Oilers 2: Paul Stastny and Alexander Steen scored in the third period to help St. Louis spoil winless Edmonton's home opener.

Jori Lehtera and Vladimir Tarasenko also scored for the Blues, who beat Edmonton for the eighth straight time. Stastny, Steen and Lehtera also each had an assist, and Brian Elliott stopped 24 shots.

Wild 4, Coyotes 3: Zach Parise had a goal and an assist, and visiting Minnesota remained undefeated by holding off previously unbeaten Arizona.

The Wild had fresh legs after a four-day layoff between games, jumping on the tired Coyotes for a 3-0 lead.

No. 15 Stanford tops No. 18 UCLA

Associated Press

STANFORD, Calif. — One jaw-dropping catch by Francis Owusu nearly overshadowed a record-setting performance from Christian McCaffrey.

Owusu pinned the ball on the back of a defender in the end zone for one of the most memorable catches in recent memory and McCaffrey did most of the rest with a school-record 243 yards rushing and four touchdowns in No. 15 Stanford's 56-35 victory over No. 18 UCLA on Thursday night.

"That's one of the most amazing things I've ever seen," McCaffrey said.

He was talking about Owusu's catch but others could have said it about McCaffrey's own performance. He scored on a 70-yard run out of the wildcat, returned a kick 96 yards to set up another score and ran for three more touchdowns in a virtuoso performance that broke Toby Gerhart's school record of 223 yards rushing in a game set in 2009.

McCaffrey finished with 369 all-purpose yards as the Cardinal (5-1, 4-0 Pac-12) beat the Bruins (4-2, 1-2) for the eighth straight time.

Yet for all the accolades McCaffrey earned in this game, the lasting memory was provided by Owusu on his 41-yard TD catch.

It started with McCaffrey taking a direct snap in the wildcat and handing to Bryce Love on a jet sweep. Love then flipped the ball to quarterback Kevin Hogan, who had lined up as a receiver. Hogan set himself in the backfield and threw deep to Owusu.

Despite being interfered with by a face-guarding Jaleel Wadood in the end zone, Owusu still managed to trap the ball against Wadood's back while not even being able to see it. Owusu managed to keep his hand on the ball to maintain control as the two fell to the ground.

"I saw it for a little bit and then from there I felt the ball after that," Owusu said. "I didn't really see it and squeezed as hard as I could when I felt it."

Shaw had already assumed it would be incomplete and was looking at his chart for the next play when he was told Owusu made the catch. The usually stoic Shaw

then cracked a smile on the sideline.

"I can't describe that catch," Shaw said. "I don't understand what happened to be honest."

Hogan threw for 131 yards and three TDs on eight completions and McCaffrey took over the national lead in all-purpose yards with 1,518 for the Cardinal, who have scored 225 points the past five games after being kept out of the end zone in a season-opening 16-6 loss at Northwestern.

Josh Rosen threw for 325 yards and three touchdowns. Paul Perkins ran for 104 and a score, but the Bruins still dropped their second straight contest to fall further back in the Pac-12 South race.

"Every loss hurts. We have to execute a lot better than we did tonight," safety Randall Goforth said. "Their quarterback did everything right and they outplayed us. I just have to make sure everybody is staying together and we'll come back and be ready to fight."

Auburn 30, Kentucky 27: Something about third down seemed to spark Auburn, and Peyton Barber's clutch execution on the money play helped give the visiting Tigers a long-awaited Southeastern Conference victory.

Barber rushed for two short touchdowns, including a 3-yarder on third-and-one with 7:56 remaining, helping Auburn outlast Kentucky 30-27 on Thursday night and earn its first SEC victory.

That final TD provided a critical buffer against Mikel Horton's 1-yard TD run with 4:06 left that brought Kentucky within a field goal.

That score was also the last of Barber's three third-down runs totaling 10 yards that extended the Tigers' key possession and ended up providing a crucial cushion.

Those plays also typified a night in which the Tigers (4-2, 1-2 SEC) converted 11 of 18 chances. Meanwhile, their defense was stingy, allowing Kentucky (4-2, 2-2) to make just 5 of 13 opportunities.

The combined effort helped give Auburn a sorely needed conference win in hopes of contending in the West division. The Tigers started and closed strong behind Barber, who rushed for a 1-yard TD on their

opening drive en route to 92 yards rushing on 26 carries.

Barber was not available after the game, but Auburn coach Gus Malzahn said, "we were very good on third down."

Kerryon Johnson added 36 yards, including a 6-yard TD on nine attempts. Sean White threw for 255 yards, 154 to Ricardo Louis, as the Tigers won their ninth straight in Lexington.

Kentucky's final attempt to at least tie the game ended with quarterback Patrick Towles being sacked on fourth down with 25 seconds left.

Auburn was outgained 497-407 but made several timely plays on both sides of the ball, including the defensive stand that denied Kentucky 3 yards on two plays on its final drive.

"Big win for our team. I'm very proud," said Malzahn, who went visor-less to honor South Carolina counterpart Steve Spurrier, who retired on Tuesday. His visor will be auctioned off to help that state's flood relief efforts.

"All three phases helped us win this game and we probably played our best overall game of the year. We had some explosive plays and finally got in a rhythm."

Auburn hasn't always played like that after starting the season ranked sixth before falling out of the Top 25. But the Tigers made Kentucky play catch-up all night and maintained their dominance at Commonwealth Stadium.

"We made some adjustments and played much better in the second half, and had plenty of opportunities to get the game tied up or go up," Kentucky coach Mark Stoops said. "We never could do that and get that momentum."

Auburn set the tone right away with touchdowns on its first two possessions and points on five of its first six drives. White had a lot to do with those first two TDs, using lots of time to find receivers and complete his first three third-down passes for 59 yards alone. He completed 17 of 27 passes without an interception and was sacked just once.

"We left a couple plays out there I think," White said, "but you can tell our offense is rolling pretty well. We have to keep that up."