

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## DOD maintains US role in Iraq is to assist

By TARA COPP  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Master Sgt. Joshua L. Wheeler was killed in combat Thursday, shot in a firefight with Islamic State forces in Iraq, though he wasn't serving in a combat role, Secretary of Defense Ash Carter said Friday.

Wheeler was part of the U.S. forces and Kurdish peshmerga fighters who raided a prison outside Hawijah in the Kirkuk province to free hostages from their Islamic State captors. Carter approved the rescue under Operation Inherent Resolve.

"We'll do more raids," he said Friday during a Pentagon news briefing. "It doesn't represent us assuming a combat role. It represents a continuation of our advise and assist mission."

Wheeler's death, the first

at the hands of enemy forces since the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq in 2011, raised questions about whether the U.S. forces were operating beyond the "train, advise, assist" mission that President Barack Obama authorized when the United States began attacks against the Islamic State last year.

Obama had declared the end of combat operations in Iraq in August 2010. Last year, the president informed Americans that U.S. forces would be returning to Iraq after the Islamic State captured much of the country's northwestern provinces.

"These American forces will not have a combat mission — we will not get dragged into another ground war in Iraq," the president said.

Larry Korb, a senior defense fellow for the Center for American Progress, who was an assistant secretary of de-

fense under President Ronald Reagan, disagreed.

"Of course it's combat," Korb said. "They are trying to say it's just train and advise. No — it's combat."

On Friday, Carter offered some details about the firefight inside the Iraq prison where Wheeler suffered his fatal wounds. He elaborated on Wheeler's actions on the battlefield, but he said he wasn't prepared to share more details.

"This is combat, things are complicated," Carter said.

But moments earlier in the news briefing, Carter said the prison raid did not indicate a change in the combat role of the U.S. troops in Iraq. He also was clear that operations like the raid in Hawijah were the kinds of missions in which the 3,500 U.S. forces deployed in Iraq will take part.

According to the Internal Revenue Service, the presi-

dent designates an area a combat zone, which qualifies it for certain tax exemptions and pay benefits. Iraq has been designated a combat zone since 1991, according to the IRS. The Defense Department recertified Iraq for imminent danger pay, or "combat pay," as it is commonly known, in January 2014, meaning the 3,500 troops serving there receive an extra \$225 per month in their paychecks.

"There are Americans involved in training and advising Iraqi security forces around the country. We do not have combat formations there the way we had once upon a time in Iraq, or the way we have had in years past in Afghanistan," Carter said. "But we do have people who are in harm's way."

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## Report: Black Hawk pilots disobeyed orders

*Associated Press*

NEW ORLEANS — The pilots of a Black Hawk military helicopter that crashed in March, killing all 11 servicemembers on board, had disobeyed direct orders by flying into worsening weather, according to an investigation report.

The military said in June the crash was caused when the pilots became disoriented at night off the Florida coast. The training took place as dense fog rolled in from the Gulf of Mexico.

The full report, obtained by The Associated Press late Thursday through a public records request, said the pilots

were not authorized to fly in such bad weather and others failed to challenge the overconfidence of the lead pilot.

The report was a joint investigation by the Louisiana National Guard and U.S. Special Operations Command. Details of the report were previously reported by The Irish Times in June.

The training involved two Black Hawk helicopters from the Louisiana National Guard taking teams of Marine special operations servicemembers over water so they could rappel into the sea.

Both crews "disobeyed a direct order ... by choosing to fly in lower than (sic) briefed

weather minimums."

The report went on to fault the lead pilot, Chief Warrant Officer George Wayne Griffin Jr., 37, of Hammond, La., for pushing ahead with the mission even though weather was worsening March 10.

According to the report, the training was supposed to take place only if cloud cover was no lower than 1,000 feet and visibility was 3 miles. Conditions were worse, with cloud cover as low as 200 feet.

Fog began to set in about 40 minutes before the helicopters took off at 8:16 p.m., according to testimony. The same servicemember told investigators that Griffin dismissed concerns

from servicemembers on boats where the training was to take place.

Records show that the National Guard felt that Griffin was a top-notch, veteran pilot fully capable of doing the training.

"No one spoke up and questioned the wisdom to conduct the mission," the report said.

Griffin Jr. and Chief Warrant Officer George David Strother both were decorated, veteran pilots. Griffin had twice served in Iraq; Strother had served in Iraq, Afghanistan and Kosovo.

The Louisiana National Guard did not return messages seeking comment. The U.S. Special Operations Command declined to comment.

## Storms flood roads, cause train derailment in Texas

Associated Press

DALLAS—A powerful storm system rumbled through Texas on Saturday, flooding roads and causing a freight train to derail as parts of the state braced for the remnants of Hurricane Patricia to arrive.

Many parts of Texas, including its biggest cities, were under flash flood watches through Sunday or Monday. The remnants of Patricia, which was downgraded to tropical storm status and was expected to reach northern Mexico by Saturday night, were expected add to the rain falling in southern and central Texas, said Jesse Moore, a National Weather Service forecaster in Fort Worth.

The storm system already moving through Texas dumped more than a foot of rain onto parts of the state on Friday, causing flooding that blocked several major roadways.

A Union Pacific freight train derailed before dawn on Saturday near Corsicana, about 50 miles south of Dallas, because a creek overflowed and washed away the tracks, said Jeff DeGraff, a railroad spokesman. The two crewmembers swam to safety and nobody was hurt, he said.

“They (crew) escaped the train after it stopped and swam to high ground,” DeGraff said. “A Navarro County rescue team was able to get in and pull them to safety, they are back safe on dry ground.”

One locomotive and several railcars loaded with gravel went into the water and were partly submerged, DeGraff said. He had no specifics on how many cars derailed because crews couldn’t reach the site due to flooding.

Authorities on Saturday morning reopened a section of Interstate 45 near Corsicana that was closed overnight due to flooding, backing up traffic for 12 miles. Moore said that since Friday morning, Corsicana has received 18 inches of rain and Powell has received 20 inches.

Flight tracker flightaware.com reported that about 100 Saturday flights had been canceled at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport.

A flash flood watch was in effect for the Dallas, Fort Worth, Waco, Austin and San Antonio areas through Sunday morning, according to the National Weather Service. Corpus Christi, Laredo and Brownsville are under a flash flood watch through Sunday night.

## Megastorm Patricia soaks Mexico, weakens

Associated Press

PUERTO VALLARTA, Mexico — Record-breaking Hurricane Patricia pushed rapidly inland over mountainous western Mexico early Saturday, weakening to tropical storm force while dumping torrential rains that authorities warned could cause deadly floods and mudslides.

Patricia, which peaked as the strongest hurricane on record in the Western Hemisphere, made landfall Friday on a sparsely populated stretch of Mexico’s Pacific coast as a Category 5 storm, avoiding direct

hits on the resort city of Puerto Vallarta and the major port city of Manzanillo.

There were reports of some flooding and landslides, but no word of fatalities or major damage as the storm pushed across inland mountains while bypassing the metropolis of Guadalajara overnight.

Residents of the coast where Patricia came ashore last night described an enraged sea that crashed into hotels, scooping beach away from their foundations, and howling winds that toppled trees and telephone posts.

## Vehicle hits crowd at Oklahoma State; 3 die

Associated Press

STILLWATER, Okla. — Police say three people are dead and 22 others injured after a vehicle crashed into a crowd of spectators during the Oklahoma State University homecoming parade.

Stillwater police Capt. Kyle Gibbs had no further comment Saturday prior to a news conference about the incident.

Gibbs said police had arrested a 25-year-old woman who was suspected of being the car’s driver and of driving under the influence.

Witness Dave Kapple told the Stillwater News Press that “people were flying everywhere” after the vehicle barreled into

the crowd.

The university posted on Twitter: “Oklahoma State University is saddened by the tragic parade incident earlier this morning. Our thoughts & prayers are with those affected.”

Konda Walker, of Anchorage, Alaska, was attending the festivities.

“At first we thought it was part of the show,” Walker told the News Press. “People were flying 30 feet into the air like rag dolls.”

Oklahoma State University President Burns Hargis said the homecoming game against Kansas would still be played Saturday.

## Civilian deaths at Afghan hospital acknowledged

By JOSH SMITH

*Stars and Stripes*

KABUL, Afghanistan — A coalition investigation team has officially acknowledged that civilians likely were killed by the American airstrike on a Doctors Without Borders hospital in Kunduz earlier this month.

The initial assessment, released by the NATO-led Resolute Support coalition on Saturday, adds no new information to the controversy over what happened on Oct. 3, when a U.S. special operations AC-130 shelled the hospital.

At least 23 medical staff and patients were killed in the attack. Doctors Without Borders, which goes by its French initials MSF, says seven bodies remain unidentified.

“The Combined Civilian Casualty Assessment Team determined that the reports of civilian casualties were credible, and we continue to work with the government of Afghanistan to fully identify the victims,” Resolute Support

spokesman Brig. Gen. Wilson Shoffner said in a statement.

Defense Secretary Ash Carter asked for patience at a Pentagon news briefing on Friday, saying that a thorough investigation would take time.

“We want to get this done, and I want him to get it done, but we wanted to get it done absolutely right,” he told reporters. “I want the answers to the questions in those investigations. Accountability is part of our obligation to those who died in Kunduz, and it must inform everything we do here at the Department of Defense.”

Several investigations have been launched by NATO, the American military and the Afghan government, but MSF is demanding a probe by an independent third party, such as the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission.

American military officials have defended both the U.S. and NATO investigations as “independent and unbiased.”

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# Royals return to World Series

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Lorenzo Cain raced in from the outfield about as fast as he had raced around the bases, hurrying to join the rest of the Kansas City Royals as they streamed onto the diamond in celebration.

There was Eric Hosmer, hugging anyone in sight. And curmudgeonly manager Ned Yost, finally cracking a smile. And stoic closer Wade Davis, who let out a fierce roar Friday night when the Royals recorded the final out in Game 6 of the AL Championship Series, a white-knuckle, 4-3 victory over the Toronto Blue Jays.

A win that returned the Royals to the World Series.

"We came in with one goal," Cain said with a smile, "and that was to get back."

The Royals open the World Series on Tuesday night against the New York Mets, trying to do one win better than they did last year. In their first trip to the Fall Classic in 29 years, they lost in Game 7 to the San Francisco Giants with the tying run standing 90 feet from home.

It was a heartbreaking defeat that remained in the back of the Royals' minds all season, and ultimately spurred their return to the game's biggest stage.

"Our guys, from the first day of spring training, their focus was to get back to the World Series," Royals manager Ned Yost said, "and they did it."

In dramatic fashion, too. Jose Bautista's second homer of the game, a two-run shot in the top of the eighth, lifted Toronto into a 3-3 tie. Then the weather hit, a 45-minute rain delay that sent fans scurrying for the concourses and threatened to put a damper on what had been a festive night for KC.

After the delay, Cain calmly worked

## SS Escobar named MVP of ALCS

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Alcides Escobar caused the Toronto Blue Jays all kinds of trouble from the very first pitch.

In just about every game of the AL Championship Series.

The leadoff hitter and defensive dynamo was voted MVP of the ALCS on Friday night following a 4-3 victory in Game 6 that put Kansas City in its second straight World Series.

"For me it's a surprise," Escobar said of being named MVP. "I know I'm playing really good and my team is playing really good, together we play. And when I heard the news, I was so happy for that."

Now the Royals get a chance to win the World Series after losing to the San Francisco Giants in Game 7.

"Feeling pretty good compared to last year," Escobar said. "Last year we

were really a good team and this year, again, a really great team. And those guys, like I say, every day a lot of talent in the clubhouse, everybody is playing hard. That's why I think we won."

Escobar set a postseason record by getting a leadoff hit in the first four games of a series — he scored in two of those games. And he wound up going 11-for-23 against the Blue Jays, joining Dustin Pedroia of the Boston Red Sox as the only hitters to have at least 10 hits and five RBIs from the leadoff spot in LCS history.

Not bad for a career .262 hitter known primarily for his defense.

"He's such a talented player," Royals manager Ned Yost said. "But with the grind of a 162-game season, there are little periods where his focus will tend to waver a little bit. But during the play-offs, he just locks in. And when he's focused, he's as good as any player in the

league."

Escobar followed teammate Lorenzo Cain in becoming the second straight Royal to earn ALCS MVP honors. Both were part of the 2010 trade that sent pitcher Zack Greinke to the Milwaukee Brewers — a deal that helped set up Kansas City's run of success.

Despite a lousy on-base percentage, and advance metrics that run against conventional wisdom, Escobar has flourished since returning to the Royals' leadoff spot in late September.

His offensive outbreak hadn't diminished his otherworldly defense, either.

Escobar's diving catch of Russell Martin's hit with runners on first and second in the second inning of Game 2 has become a postseason highlight-reel staple. He made an equally impressive dive to catch reliever Ryan Madson's throw for a force at second base.

a leadoff walk from Blue Jays closer Roberto Osuna, and Hosmer followed with a clean single that Bautista fielded down the right-field line.

Rather than hit the cutoff man, though, Bautista threw to second. That gave the speedy Cain, running full speed and waved home by third base coach Mike Jirschele, just enough time to beat the relay throw from second base with a textbook slide that ignited a sellout crowd.

"I felt like I cut it off quick enough to where if I threw to second I could prevent him from going to second and Cain from scoring," Bautista said, "but I was wrong."

Jirschele had noticed all series that Bautista usually threw to second in those situations.

"As soon I saw him release the ball to second," Jirschele said, "I had Lorenzo coming in."

Ben Zobrist and Mike Moustakas hom-

ered, and Alex Rios also drove in a run for Kansas City, while shortstop Alcides Escobar was voted MVP after going 11-for-23 in the series.

For the Blue Jays, it was a frustrating ending to a late-season surge that ended their own postseason drought dating to 1993. They had rallied from a 2-0 series deficit against Texas in the divisional round, then staved off elimination against the Royals in Game 5 in Toronto.

# Former Army Ranger forges path in NFL

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Alejandro Villanueva says he is amazed by his teammates.

Funny thing is, his Pittsburgh Steelers teammates say the same thing about the offensive tackle expected to make his first start Sunday at Kansas City.

Villanueva is a former Army Ranger who won a Bronze Star while serving in Afghanistan.

"He's been ready for this ever since walking into this building," Steelers guard Cody Wallace said Thursday. "In fact, he was ready long before he ever got here."

Villanueva will take the place of left tackle Kelvin Beachum, who sustained a season-ending knee injury in last week's victory over the Arizona Cardinals. Villanueva says he is not overly nervous about moving into the lineup because of his teammates.

"Kelvin Beachum works even harder than me," Villanueva said. "Wide re-

ceiver) Antonio Brown is the hardest worker on the team. (Defensive end) Cam Heyward is a guy that makes sure that I'm up to (par at practice) with my technique and football skills.

"I'm just feeding off the energy of my teammates and coaches. That's what's making this team so special."

Military service and the Bronze Star — awarded for heroic or meritorious service in a combat zone — aside, Villanueva's path to the NFL has been astonishing.

The 27-year-old finished his college career in 2009 at West Point playing wide receiver. Last season, following his four-year commitment in the service, the 6-foot-9, 277-pound Villanueva went to training camp with the Philadelphia Eagles as a defensive lineman and was waived. He signed with the Steelers, who kept him on the practice squad all season while converting him into an offensive lineman.

Steelers coach Mike Tomlin couldn't

help but notice Villanueva during the playing of the national anthem last year before a preseason game against the Eagles.

"There was a guy standing over there about a head taller than everybody else saluting during the anthem and it kind of got my attention," Tomlin said. "I wanted to know about this enormous human being over there saluting."

Villanueva added 65 pounds over the past offseason and made the 53-man roster in training camp. He remains in the Army reserves and is taking classes at Carnegie Mellon University's Tepper School of Business in Pittsburgh while working on an MBA.

Villanueva knows his story would be enhanced by playing well and helping the Steelers (4-2) win their third straight game when they face the Chiefs (1-5).

"I just have to get better," he said. "Get lower. Get faster. Get sharper, and overall just be a little bit better."

Villanueva played well in the victory over the Cardinals, though his role as an injury fill-in was overshadowed by Landry Jones. The third-string quarterback replaced injured Mike Vick, who was making his third straight start in place of injured Ben Roethlisberger, in the third quarter. Jones threw two touchdowns passes to rally the Steelers.

"You know that you have to perform like they expect you to," Villanueva said. "You can't sit back and make excuses."

The Steelers haven't made excuses all season despite injuries to a number of other key players, including Roethlisberger, linebacker Ryan Shazier and kicker Shaun Suisham. They have a winning record and Tomlin does not expect a drop-off with Villanueva starting.

"I'm not shocked by anything Al does," Tomlin said. "He's a unique man, he's a talented man, he's a sharp guy, and a very gifted athlete. I think he's capable of doing anything he puts his mind to."



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# Canadiens roll past Sabres

Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Andrei Markov had a career night for the streaking Montreal Canadiens.

The defenseman crossed the 500-point mark with a career-best five points and the Canadiens beat the Buffalo Sabres 7-2 on Friday night to run their season-opening winning streak to eight games.

"Maybe, I just got lucky today," Markov said after finishing with a goal and four assists. "It's great to have eight wins, but tomorrow is another challenge."

The Canadiens are two victories away from matching the NHL record set by the Toronto Maple Leafs in 1993-94 and matched by the Sabres in 2006-07.

Brendan Gallagher joked that he was surprised Markov had so many points.

"It's a pretty undercover 500 points," Gallagher said. "He's pretty special, year after year. It's not every day that you get to see a guy put up 500 points."

Gallagher and Dale Weise each scored twice, and Max Pacioretty and Torrey Mitchell also scored. Mike Condon made 34 saves, and P.K. Subban and Tomas Plekanec each had three assists.

"When they put up seven, it makes any

goalie's job easier," Condon said. "It was really nice to see the offense explode tonight."

Matt Moulson and Ryan O'Reilly scored for Buffalo, and Cody Franson had two assists. Chad Johnson allowed all seven goals.

"You're playing a team that hasn't lost a game all year," Sabres defenseman Josh Gorges said. "You've got to play the right way the whole way through and too many times tonight, collectively as a group, we just made mistakes."

Montreal won for first time in four tries against Buffalo dating to Nov. 28, 2014.

**Capitals 7, Oilers 4:** Evgeny Kuznetsov had three goals and two assists to help Washington beat host Edmonton for its fifth straight victory.

Kuznetsov opened the scoring on a back-hander at 3:05 of the first period, gave Washington a 4-3 lead with another back-hander at 6:17 of the second, and completed his first career hat trick with a snap shot on a power play with 3:01 left in the third period.

**Flames 3, Red Wings 2 (OT):** Mark Giordano scored his second goal of the game in overtime and host Calgary rallied to beat Detroit to snap a four-game losing

streak.

Joe Colborne tied it for the Flames with 1:12 left in the third period. Giordano scored 3:12 into overtime to give Calgary its first win in five home games this season.

**Bruins 5, Islanders 3:** David Pastrnak broke a tie late in the second period and visiting Boston beat New York.

The Bruins improved to 3-0 on the road this season to go along with an 0-3-1 mark at home. Jonas Gustavsson, starting in place of the struggling Tuukka Rask, finished with 23 saves.

**Lightning 4, Jets 3 (OT):** Ondrej Palat scored 36 seconds into overtime to lift Tampa Bay past host Winnipeg.

Palat scored off a 3-on-1 rush, converting a tap in after a tic-tac-toe play with Steven Stamkos and Victor Hedman. Ben Bishop made 33 saves to help the Lightning improve to 5-2-1.

**Kings 3, Hurricanes 0:** Jonathan Quick made 40 saves in his 38th career shutout and Tyler Toffoli scored twice in host Los Angeles' fourth consecutive win.

Cam Ward stopped 25 shots in a duel between Stanley Cup champion goalies and Conn Smythe Trophy winners.

# Lynch's career day boosts Memphis

Associated Press

TULSA, Okla. — Paxton Lynch wasn't completely satisfied with how he played Friday night.

If completing 32 of 44 passes for four touchdowns and a career-high 447 yards wasn't enough to please the Memphis quarterback, then the rest of the American Athletic Conference has its work cut out for it.

Lynch's career day came in a 66-42 victory for the No. 18 Tigers (7-0, 3-0) over Tulsa. It was the highest-scoring game in major college football season, according to STATS, and it featured 1,248 yards of total offense from a pair of teams each ranked in the top 10 nationally in total offense.

And it was Lynch who showed complete command on a national stage for a second straight week, following Memphis' dramatic win over No. 24 Mississippi with five total touchdowns — even if he thought he could have played better after topping 300 yards passing for the sixth straight game. The four touchdown passes matched his career high.

"We're playing pretty well as a whole team, but all around the board it just wasn't as good as we could have played," Lynch said.

The win was the 14th straight for Memphis, which has gone more than a year since its last loss against Houston. It's the third longest winning streak in the country behind No. 1 Ohio State (20 games) and No. 4 TCU (14 games).

In addition to the career bests by Lynch and Garrett, sophomore Dorland Dorceus had a career-high 150 yards rushing and two touchdowns for Memphis. Jamarius Henderson added 119 yards on the ground and two scores on 14 carries.

But it was Lynch, the junior who guided the Tigers to a 37-24 win over No. 24 Mississippi a week ago, who once again shined the brightest — throwing touchdown passes of 58, 45, 21 and 5 yards in the win. He also had a 3-yard touchdown run to put Memphis up 49-35 in the third quarter.

Dane Evans was 24 of 36 passing for 421 yards and four touchdowns for the Golden Hurricane (3-4, 0-3), while Keyarris Garrett had 14 catches for a career-high 268 yards and three touchdowns.

Tulsa had 544 yards of total offense, but Lynch and the Tigers had 704 yards of their own.

"(Lynch is) a very talented quarterback," Tulsa coach Philip Montgomery said. "... He's the trigger guy, he makes them work and is a great operator."

Tigers coach Justin Fuente was concerned earlier in the week how Memphis would respond following last week's dramatic win over its Southeastern Conference neighbor to the south, even seeking out advice from former Texas coach Mack Brown and TCU coach Gary Patterson.

Any concerns Fuente had were finally put to rest in the second half after Tulsa closed to 42-35 on Evans' an 80-yard touchdown pass to Josh Atkinson.

Following the score, the Tigers outscored the Golden Hurricane 24-7 to close out the game — with Henderson capping the scoring with a 20-yard touchdown run with less than two minutes remaining.

"Obviously, we're happy to get the win coming off last week," Fuente said. "Last week was an emotional game, it was a physical game, and this was an incredible challenge."

# Kenseth: Logano wreck intentional

Associated Press

TALLADEGA, Ala. — Joey Logano chalked up contact with Matt Kenseth as aggressive racing for a win.

Kenseth thinks Logano is a liar.

That's where things stood Friday at Talladega Superspeedway, where Kenseth had hardly softened his stance toward Logano after their incident at Kansas Speedway last weekend. Kenseth was racing for a win he needed to advance into the third round of NASCAR's playoffs when contact from behind from Logano caused him to spin.

Logano went on to win the race and maintained it was accidental contact, a product of hard racing.

"Someday he might mature a little bit," Kenseth said Friday. "He should have stopped running his mouth ... and, he's

lying when he said he didn't do it on purpose because he lifted (my) tires off the ground. He's too good a race car driver to do that by accident."

Logano has won two consecutive races and had already earned his berth into the third round of the Chase for the Sprint Cup championship. Kenseth had a poor showing in the opening race of the second round, and was in desperate need of the victory last Sunday at Kansas.

Instead, he finished 14th and is now last in the 12-driver field headed into Sunday's race at Talladega, after which four drivers will be cut from the field.

A victory Sunday is Kenseth's only guarantee to continue his championship chances, but he could advance depending on how other Chase drivers fare. Even with the stakes so high, he's not conceding anything in his run-in with Logano."I

wouldn't have done anything differently because I didn't do anything wrong," Kenseth said. "I did everything I was supposed to do. I tried to get away. He drove the car in the wall himself twice. I don't know how you can possibly either block someone or put somebody in the wall when they're not up alongside you — it's pretty talented if you can do that when somebody's four feet behind you."

"So, no, I did everything I could to win the race. That's the way I'd race to win any race — race as hard as you can and do whatever you can, be clean about it and go as fast as I could go and that's all I was doing. I got hit from behind. I couldn't do anything about that."

Kenseth said he's not spoken to Logano — but he indicated at Kansas there was nothing for the two drivers to discuss.

# UFC lifts former champ's suspension

Associated Press

Jon Jones is getting yet another chance in the UFC octagon.

The UFC reinstated its former light heavyweight champion Friday, lifting Jones' indefinite suspension after its lawyers reviewed his plea agreement stemming from a hit-and-run crash in Albuquerque in April.

The world's dominant mixed martial arts promotion hasn't decided on a date or opponent for Jones' return. UFC President Dana White has previously said Jones likely would get an immediate title shot against Daniel Cormier, who claimed the light heavyweight belt after Jones' ban.

"We've made it clear to Jon that this new opportunity to compete in UFC is a privilege and not a right, and that there are significant expectations we have regarding his conduct moving forward," UFC Chairman and CEO Lorenzo Fertitta

said in a statement. "We're happy to read and see reports that he has embraced the terms of his plea agreement and is using this experience to grow and develop as a person."

The 28-year-old Jones (21-1) was considered the most dominant champion in MMA until his turbulent personal life knocked him out of the cage. He has won 12 straight fights since his only loss on a sketchy disqualification, and he defended his 205-pound title eight consecutive times after winning it in March 2011 to become the youngest champion in UFC history.

Jones beat the previously unbeaten Cormier by a clear unanimous decision in January at UFC 182, but his string of misbehaviors culminated six months ago in that crash in Albuquerque, where the upstate New York native lives and trains.

Police say officers were told by witnesses that Jones ran from a crash that hospitalized a pregnant motorist and then returned to his rental car to grab a

wad of cash, leaving behind a pipe with marijuana and rental car documents in his name.

Jones pleaded guilty last month to a charge of leaving the scene of an accident involving injury. He will serve up to 18 months of supervised probation, but his plea deal kept a felony conviction off his record.

Cormier assumed the title forfeited by Jones when he defeated Anthony "Rumble" Johnson by submission in May, and he defended the belt earlier this month with a thrilling split-decision victory over Alexander Gustafsson at UFC 192. Gustafsson also provided Jones' toughest test of Jones' career, losing a narrow unanimous decision in September 2013.

Cormier realizes the belt won't truly belong to him unless he defeats Jones. The veteran wrestler has repeatedly called on Jones to correct his behavior to set up their rematch, which seems likely to be held early next year.