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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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New CNO assesses needs of taxed fleets

BY STEVEN BEARDSLEY

Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — New Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson faces the same dilemma as his predecessor — how to meet the growing needs of U.S. commanders with a limited number of resources.

The challenges were apparent as Richardson toured overseas naval bases in the Pacific, Mideast and Europe barely a month into his tenure. The U.S. 7th Fleet, based in Yokosuka, Japan, is preparing for a possible

ANALYSIS

confrontation with China over territorial claims in the South China Sea. The U.S. 5th Fleet in Bahrain has been conducting airstrikes in Syria and Iraq as well as monitoring the Persian Gulf. The U.S. 6th Fleet in Naples has seen an uptick in Russian activity in the Black, Baltic and Mediterranean seas.

Richardson's task is to allocate the Navy's resources among the fleets while accounting for manpower, maintenance needs and an unpredictable budget.

"It is a time where we are resource-challenged, even as the security environment gets more complex," he said during a stop in Naples last week. "So resolving that gap is an important conversation we're having with forward commanders."

Richardson, 55, took over from Adm. Jonathan Greenert last month. A submariner and former director of Naval Reactors, he

has said little about his long-term goals, focusing instead on personnel issues in recent audiences with sailors around the globe. Navy officials say Richardson will set out priorities later this year.

Under Greenert, the Navy sought to have more ships "forward," either deployed or stationed overseas, at any one time. Plans call for an average of 120 ships forward by 2020, up from last year's average of 97. Most of the new presence would be in the Middle East and Pacific.

Finding the ships and manpower hasn't been easy. The sequestration budget caps in 2013 curtailed training and maintenance across the Navy and delayed deployment of the aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman. Unexpected maintenance problems with the carrier USS Nimitz in the same year forced another carrier, the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, to make unusual back-to-back deployments, resulting in maintenance issues that have delayed the Eisenhower's next deployment until 2016.

Then there is the problem of Europe. Considered a quiet theater since the end of the Cold War, Europe has seen the rise of new security threats in recent years, from the spread of militants in North Africa to increased Russian activity in the Black Sea and Mediterranean. Yet Navy plans still call for little change to its European posture.

The Navy moved four guided-missile destroyers from the U.S. to Rota, Spain, for ballistic missile defense, a move that was

years in planning. But some argue the fleet needs more. Major ships like aircraft carriers and amphibious warships today pass through the region only while on their way to the Middle East.

"We need a third hub," said Bryan McGrath, a former naval officer and current consultant who worked on the Navy's 2007 maritime strategy document. "We need a naval power consistently in three places — the Far East, the Middle East and the Mediterranean."

Richardson signaled that's unlikely to happen in the near future, telling his Naples audience that although he'd like to put more carriers and amphibious warships in the theater, the needs were greater elsewhere.

The service is also interested in preserving manpower and maintenance schedules after several years of long deployments strained both. It unveiled the Optimized Fleet Response Plan in 2014, an initiative to bring carrier tour lengths down to eight months from the 10-month deployments common in recent years.

Richardson hopes to have carrier tour lengths down to seven months by 2017, assuming deployments remain on schedule. World events could always change that, he acknowledged.

Stars and Stripes reporter Chris Church contributed to this report.
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Massive earthquake strikes Afghanistan, Pakistan

BY JOSH SMITH

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — A massive earthquake struck northern parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan on Monday, killing more than 170 people, sending terrified survivors fleeing into the streets and shaking buildings as far away as India, officials said.

The majority of the deaths were in Pakistan, where The Associated Press reported at least 147 people were killed. In Afghanistan, 33 people died and

more than 200 were injured. Among the dead were 12 students at a girls' school in northern Afghanistan.

There were no reports of damage or casualties at U.S. military facilities, U.S. military spokesman Col. Michael Lawhorn said.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said his prayers are with the victims of the earthquake throughout the region. "We are collecting information to have an accurate assessment of today's earthquake damages

across the country," he said in a statement on Twitter. "All government agencies will remain on stand-by to assist victims of today's earthquake and carry out rescue operations if needed."

The U.S. Geological Survey reported that the quake had a magnitude of 7.5 and was centered in the Hindu Kush region, about 50 miles south of Fayzabad, capital of Badakhshan province in northern Afghanistan.

The nearly 10,000 American

troops in Afghanistan did not report any damage, and the U.S. has not received any requests for assistance, Lawhorn said.

Abdullah Abdullah, chief executive of the power-sharing government, called an emergency meeting with the National Disaster Management Authority to assess the damage and needs, especially in the more "vulnerable" northeastern part of the country, his office said in statements on Twitter.

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Namesake ships honor Iraq, Afghan war heroes

Associated Press

BATH, Maine — Heroes forged in Afghanistan and Iraq are having their names bestowed on a new generation of warships, joining those whose exploits in World Wars and battles domestic and abroad earned them the distinction of having U.S. Navy vessels christened in their honor.

More than a decade after U.S. boots hit the ground in the Middle East, two new destroyers bearing the names of Americans who died there are already in service.

A third, the USS Rafael Peralta, named for a Marine killed nearly 11 years ago in Iraq, will be christened Saturday at Bath Iron Works. Peralta, a Mexican immigrant, was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross for heroism after he covered an insurgent's grenade with his body

to protect his fellow Marines.

"His legacy will carry on," said Ricardo Peralta, who was inspired by his older brother to join the Marines and served in Afghanistan. "I feel like the USS Peralta holds the spirit of what my brother stood for, and that was for God, for his country, the United States, and for the Marine Corps."

The Peralta is one of four destroyers named for servicemen who died in Iraq or Afghanistan.

The USS Jason Dunham, named for a Marine killed in 2004 in Iraq, and the USS Michael Murphy, named for a Navy SEAL killed in 2005 in Afghanistan, are already on duty. The future USS Michael Monsoor, named for a Navy SEAL killed in 2006 in Iraq, is also being built at Bath Iron Works.

US fears Russia might target underwater cables

Stars and Stripes

U.S. military officials are growing increasingly concerned that Russia may be scouting for weak spots in the underwater cables the U.S. relies on for global communications and commerce, The New York Times reported.

American military and intelligence officials told the Times that Moscow might be planning to attack those lines in times of tension or conflict.

Currently, Russian submarines and spy ships are operating with greater frequency near the undersea cables, which carry almost all global Internet communications, the paper reported.

Officials are concerned those cables could be cut in locations that are hardest to access, disrupting vital communications links, the Times said.

For the Pentagon, the in-

crease in Russian naval activities is a source of intense focus.

While military assessments of Russian underwater capabilities are classified, as are any countermeasures that are being plotted by the U.S., more than a dozen officials confirmed "in broad terms" that Russian activities had become a subject of scrutiny by the Pentagon, the Times reported.

In private, U.S. military and intelligence officials told the Times that they were monitoring increased Russian activity along the known cable routes. Of particular concern, the Times said, is that the Russians may be looking for vulnerable spots along those routes at great depths, where cuts would be harder to find and fix.

The U.S. also maintains special cables in secret locations for military operations.

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Afghan official warns of risk from militants

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Al-Qaida has re-established a presence in Afghanistan and the Islamic State group has become a serious threat, the Afghan national security adviser warned, saying the country is in danger of again becoming a safe haven for terrorists and calling for U.S. and NATO backing to help drive them out.

The warning by Mohammad Hanif Atmar follows the announcement this month by President Barack Obama that the U.S. would keep 9,800 troops in Afghanistan through most of next year, casting aside a pledge to withdraw most U.S. forces before leaving office. Obama cited the fragile security situation in the face of a resurgent Taliban.

Speaking to The Associated Press late Saturday, Atmar said al-Qaida, the Taliban, the Islamic State group and other insurgents, including the brutal Haqqani network, "are morphing."

"They have not been degraded, they have regenerated themselves," he said.

Atmar warned that the insurgent groups are reinventing themselves, joining forces and drawing funds and support from outside as they take advantage of a perceived weakness of Afghan forces following the end of the U.S.-led international combat mission last year.

Highlighting Afghanistan's need for continued support from the U.S. and NATO, the Taliban overran the key northern city of Kunduz on Sept. 28 — their first seizure of a major urban area since being toppled in 2001 by the U.S. invasion — before being driven out over a period of two weeks. The Taliban then threatened cities in different corners of the country, including Lashkar Gah, capital of southern Helmand province, and Maymana, capital of northwestern Faryab province.

The Taliban have been stretching Afghan forces to the limit this year, and the shift in tactics has posed a challenge to a force accustomed to coming in behind U.S. troops to hold territory, rather than going on the offensive.

Woman faces 4 murder charges in parade crash

Associated Press

STILLWATER, Okla. — A woman accused of driving her car into a crowd of spectators at the Oklahoma State University homecoming parade is scheduled to appear in court Monday, two days after she allegedly struck the victims with such force that their bodies went flying into the air.

After the crash, Adacia Chambers, 25, of Stillwater, initially was arrested on suspicion of driving under the influence. Late Sunday, police said she was also being held on four counts of second-degree murder.

"Essentially, you have some-

one driving under the influence and they end up killing four persons. That's the reason for that homicide charge," Stillwater police Capt. Kyle Gibbs told ABC's "Good Morning America" on Monday.

Saturday's crash also injured dozens of people. Seventeen of them remained hospitalized, including five in critical condition, Gibbs said.

Chambers' attorney, Tony Coleman, told NBC's "Today" show Monday that he believes she is mentally ill and said she was hospitalized two years ago for an undisclosed mental illness.

Mets-Royals a tasty Series matchup

Associated Press

Yoenis Cespedes launching long drives, Lorenzo Cain dashing to catch them. Noah Syndergaard zinging 100 mph heat, Alcides Escobar trying to catch up.

The pitching-rich New York Mets, boosted by Daniel Murphy's power surge. The plucky Kansas City Royals, aiming to atone for last year's near-miss.

Served up with some BBQ and bagels, too. A tasty World Series, indeed.

The Royals set the matchup Friday night, beating Toronto 4-3 in Game 6 of AL Championship Series. The Mets were waiting, having swept the Cubs on Wednesday night in the NLCS.

"Really good team. Really good pitching over there," Escobar, MVP of the ALCS, said about the New Yorkers.

They start Tuesday night in Kansas City. Already, the clubs have made history — this is the first World Series between

franchises born in the expansion-era 1960s.

Maybe more on deck.

Can Murphy, never a major home run threat with the Mets, extend his record by connecting in a seventh straight post-season game? How will Kendrys Morales, Escobar and KC's contact hitters fare against Matt Harvey, Jacob deGrom and the fresh New York aces? When will closers Jeury Familia and Wade Davis ever give up a run?

Plus, the first World Series action at Citi Field when the scene shifts for Game 3. Then Game 4 on Halloween night, followed by Game 5 in November on the day of the New York City Marathon.

Plenty of stars on both sides — David Wright and Curtis Granderson for New York; Alex Gordon, Eric Hosmer and Salvador Perez for Kansas City — who fans can follow into the future.

In fact, consider this a preview for the

2016 season. Yep, opening day in the majors next April 4 is Mets at Royals.

This much is certain: One team wearing blue is about to end a long drought.

The Royals, who lost to San Francisco in Game 7 at Kauffman Stadium last October, haven't won the crown since George Brett and Bret Saberhagen starred in 1985. The Mets' most recent title came in 1986, led by Darryl Strawberry and Dwight Gooden.

Over the years, the Royals and Mets did share some things. David Cone, Carlos Beltran and Saberhagen are among the guys who played for both teams.

The teams have met only nine times since interleague play began in 1997, with the Royals holding a 5-4 edge. The Mets haven't even visited Kansas City since 2004.

But not much to link this current crop of Mets and Royals to each other. Other than a pair of clubs playing real sharp ball

these days.

Manager Ned Yost's Royals are known for speed, defense and their bullpen. Cain and the other fleet outfielders seem to catch everything, and young ace Yordano Ventura has made his mark with every hard fastball.

Kansas City also has loads of World Series experience and added veteran Ben Zobrist and Johnny Cueto for the pennant push.

Mets manager Terry Collins is in his first World Series, as are nearly all his players. Few of them had been in the postseason until this year.

No matter, they did just fine in the deciding Game 5 of the Division Series vs. major league ERA leader Zack Greinke at Dodger Stadium. Didn't hurt them against the big-hitting Cubs, either — the Mets never trailed for a single inning in that series.

T-Wolves' Saunders succumbs to cancer

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Flip Saunders, who rose from the backwaters of basketball's minor leagues to become one of the most powerful men in the NBA as coach, team president and part owner of the Minnesota Timberwolves, died Sunday, the team said. He was 60.

Saunders was diagnosed with Hodgkin lymphoma in June and doctors called it "treatable and curable." But he took a leave of absence from the team in September after complications arose during his treatment, which included chemotherapy. He had been hospitalized for more than a month.

"Flip was a symbol of strength, compassion, and dignity for our organization," owner Glen Taylor said in a statement. "He was a shining example of what a true leader should be, defined by his integrity and kindness to all he encountered."

Sam Mitchell has been named interim head coach and GM Milt Newton is heading the team's personnel department.

Saunders went 654-592 in 17 NBA seasons with the Timberwolves, Detroit Pistons and Washington Wizards. But his best days came in Minnesota, where he nurtured Kevin Garnett from a teenager who jumped straight from high school to the NBA in 1995 and helped turn the woe-laden Wolves into a perennial playoff team.

The Timberwolves had started to practice on Sunday when Newton got word from Taylor of Saunders' death. Practice was halted and a devastated Garnett left the floor, walked to the parking garage at the practice facility and sat down in the spot marked for Saunders. He posted a picture of the moment on his Facebook page with the message "Forever in my

heart ..."

"He was a great human being and one of the best offensive minds in basketball," Michigan State coach Tom Izzo, a friend of Saunders for three-plus decades, told The Associated Press. "I could talk basketball with him all day and night."

Philip Daniel Saunders was born on Feb. 23, 1955, in Cleveland and was a prep basketball star at Cuyahoga Heights High School. His mother Kay nicknamed him Flip after hearing the name at a beauty salon. He played in college at Minnesota, teaming with Kevin McHale and Mychal Thompson as a senior to lead the Golden Gophers to a 24-3 record.

He landed in the NBA in 1995, when he wrote a letter to new owner Taylor asking for a job. His college buddy, McHale, took over the basketball operations with the Timberwolves and Saunders became the general manager. When Bill Blair was fired 20 games into the season, Saunders was suddenly the head coach of a struggling franchise that had never made the playoffs.

Saunders and Garnett led the Wolves to eight straight playoff appearances, the last a trip to the Western Conference finals in 2004.

"Today is not a day to reflect on Flip's accomplishments in basketball or what he brought to us as an organization on the court, but rather to indicate what he meant to us as a co-worker, friend, member of the community and the basketball world at large," Taylor said. "We as an organization are devastated by his passing, and our hearts and prayers go out to (his wife) Debbie and the entire Saunders family as they endure this extraordinary loss."

Kings defeat Oilers

Associated Press

EDMONTON, Alberta — The Los Angeles Kings have officially put a tough start to the season behind them.

Tanner Pearson broke a tie late in the third period with his first goal since breaking his leg last season and the Los Angeles Kings beat the Edmonton Oilers 3-2 on Saturday night for their fifth straight win.

Connor McDavid nearly tied it for Edmonton with 5.2 seconds left, but Jonathan Quick sprawled to catch his backhand right at the goal line. A replay review upheld the no-goal call.

"It happened so fast," McDavid said. "Obviously I'm going to think I scored there in a situation like that... I thought it could have gone in."

Pearson's power-play goal put the Kings ahead with 3:26 left. He found the rebound from Jake Muzzin's shot and slapped it past goalie Cam Talbot, helping Los Angeles ease concerns over an 0-3-0 start.

Pearson's score came fewer than 3 minutes after Taylor Hall tied it for Edmonton on the power play following Brayden McNabb's tripping minor. Hall redirected a pass from Ryan Nugent-Hopkins for his third of the season.

"When you take a penalty late like that, they give their final push," Kings captain Anze Kopitar said. "They got one, but the character of this team came up again and we got one right back on them. That was huge."

Edmonton has lost two straight and fell to 3-6-0.

"It's disappointing, but it was great to see that we didn't give up," Oilers forward Ryan Nugent-Hopkins said. "We just fought back and we came within inches at the end."

Kopitar and Jeff Carter also scored for the Kings. Drew Doughty had two

assists.

Pearson broke his leg at Winnipeg on Jan. 10 and missed the rest of last season.

McDavid set up Benoit Pouliot's first-period goal with an impressive sprint toward the net around a defender. McDavid and Nail Yakupov assisted on the goal, extending each of their point streaks to five games.

Just over a minute later, Carter banked in a shot off Talbot from behind the goal line.

Kopitar picked the top corner on Talbot during an odd-man rush with 6:24 left in the second.

Edmonton defenseman Justin Schultz left the game in the second with an undisclosed injury and did not return.

Rangers 4, Flames 1: Dan Girardi broke a deadlock late in the second period on a night when he passed Mark Messier for 10th on the Rangers' all-time games played list as host New York beat Calgary.

Oscar Lindberg, Kevin Klein and Derick Brassard also scored. The Rangers (6-2-2) have won three of their last five and earned points in all five games.

Antti Raanta made 22 saves in New York's third of 17 back-to-back sets this season — the Rangers lost to the Flyers in a shootout Saturday night. New York has won six of its past seven against the Flames.

Jets 5, Wild 4: Drew Stafford scored twice and Blake Wheeler had two assists as Winnipeg edged visiting Minnesota.

Minnesota's Jason Zucker scored 10 seconds into the game, but then Winnipeg got five consecutive goals.

Bryan Little tied it 1:22 into the first, Andrew Ladd scored about 2 minutes later and Nikolaj Ehlers made it 3-1 Jets (5-2-1) midway through the period.



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Pats top Jets, still unbeaten

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Tom Brady overcame New England's shaky first three quarters by throwing for a pair of touchdowns in the fourth, and the Patriots beat the New York Jets 30-23 on Sunday to remain unbeaten.

Brady completed 13 of 16 passes for 135 yards in the final quarter to overcome a 20-16 lead and give New England a two-game lead over the Jets in the AFC East. He was 34 of 54 for 355 yards overall — numbers that would have been even better if not for the 11 drops by his receivers, six by newly activated Brandon LaFell.

The Jets kicked a field goal on first down and then recovered the onside kick with 15 seconds left. But a false-start penalty on Brandon Marshall ended the game after a short pass from Ryan Fitzpatrick left the Jets 37 yards from the tying score.

Panthers 27, Eagles 16: Cam Newton took another step toward rewriting the NFL record book as host Carolina defeated Philadelphia to improve remain unbeaten after their first six games for the first time in club history.

Newton threw for a touchdown and ran for another score, marking the fourth time this season he has accomplished that feat in a game and 28th time in his career — three behind Hall of Famer Steve Young for the league record. Jonathan Stewart ran for 119 yards and Mike Tolbert scored two touchdowns for Carolina, which has won a franchise-record 10 straight regular-season games dating to last season.

The Eagles (3-4) were only able to convert three interceptions by Newton into six points. The Panthers held Sam Bradford to 205 yards passing and sacked him five times, including twice by Jared Allen.

Giants 27, Cowboys 20: Dwayne Harris sped 100 yards with a kickoff return against his former Dallas teammates seconds after the Cowboys had tied the game, and host New York moved atop the NFC East with a victory.

Harris spent four seasons in Dallas without running back a kickoff for a score. But he tied a Giants record set in 1994 by romping untouched to the end zone.

New York (4-3) snapped a five-game slide against Dallas (2-4) thanks to big plays by its defense and special teams. Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie had two interceptions, returning one 58 yards for a touchdown.

The Cowboys, losers of four in a row with injured offensive stars Tony Romo and Dez Bryant, got a big game from Darren McFadden. Starting running back Joseph Randle left early with a strained back, and McFadden rushed for 152 yards and a TD.

Dolphins 44, Texans 26: Host Miami became the first team since at least 1940 to score four offensive touchdowns of at least 50 yards in a half.

The Dolphins led 41-0 at halftime, making the drubbing even more emphatic than a 38-10 win at Tennessee a week earlier in Dan Campbell's debut as head coach.

Now he's the fifth interim coach of 26 since 2000 to win his first two games. Since the firing of Joe Philbin on Oct. 5, the Dolphins (3-3) have gone from notorious underachievers to contending for their first playoff berth since 2008.

The Dolphins had been 0-7 previously against Houston (2-5). Miami's four long scores in the first half were the most in at least 75 years, according to STATS.

Redskins 31, Buccaneers 30: Kirk Cousins threw three second-half touchdown passes, including the go-ahead score with 24 seconds left, to lead host Washington to the largest comeback in franchise history.

Tampa Bay (2-4) was up 24-0 in the second quarter, before Cousins ran for an 8-yard TD to get Washington (3-4) on the board.

Cousins hadn't completed more than one TD pass in any game all season. But he got a pair of 3-yard scores in the third quarter, sandwiched around an onside kick, to make things interesting.

Then, trailing 30-24, Washington got the ball at its 20 with a little less than 2½ minutes left in the fourth quarter. Cousins capped the drive with a 6-yard TD toss to Jordan Reed.

Raiders 37, Chargers 29: Derek Carr threw three touchdown passes, including a 52-yarder to Amari Cooper, and visiting Oakland turned two interceptions of Philip Rivers into 10 points on their way to an easy victory over in what could be the last game of the AFC West rivalry played in San Diego.

It was the first meeting of the Raiders (3-3) and Chargers (2-5) since their owners announced plans to build a \$1.7 billion stadium in an industrial Los Angeles suburb if they can't get new stadiums in their home markets.

Coming off a bye, the Raiders looked quicker and more efficient. Cooper, the first-round draft pick out of Alabama, caught a short pass from Carr on an inside screen and raced through the defense to give Oakland a 30-3 lead just before halftime.

San Diego made it close with three fourth-quarter touchdowns.

Vikings 28, Lions 19: Teddy Bridgewater threw for a season-high 316 yards and two touchdowns for visiting Minnesota.

Adrian Peterson rushed for 98 yards as the Vikings (4-2) won an NFC North game on the road for the first time in three years.

The Lions (1-6) had an 11-point lead after Matthew Stafford threw TDs on their first two drives, but they blew it because they couldn't protect the quarterback.

Minnesota had a season-high seven sacks, which also was a season worst for Detroit.

Falcons 10, Titans 7: At Nashville, Tennessee, Matt Ryan threw for 251 yards and a touchdown pass, and Devonta Freeman ran for 116 yards.

The Falcons (6-1) bounced back from their first loss by grinding out a road win and

overcoming two interceptions. Freeman notched his third consecutive game with at least 100 yards, and Atlanta outgained Tennessee 378-256.

The banged-up Titans (1-5) lost their fifth straight overall. They played without rookie quarterback Marcus Mariota, who was replaced by Zach Mettenberger — intercepted by safety Robenson Therezie with 1:31 left to seal the win.

Jaguars 34, Bills 31: Blake Bortles threw a touchdown pass to Allen Hurns with 2:16 remaining and Jacksonville rallied in the game at Wembley Stadium in London.

Bortles' second TD pass of the game came a short time after Buffalo safety Corey Graham intercepted a pass and returned it 44 yards to put the Bills ahead.

The Jaguars (2-5) won their first game in London after losing in each of the past two seasons at Wembley, the home of England's national soccer team. The Bills (3-4) were playing in the British capital for the first time.

Rams 24, Browns 6: Rookie Todd Gurley rushed for 128 yards and his first two touchdowns, helping host St. Louis to the win.

St. Louis (3-3) had four sacks and recovered four fumbles. The Rams scored 10 points off miscues on Cleveland's first two series, a 17-yard fumble recovery by Rodney McLeod and a field goal after the first of William Hayes' two sacks and strips of Josh McCown on the day.

Johnny Manziel got mop-up duty for the Browns (2-5) after McCown left favoring his right arm with about four minutes left.

Chiefs 23, Steelers 13: Alex Smith threw for 251 yards and a touchdown, Cairo Santos kicked three field goals as host Kansas City ended a five-game losing streak.

Charcandrick West added 110 yards rushing and his first career touchdown for the Chiefs (2-5), and Eric Berry intercepted his first pass since his cancer diagnosis last December.

Meanwhile, the Chiefs shut down Pittsburgh's Landry Jones, who made his first NFL start in place of the injured Ben Roethlisberger and Mike Vick. Jones threw for 209 yards and a touchdown, but he was also picked off twice and lost a fumble.

Le'Veon Bell ran for 121 yards for the Steelers (4-3).

Saints 27, Colts 21: Drew Brees threw for 255 yards and one touchdown, Khiry Robinson ran for two scores and visiting New Orleans held on for the victory.

New Orleans (3-4) has won three of its past four. Indy (3-4) still leads the AFC South despite losing its second straight.

Brees finished 28 of 44 and was helped by a running game led by Mark Ingram, who ran for 143 yards and one score as New Orleans took a 27-0 lead.

Andrew Luck threw TD passes of 87 and 46 yards to T.Y. Hilton, and an 8-yard TD pass to Donte Moncrief with 3:46 left to make it 27-21.

Tensions flare up at Talladega

Associated Press

TALLADEGA, Ala. — As Joey Logano made his third straight trip to Victory Lane, questions swirled about reigning Sprint Cup champion Kevin Harvick's late-race tactics.

Several competitors accused Harvick of intentionally causing a race-ending caution Sunday at Talladega Superspeedway, where Logano completed a sweep of the second round of NASCAR's playoffs.

It came at the expense of Dale Earnhardt Jr., who was eliminated from the Chase for the Sprint Cup championship at his best track for the second consecutive year. Earnhardt led a race-high 61 laps, but had to settle for second in a race he had to win when the Harvick-triggered crash ended the race under caution.

NASCAR's most popular driver did not question his fate.

"When the race is over, I can live with the result as long as everyone else is going by the same rules," Earnhardt said. "I felt like per the rule book, it sorted out and I finished second. I'm OK with that."

NASCAR said this week it would make just one attempt at Talladega to finish the race under green instead of the usual three tries in a nod toward creating a safer racing environment. Drivers were almost unanimous in their support of the change, even when it came into play in a race that cut four drivers from the Chase field.

Eliminated Sunday were Earnhardt, Ryan Newman — the runner-up to Harvick last year — and Joe Gibbs Racing drivers Matt Kenseth and Denny Hamlin. JGR was considered a heavy favorite in this Chase after a dominating regular season, but had two of four drivers eliminated Sunday and both were furious with Harvick.

Harvick had radioed to his crew under caution that a mechanical issue was preventing him from accelerating. But if he moved out of the way, he risked falling to the back of the field and potentially being knocked out of the Chase.

So he instead stayed put, and when his car failed to take off on the restart, he hit Trevor Bayne as Bayne tried to dart around him and it triggered a wreck that brought out the caution to end the race. Earnhardt was unable to race Logano for the win once the caution was called.

"It was a pretty tough ending. [He] knew he was blowing up and told everybody he was going to stay in his lane," Kenseth said. "It just feels like we kind of lost control of the situation."

Denny Hamlin echoed the sentiments of his Joe Gibbs Racing teammate. He was caught in the accident and had to climb from his flaming car, and said after that Harvick caused the wreck rather than risk losing positions on the track that would knock him out of the Chase.

"The 4 could only run about 30 miles an hour, I think he saw people coming and he knew he was probably going to be 30th, the last car on the lead lap, so he caused the wreck," said Hamlin.

He had a far more scathing take on Twitter after he was eliminated from the Chase. Joe Gibbs Racing, the heavy favorites in this championship race, instead had two of its four drivers knocked out of the playoffs on Sunday.

"What a joke we have a car with no motor wreck the field to end the race. Complete crap. Sorry to anyone who spent \$ coming to this circus," Hamlin tweeted.

Miami parting ways with Golden

Associated Press

CORAL GABLES, Fla. — Miami has fired coach Al Golden midway through his fifth season and one day after the Hurricanes endured the worst loss in the program's 90-year history.

Golden went 32-25 with the Hurricanes and 17-18 in Atlantic Coast Conference play, his entire stint marred by an NCAA investigation and subsequent fallout

caused by things that happened before he arrived in Coral Gables. His last game with Miami was a 58-0 loss to then-No. 6 Clemson, a result that had fans booing from the stands and calling for his departure — as many had for some time.

Miami (4-3, 1-2 ACC) plays at Duke on Saturday night. Larry Scott will take over as Miami's interim head coach.

"Coach Golden has led our program through some very difficult times and he

has done so with class, integrity and a true desire to see our students succeed on the field, in the classroom and in the community," Miami athletic director Blake James said. "However, we have a proud tradition of excellence at Miami, not just in football but in all sports, and we want to compete for ACC and national championships."

"I simply believe that now is the time to bring the Hurricane Family together and rally behind our young men."