

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

## US to deploy tanks to guard Syrian oil

By JOHN VANDIVER

*Stars and Stripes*

The U.S. will send armored reinforcements to guard oil fields in Syria that President Donald Trump said also could serve as a safe area for Kurds who aided the Americans before Turkey's incursion into formerly Kurdish-held Syrian territory.

Defense Secretary Mark Esper, speaking in Brussels on Friday, confirmed that "mechanized" forces would be moving into the Deir al-Zour region, but declined to detail the composition of the units. "We are reinforcing that position, it will include some mechanized forces," Esper said.

Esper also urged Ankara to investigate allegations of war crimes committed by Turkish-supported militias, which have carried out attacks against the Kurds during Turkey's incursion into Syria against Kurdish forces.

The oil-rich area where U.S. troops are headed is also where U.S. forces in 2018 were involved in a deadly clash with Russian mercenaries.

Up to 200 pro-Syrian regime forces, including some mercenaries, were killed after mounting a failed attack on a base held by U.S. troops near the town of Deir al-Zour.

After a conversation with Syrian Democratic Forces Gen. Mazloum Abdi on Thursday, Trump tweeted that "perhaps it is time for the Kurds to start heading to the Oil Region!"

Trump's comments, along with reports that the U.S. military is considering sending in tanks and other armored vehicles into Syria to protect oil fields, serve as the latest twist in a changing response to the crisis in Syria.

It was unclear what Trump

### Russia sends more troops to Syria to assist Turkey

*Associated Press*

MOSCOW — Russia has sent hundreds of additional troops to Syria to help patrol the country's Turkey-Syria border after a deal between Moscow and Ankara, the Russian Defense Ministry said Friday.

The ministry said about 300 military police have arrived to patrol the northeastern areas along the border with Turkey and oversee the pullout of Syrian Kurdish fighters from there. Military cargo planes also airlifted 20 armored vehicles for the mission, it added.

After Turkey invaded northeastern Syria this month, an offensive enabled by President Donald

Trump's abrupt pullout of U.S. troops, Moscow and Ankara struck a deal splitting control of northeastern Syria. The new Russian troops sent in — as American soldiers pull out — further underscore how the situation on the ground in Syria has dramatically changed with Turkey's invasion and subsequent developments.

Turkey has now been allowed to keep control over a significant chunk of northeastern Syria, a belt of land on its border in the northeast that it invaded on Oct. 9, along with a larger piece of the border in the northwest that Turkey already holds, captured in previous incursions.

meant when he suggested the Kurds head to Syria's eastern oil region — whether that referred to military forces the U.S. is aligned with or the Kurdish population as a whole, which numbers in the millions.

"The U.S. is committed to reinforcing our position, in coordination with our SDF partners, in northeast Syria with additional military assets to prevent those oil fields from falling back into the hands of ISIS or other destabilizing actors," a U.S. defense official told reporters Thursday.

The comments came after troops convoyed out of Syria earlier this week, bound for Iraq.

A report by Newsweek, citing an unnamed senior U.S. official, said the Pentagon has drafted plans to deploy half of

an Army armored battalion, which could include as many as 30 Abrams tanks, to guard the oil fields. It's not clear whether the White House has signed off on the proposal or plans a smaller force.

The Washington Post, citing unnamed U.S. officials, said several options were under discussion. One option could involve a company of American troops, a handful of Abrams tanks and support equipment, the newspaper said. Dispatching tanks might require extra troops for support and security.

The Post said discussions also included the possibly sending other heavy equipment, such as Bradley Fighting Vehicles.

However, CNN reported that more troops are expected to move into Syria's oil area relatively soon and that in ad-

dition to safeguarding oil fields they will fight remnants of the Islamic State in coordination with the SDF.

Positioning armored forces in Syria could be designed to send a signal to Russian forces operating in the region to stay clear of oil fields. But the move also runs the risk of escalating tensions with both Moscow and Ankara.

On Tuesday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and President Vladimir Putin reached a deal to conduct joint patrols in the border region of Syria vacated by U.S. troops.

Earlier this month, the White House ordered U.S. troops to pull back from their positions on the Turkish border, which critics say served as a green light for the Turkish military to invade and attack Kurdish forces that helped defeat ISIS.

Esper has condemned Turkey's invasion but also has defended Washington's decision to step back.

Esper on Thursday said Erdogan was intent on invading, regardless of the U.S. presence.

"I think President Erdogan was fixated on making this incursion for one reason or another and there was not a possibility that we were going to start a war with a NATO ally," Esper said during a speech in Brussels, where he is taking part in talks at NATO headquarters.

Critics have countered that even a small U.S. presence would have been enough to prevent Turkey from risking a direct confrontation with the U.S. and would have prevented subsequent bloodshed.

In Brussels, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg declined to comment on Friday on the possibility of the U.S. sending armored vehicles and troops into Syria.

# Chaos in across Iraq amid deadly protests

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Iraqi police fired live shots into the air as well as rubber bullets and dozens of tear gas canisters Friday to disperse thousands of anti-government protesters, sending young demonstrators running for cover and enveloping a main bridge in the capital Baghdad with thick white smoke. Twenty-three protesters were killed and dozens were injured, security officials said.

The confrontations began early in the morning after anti-government demonstrations resumed, following a three-week hiatus. The protests began Oct. 1 over corruption, unemployment and lack of basic

services but quickly turned deadly as security forces cracked down, using live ammunition for days.

The protests then spread to several, mainly Shiite-populated southern provinces and authorities imposed a curfew and shut down the internet for days in an effort to quell the unrest.

After a week of violence in the capital and the country's southern provinces, a government-appointed inquiry into the protests determined that security forces had used excessive force, killing 149 people and wounding over 3,000. It also recommended the firing of security chiefs in Baghdad and the south. Eight members of the security forces were also killed.

The protests in Iraq threaten to plunge the country into a new cycle of instability that potentially could be the most dangerous this conflict-scarred nation has faced, barely two years after declaring victory over Islamic State.

"They (leaders) have eaten away at the country like cancer," said Abu Ali al-Majidi, 55, pointing in the direction of the Green Zone. "They are all corrupt thieves," he added, surrounded by his four sons who had come along for the protest.

Subsequently, Iraqi security forces and government officials vowed to avoid further deadly violence and deployed heavily on the streets of Baghdad in anticipation of Friday's protests.

## USS Indianapolis is set to be commissioned

Post-Tribune (Merrillville, Ind.)

Some 74 years ago, Richard Thelen, a then-18-year-old gunner's mate on the cruiser Indianapolis, vaulted into the air when a Japanese torpedo sank the ship on July 30, 1945.

"I remember mostly how quickly it sunk. I had to stay alive out there. Every time I was ready to give up, I felt my dad's grip, and saw his face," said Thelen.

Only 317 of the ship's 1,196 sailors survived after five days afloat in the Pacific. Some died from dehydration; others were killed by sharks. It was the biggest loss of life in the Navy's history.

Now, a new Indianapolis is ready for

service.

Navy officials say the new \$450 million littoral combat ship, to be commissioned at 10 a.m. Saturday at the Port of Indiana in Burns Harbor, will carry on the legacy. It's the fourth ship to bear the USS Indianapolis name.

About 11,000 people are expected for the invitation-only Saturday event. Jill Donnelly, wife of former Indiana U.S. Sen. Joe Donnelly, is the ship's sponsor. She will follow the Navy tradition of giving the first order to "man our ship and bring her to life!"

Standing with a walker on the future Indianapolis on Thursday, Thelen, 92, of Lansing, Mich., recounted the horror of

spending five days in the Pacific in shark-infested waters.

Thelen is one of a handful of survivors who remain from the World War II cruiser, which earned 10 battle stars.

The ship sank just four days after delivering components of the nuclear bomb "Little Boy" that was dropped on Hiroshima Aug. 6, 1945.

Its captain, Charles B. McVay III, survived but was court-martialed soon after the war. Authorities said he was guilty of endangering his vessel by failing to steer a zigzag course to avoid torpedoes. The tragedy haunted McVay and he killed himself in 1968. In 2000, President Bill Clinton signed a bill exonerating McVay.

## AAFES lifts online uniform purchase restrictions

BY SETH ROBSON  
AND JAMES BOLINGER

Stars and Stripes

Soldiers and airmen in the Reserve and National Guard are now authorized to buy uniforms online regardless of their active status or rank, the Army & Air Force Exchange Service announced this month.

To ensure compliance with purchase restrictions, customers with temporary authorization to buy uniforms and other items had been directed to the nearest brick-and-mortar military clothing store, AAFES spokesman Chris Ward said in an email Friday.

However, after review and discussions

with the Army and Air Force, AAFES has lifted online purchase restrictions for all Guard and Reserve members, he said.

Soldiers can already buy the new Operational Camouflage Pattern online but airmen won't be able to do so until December, Ward said.

Exchange-operated military clothing stores — the only source for government-certified, authentic uniforms — are owned by the various service branches and subject to separate wear and purchase restrictions, he added.

"Each branch of service provides funding to establish and operate MCS facilities to service their active duty personnel," he said.

However, Ward said, Guard and Reserve personnel may shop at those facilities while they are on active-duty status.

Enlisted reservists are scheduled to be issued two sets of OCPs starting around December or January and four sets by the mandatory wear date in April 2021, Senior Master Sgt. Stephen Schester, an Air Force Reserve Command spokesman, said in an email Friday.

Online uniform sales will be particularly useful for airmen who live far away from bases where they drill, said Air Force Reserve 2nd Lt. Daniel Phelps, a public affairs officer for the 349th Air Mobility Wing at Travis Air Force Base, Calif., in a text message Wednesday.

# DOJ's review of Russia probe shifted to a criminal inquiry

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department has shifted its review of the Russia probe to a criminal investigation, a person familiar with the matter says. It's a move that is likely to raise concerns that President Donald Trump and his allies may be using the powers of the government to go after their opponents.

The revelation comes as Trump is already facing scrutiny about a potential abuse of power, including a House impeachment inquiry examining whether he withheld military aid to pressure the president of Ukraine to launch an investigation of former Vice President Joe Biden and his son Hunter.

The person who confirmed the criminal investigation Thursday was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and

spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity.

It is unclear what potential crimes are being investigated or what prompted the change. But the designation as a formal criminal investigation gives prosecutors the ability to issue subpoenas, potentially empanel a grand jury and compel witnesses to give testimony and bring federal criminal charges.

The Justice Department had previously considered it to be an administrative review, and Attorney General William Barr appointed John Durham, the U.S. attorney in Connecticut, to lead the inquiry into the origins of special counsel Robert Mueller's probe into Russian interference in the 2016 election.

Durham is examining what led the U.S. to open a counter-

intelligence investigation into the Trump campaign and the roles that various countries played in the U.S. probe. He is also investigating whether the surveillance methods and intelligence gathering methods used during the investigation were legal and appropriate.

Trump has long slammed the investigation, saying there was political bias at the FBI and the probe was all part of a "witch hunt" to discredit him and his presidency.

The chairmen of the House Judiciary and Intelligence committees, which are leading the impeachment inquiry, said in a statement late Thursday that the reports "raise profound new concerns" that Barr's DOJ "has lost its independence and become a vehicle for President Trump's political revenge."

# Gabbard focuses on presidential campaign

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Democratic presidential candidate Tulsi Gabbard says she will focus on her White House bid and not run for reelection to her congressional seat. The congresswoman from Hawaii made the announcement early Friday.

While lagging behind in a crowded Democratic presidential field, Gabbard has gotten renewed attention lately after a heated argument with former Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton.

The Hawaii congresswoman fought back after Clinton said in a recent interview that she believes Republicans have "got their eye on somebody who's currently in the Democratic primary and are grooming her to be the third-party candidate." Clinton, the former senator, U.S. secretary of state and 2016 Democratic presidential candidate, did not name Gabbard directly.

The squabble seemed to give Gabbard renewed energy on the campaign trail.

Gabbard noted in her early morning announcement that the threats of war, international tensions and the threats of a new cold war convinced her she should focus on the presidential race.

"I believe I can best serve the people of Hawaii and our country as your President and Commander-in-Chief," she said in her statement.

Gabbard, who launched her presidential bid in January, has emphasized her background as a combat veteran. Currently a major in the Army National Guard, she has served for more than 16 years and deployed twice to the Middle East, according to her announcement. She was first elected to Congress in 2012.

# Pentagon official instructed witness not to cooperate with impeachment inquiry

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A Defense Department official who testified in the impeachment inquiry against President Donald Trump did so in defiance of the Pentagon, which told her not to cooperate.

A letter to Laura Cooper's attorney obtained by The Associated Press on Thursday cites an administration-wide policy against participating in the impeachment probe.

The directive underscores Trump administration efforts to discourage or prevent some executive branch employees from cooperating with House Democrats, who are investigating Trump's prodding of his Ukrainian counterpart to investigate Democratic rival Joe Biden. The administration this

month blocked Gordon Sondland, the ambassador to the European Union, from testifying, though he ultimately did so under subpoena.

The letter cites concerns about whether the House is authorized to conduct an impeachment inquiry without a formal vote and about what it says is a "blanket refusal" to permit Defense Department lawyers from being present for the interviews. Excluding department lawyers, the letter says, "violates settled practice and may jeopardize future accommodation."

"To reiterate, the Department respects the oversight role of Congress and stands ready to work with the Committees should there be an appropriate resolution of outstanding legal issues," reads the Defense

Department letter to Cooper's lawyer, Daniel Levin.

But, it adds, "Any such resolution would have to consider the constitutional prerogatives and confidentiality interests of the co-equal Executive Branch ... and ensure fundamental fairness to any Executive Branch employees involved in this process, including Ms. Cooper."

Several witnesses, including Cooper, have appeared for closed-door interviews after receiving subpoenas from the House.

Cooper, who oversees Ukraine policy at the Defense Department, had to wait hours for her interview to begin on Wednesday after Republicans stormed the secure room being used for depositions. The act of protest brought the proceedings to a halt.

# Calif. utility admits it may have ignited fire

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — California's biggest utility admitted its electrical equipment may have ignited a wildfire burning in wine country Friday, despite blackouts imposed across the region to prevent blazes. Meanwhile, a wind-whipped fire destroyed homes near Los Angeles.

More than 50,000 people were under evacuation orders in the Santa Clarita area north of Los Angeles as hot, dry Santa Ana winds howling at up to 50 mph drove the flames into neighborhoods. At least six homes were burned. No immediate injuries were reported.

In Northern California, a blaze near the

Sonoma County wine country town of Geyserville burned 49 buildings and prompted evacuation orders for some 2,000 people.

The fire burned at least 25 square miles, whipped up by the strong winds that had prompted Pacific Gas & Electric to impose sweeping blackouts affecting a half-million people in Northern and Central California. Power was restored to most people by Thursday evening, PG&E said.

The power shut-offs were imposed after PG&E electrical equipment was blamed for several blazes in recent years that killed scores of people and burned thousands of homes.

However, PG&E said Thursday it didn't

de-energize a 230,000-volt transmission line near Geyserville that malfunctioned minutes before the fire erupted. The company reported finding a "broken jumper" wire on a transmission tower Wednesday night.

PG&E CEO Bill Johnson said it was too soon to know if the faulty equipment ignited the fire. He said the tower had been inspected four times in the past two years and appeared to have been in excellent condition.

In shutting off the electricity, PG&E cut power to the distribution lines that supply homes, but not to its long-distance transmission lines.

# Pence scolds firms for bowing to China's rules

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Vice President Mike Pence on Thursday sharply criticized U.S. companies for "kowtowing" to China's restrictions on free speech, taking special aim at Nike and the National Basketball Association for "losing their voices" in a dispute with Beijing this month over pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong.

In remarks at the Wilson Center presidential memorial, Pence issued a wide-ranging set of criticisms of Beijing's predatory trade practices, jailing of Muslim minorities and military expansionism. In far stronger terms than President Donald Trump has done so far, Pence also expressed solidarity with the protesters in Hong Kong, declaring that they "have

the prayers and admiration of millions of Americans."

But Pence also took time to upbraid U.S. businesses for compromising American values as a cost of doing business in China by acceding to Beijing's demand that they refrain from speaking out on political and social issues.

In doing so, he said, China is "seeking to export censorship, the hallmark of its regime.

"By exploiting corporate greed, Beijing is attempting to influence American public opinion in an attempt to influence public opinion, coercing corporate America," Pence said. Those corporations follow the "lure of China's money by muzzling not only criticism of China's Communist Party but even affirmative expression of Ameri-

can values."

Turning an eye toward Nike and the NBA, he chastised their response to Chinese pressure to denounce a tweet this month from Houston Rockets General Manager Daryl Morey expressing support for the demonstrators in Hong Kong. Trump has feuded with former National Football League player Colin Kaepernick, a Nike pitchman, and with NBA superstars LeBron James and Stephen Curry over racial issues, to which Pence appeared to allude obliquely.

"Nike promotes itself as a social justice champion, but when it comes to Hong Kong, it prefers checking its social conscience at the door," Pence said, noting reports that the company had pulled Rockets merchandise from stores in China.

# Children separated from families at border top 5K

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — U.S. immigration authorities separated more than 1,500 children from their parents at the Mexico border early in the Trump administration, the American Civil Liberties Union said Thursday, bringing the total number of children separated since July 2017 to more than 5,400.

The ACLU said the administration told its attorneys that 1,556 children were separated from July 1, 2017, to June 26, 2018, when a federal judge in San Diego ordered that chil-

dren in government custody be reunited with their parents.

Children from that period can be difficult to find because the government had inadequate tracking systems. Volunteers working with the ACLU are searching for some of them and their parents by going door-to-door in Guatemala and Honduras.

Of those separated during the 12-month period, 207 were under 5, said attorney Lee Gelernt of the ACLU, which sued to stop family separation. Five were under a year old, 26 were

a year old, 40 were 2 years old, 76 were 3, and 60 were 4.

"It is shocking that 1,556 more families, including babies and toddlers, join the thousands of others already torn apart by this inhumane and illegal policy," said Gelernt. "Families have suffered tremendously, and some may never recover."

The Justice Department declined to comment.

The count is a milestone in accounting for families who have been touched by Trump's widely maligned effort against illegal immigration. The gov-

ernment identified 2,814 separated children who were in government custody on June 26, 2018, nearly all of whom have been reunited.

The U.S. Health and Human Services Department's internal watchdog said in January that potentially thousands more had been separated since July 2017, prompting U.S. District Judge Dana Sabraw to give the administration six months to identify them. The ACLU said it received the last batch of 1,556 names one day ahead of Friday's deadline.

# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Painting stolen by Nazis recovered from museum

**NY** CANAJOHARIE — A painting that was stolen by the Nazis has been recovered from an upstate New York museum by the FBI.

The painting “Winter” by American artist Gari Melchers was part of the collection at the Arkell Museum in Canajoharie before it was recovered Sept. 10.

Court documents say German publisher and philanthropist Rudolf Mosse acquired the painting from the Great Berlin Art Exhibition in 1900. The state seized control of the family’s art collection after Mosse’s family members fled Germany in 1933.

The painting was to remain at the FBI’s Albany office until it is reunited with the Mosse family.

## Mural contains hidden expletive about Trump

**KY** LEXINGTON — A Kentucky mural includes a hidden message about President Donald Trump.

WLEX-TV reported the piece is called “The Devil is in the Details” and appears to show four women and a snake emerging from a spray paint can, but a closer look also finds an expletive followed by the word “Trump.”

The artist, known as ELLE, told the station the phrase is hidden in the piece, which was painted on a building in Lexington. In a statement, the artist said the message is an expression of anger about “this delusional sexist, racist man.”

A city spokeswoman acknowledged that using vulgarity is offensive but said no city dollars were spent on the mural and that it qualified as free speech.

## Police: Hospital video voyeur had 1M images

**FL** WEST PALM BEACH — Authorities have arrested a man who they say hid a small camera in bathrooms at three Florida medical facilities.

West Palm Beach police spokeswoman Molly Anderson said Tuesday that Department of Homeland Security agents arrested Rudelmiro Santizo Perez, 41, on Monday in Houston as he tried to flee to Guatemala.

Police began investigating on Oct. 3 when a hidden camera was found inside an employee bathroom at St. Mary’s Medical Center. Investigators found more than a million still and video images.

Perez was a technician who took CT scans at the hospital and PET scans at medical facilities in Delray Beach and Boca Raton.

## Student lab experiment prompts evacuation

**WV** MORGANTOWN — A spokesman for West Virginia University says a campus building was evacuated after a student’s chemical lab experiment went awry and created an explosive.

WVU spokesman John Bolt said students, faculty and staff in the engineering research building on the Evansdale campus were ordered out Tuesday. No injuries were reported.

Bolt told The Charleston Gazette-Mail that he believed the experiment was conducted Monday night, and when the analysis came back Tuesday, it showed an explosive was created. He said police and fire crews helped remove some materials from the research building as a precaution.

## New tech tools helping count secretive cougars

**NM** LINCOLN NATIONAL FOREST — New Mexico wildlife officials said new technology is allowing the state to estimate its cougar population more accurately.

The Santa Fe New Mexican reported the state’s Department of Game and Fish is using long-lasting motion-capture wildlife cameras, mathematical models and GPS collaring devices to count its elusive cougars.

The big cat is secretive, has a broad range of movement, and often doesn’t live close to its kind.

Officials said having an accurate count informs the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish’s quota on hunting and trapping of cougars. The department’s quota is 17% of the population.

## Time capsule is found in chapel’s foundation

**NH** SUGAR HILL — Members of a New Hampshire chapel said they discovered a time capsule from 1893 in the church’s foundation.

The Caledonian-Record reported a metal box was discovered chiseled into the cornerstone of St. Matthew’s Chapel in Sugar Hill on Monday.

The chapel is being temporarily relocated a few dozen feet away so its foundation can be stabilized. The team tasked with moving the building found the box.

Inside the box, chapel members found a newspaper clipping from August 1893, when the church was built, as well as five coins and a prayer book or small Bible.

## Band plays impromptu show in hot air balloon

**MS** NATCHEZ — A Mississippi band playing at Natchez’s annual hot air balloon festival played an impromptu concert from a balloon soaring above the festival site.

Two members of hometown band Bishop Gunn went for their first ride in a hot air balloon last Saturday. To celebrate the occasion, the Natchez Democrat reported that lead singer Travis McCready and guitarist Drew Smithers played a guitar and harmonica from the air. Then, they joined band members Burne Sharpe and Ben Lewis to play a full concert to a packed crowd on the festival site Saturday night.

## Woman bitten by wild animal after feedings

**AZ** TUCSON — Arizona wildlife authorities have urged people against feeding wild animals after a woman who regularly feeds javelina in Tucson was bitten by one.

The Arizona Game & Fish Department in Tucson said they believe the woman was attacked Sunday because she got too close to a female javelina and its young.

Authorities believe the javelina, a medium-sized animal that looks similar to a wild boar, would not have been there if she wasn’t routinely feeding them. The woman said she was taking out her trash and turned around, quickly scaring the javelina.

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STARS AND STRIPES®

# Vikings, Cook grind past Redskins

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Near the end of this methodical victory for the Minnesota Vikings, the crowd directed a loud cheer toward a player on the visiting team.

When Adrian Peterson appeared on the giant video screens during the 2-minute warning with an announcement of his latest climb up the NFL's all-time rushing list, the Washington Redskins running back took off his helmet, kissed two of his fingers and waved them to the fans who rooted for him in purple not that long ago.

The star of the show, though, was Peterson's successor. Dalvin Cook gave the Vikings yet another stellar performance.

Cook had 171 total yards and the game's only touchdown, helping Kirk Cousins beat his old team on the first try and carrying the Vikings to a 19-9 victory over the Redskins on Thursday night.

"It just shows how we can pull a win out. We've got a team that can go out and keep battling and keep fighting," Cook said. "That shows you the toughness that's in this group."

Cook, the NFL leader in yards from scrimmage, rushed 23 times for 98 yards and caught five passes for 73 yards for the Vikings (6-2) in their fourth straight win. Cousins went 23-for-26 for 285 yards without a turnover against the Redskins

(1-7), who drafted him in 2012 and made him the full-time starter in 2015 before he became a free agent and signed with the Vikings in 2018.

"We talked during the week. You always have a little extra motivation when you're playing your old team. You're always trying to prove that they were wrong for letting you go or whatever the reason was, so I thought he handled it really well," Vikings coach Mike Zimmer said. "He's playing outstanding right now."

Nobody on the Redskins lately warrants that assessment. Case Keenum, the quarterback Cousins replaced, had his return to Minnesota spoiled by a concussion that kept him out of the second half and thrust rookie Dwayne Haskins back into action. Two plays after Daron Payne and Landon Collins stuffed Cousins for no gain on a fourth-and-1 quarterback sneak at the Minnesota 34, Haskins overthrew Terry McLaurin, and Anthony Harris intercepted.

Keenum's last time in the stadium was nearly two years ago, when his last-play touchdown pass to Stefon Diggs gave the Vikings a victory over New Orleans in a divisional round playoff game, but there was little reason to make this game a memory. Keenum went 12-for-16 for 130 yards.

Diggs caught all seven passes that came his way from

Cousins, racking up 143 yards in his own tribute of sorts to the "Minneapolis Miracle." This game was for the guys in the ground game, though. Alexander Mattison added 61 yards on 13 rushes, and Minnesota more than doubled Washington's total yardage, 434-216.

Peterson had 14 carries for 76 yards and in the process moved up to sixth place on the NFL's career rushing list with 13,701 yards by passing Jerome Bettis and LaDainian Tomlinson.

"It was bittersweet because you come here to win a game," said Peterson, who played for the Vikings for 10 seasons from 2007-16. "Just coming back and seeing the love that they still have for me and they showed, it felt good. It was definitely a great home welcome. They welcomed me with open arms and just showed the love that they have and have for over a decade. So, it was a special moment. I had to hold tears back, to be honest with you."

Cook hugged Peterson on the field after the game.

"He was one of the guys that I watched," Cook said. "He's a special talent."

Ditto for Cook, who was drafted in the second round in 2017.

"If we keep him healthy, I hope one day he is in the Hall of Fame just because he's a talented guy," Diggs said. "He's a blessing."

## Chef's special

The screen pass to Cook was the favored weapon, highlighted by a zigzagging 31-yard gain late in the second quarter that set up his 4-yard run for a score with 11 seconds left on third down. Offensive coordinator Kevin Stefanski made a bold inside zone call for Cook, who rewarded the confidence by powering his way through safety Troy Apke and cornerback Fabian Moreau at the goal line. The Vikings ran a third-and-15 draw play to Cook from the 25 early in the fourth quarter before settling Dan Bailey's fourth field goal of the night, another conservative decision that even drew some boos from a crowd that was probably a bit bored at that point by a game bogged down by penalties and ball-control play.

## Stefon needs stick-um

Diggs went without a fumble over each of the last three seasons, and the Vikings recovered the two he had as a rookie in 2015. This year, he has already fumbled four times, the most in the league among nonquarterbacks, and the Vikings have lost three of them. Diggs also dropped what would have been a touchdown pass last week at Detroit, a catchable ball that slipped through his hands on third down in the fourth quarter.

# No. 16 SMU slips past Houston to stay unbeaten

Associated Press

HOUSTON — SMU coach Sonny Dykes conceded that the Mustangs did not play well and still managed to escape with a win.

Shane Buechele threw for 203 yards and two touchdowns, Xavier Jones ran for 133 yards and two touchdowns and No. 16 SMU held off Houston 34-31 Thursday night.

"It was a struggle for most of the night," Dykes said. "We didn't do a good job running the ball in the second half, didn't really have the ball in the second half. We

had a couple short fields and made strange things happen, but again, any time you cannot play well and win on the road, especially on a short week. I got to give our guys a lot of credit."

Buechele was 20-for-38. James Proche caught seven passes for 83 yards and a touchdown, and Kylan Grayson had six receptions for 76 yards and a touchdown for SMU (8-0, 4-0 American).

SMU improved to 8-0 for the first time since starting 10-0 in 1982, and improved to 4-0 in conference play for the first time

since 1986.

Jones had a career-long 62-yard rushing touchdown with 10:41 left in the second quarter and added a 2-yard scoring run 47 seconds into the second half after SMU forced a Houston fumble and Richard McBryde recovered.

"We've been preaching all week 'It might be ugly; it might be pretty, but we wanted to come down here and be 1-0,'" Jones said. "We got the job done. It was an ugly game, but I'm proud of my team and how we fought."

## Astros fire assistant GM for ranting at reporters

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Houston Astros fired assistant general manager Brandon Taubman on Thursday for directing inappropriate comments at female reporters during a clubhouse celebration, announcing the decision in the middle of the World Series and putting a renewed spotlight on domestic violence in baseball.

Astros general manager Jeff Luhnow apologized for the team's initial response Monday, which was to accuse a Sports Illustrated reporter of making up the story.

"That original reaction by the Astros was wrong, and we own it as an organization," Luhnow said during a news conference at Nationals Park, a day before Game 3.

"There were many people involved in reviewing that and approving that. And I'm not going to get into the details of that. ... But regardless of who wrote it and who approved it, it was wrong. It was incorrect. It should never have been sent out. We've learned a lesson about it," he said.

SI reported Taubman repeatedly yelled toward a group of female reporters about closer Roberto Osuna, who was suspended for 75 games last year for violating MLB's domestic violence policy and then was traded from Toronto to the Astros.

Taubman shouted "Thank God we got Osuna!" according to SI, which said he made similar remarks several times, punctuating them with a profanity. Taubman's behavior was corroborated by reporters for The Houston Chronicle and Yahoo.

After an investigation by Major League Baseball and the Astros, Luhnow met with Taubman on Thursday and fired him before the team traveled to Washington in what Luhnow termed "a pretty tough conversation."

## NBA roundup

# Bucks spoil debut of Rockets' duo

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 30 points and had a triple-double before fouling out and his supporting cast held on to lead the Milwaukee Bucks to a 117-111 victory over the Houston Rockets on Thursday night in a star-studded opener featuring the last three MVPs.

Antetokounmpo, the MVP last season, fouled out with about five minutes remaining. He had 13 rebounds and 11 assists.

Brook Lopez made two free throws with about a minute left before a layup by Russell Westbrook. But Lopez made a fade-away shot to leave Milwaukee up 115-109 with 39 seconds remaining. James Harden added a pair of free throws before Ersan Ilyasova made a jump shot with about 15 seconds to

go that sent many fans heading to the exits.

Westbrook had 24 points, 16 rebounds and seven assists, Harden, the 2018 MVP, added 19 points, 14 assists and seven rebounds. He was 2 of 13 from the field, 1 of 8 on threes and made 14 free throws without a miss.

**Clippers 141, Warriors 122:** Kawhi Leonard spoiled the Warriors' first game at Chase Center just as he did their farewell at Oracle Arena four months ago, scoring 21 points in three quarters to lead Los Angeles to the win at Golden State's snazzy new arena.

Reigning NBA Finals MVP Leonard shot 9-for-17 and also dished out nine assists in his second game with L.A.

Stephen Curry scored 23 points and D'Angelo Russell added 20 in his Golden State debut, but the Warriors got

beat up the way they used to do it against the entire NBA, even giving up a 46-point third quarter.

Curry, who at 31 is the oldest Warriors player, was 2 of 11 on threes as Golden State went 15-for-42 from deep.

**Hawks 117, Pistons 100:** Trae Young had 38 points and nine assists and Atlanta opened the season with a victory over host Detroit.

John Collins added 20 points and 10 rebounds, and Jabari Parker had 18 points. Vince Carter checked in for Atlanta with 6:52 left in the first quarter, becoming the first player to see action in 22 NBA seasons.

Derrick Rose led Detroit with 27 points, and Andre Drummond had 21 points and 12 rebounds. On Wednesday night in Indiana, Drummond had 32 points and 23 rebounds in Detroit's season-opening victory.

## Sports briefs

# Suns' Ayton suspended for 25 games

Associated Press

PHOENIX — The Phoenix Suns plans for a big turnaround season hit an unexpected snag.

Center Deandre Ayton was suspended 25 games without pay by the NBA on Thursday night for violating the terms of the NBA/NBPA Anti-Drug Program by testing positive for a diuretic.

The first overall pick last year out of Arizona, Ayton averaged 16.3 points and 10.3 rebounds as a rookie.

"On behalf of the Phoenix Suns organization, Monty Williams and I are disappointed in the actions by Deandre Ayton that led to his testing positive for a banned diuretic and subsequent suspension by the NBA. This does not uphold the standards and principles we have set for the team," Suns general manager James Jones

said in a statement released by the team.

Ayton won't be eligible to return until a road game against the Los Angeles Clippers on Dec. 17.

In other NBA news:

■ Sacramento Kings forward Marvin Bagley III will miss four to six weeks after injuring his thumb in the season opener.

The Kings said Thursday that an MRI showed Bagley has a non-displaced fracture in his right thumb.

■ Cedi Osman and the Cavs have agreed to terms on a four-year, \$30.8 million contract extension, a person familiar with the negotiations told The Associated Press.

The 24-year-old Osman has continued to improve for the Cavs, who began scouting the Turkish player as a teenager.

## De La Hoya: Lawsuit is extortion attempt

LOS ANGELES — Boxing promoter Oscar De La Hoya's company, Golden Boy Promotions, issued a statement Tuesday describing a lawsuit filed against him this week as "frivolous" and calling the allegations "completely false."

The lawsuit alleges that the unnamed woman had a consensual sexual relationship with De La Hoya until he assaulted her at his Pasadena home in November 2017.

Golden Boy Promotions' statement suggests De La Hoya is being extorted.

"Oscar is a very successful businessman, running one of the country's leading sports and entertainment companies — thus a prime target," the statement reads.

## NHL roundup

## Draisaitl, Oilers rally, top Caps in OT

Associated Press

EDMONTON, Alberta — Leon Draisaitl scored two goals, including one in overtime, and the Edmonton Oilers erased a two-goal deficit to beat the Washington Capitals 4-3 on Thursday night.

The Oilers got a 3-on-1 in extra time and Connor McDavid set up Draisaitl for a goal 1:18 in, giving the Oilers a 5-0 record at home this season.

Draisaitl added an assist in regulation and McDavid had a goal and two assists. Darnell Nurse also scored for the Oilers (8-2-1), who snapped a two-game losing skid.

“We were down 3-1 and had made a couple of mistakes, but we felt like we were playing all right,” said Oilers head coach Dave Tippett. “We just said let’s stick with it in the third period and we got some momentum, we got rolling. We got that first one and we were back in the game.

“Our big guys kind of took over and we ended up with the win. After not scoring for a couple of games, the guys came back hard and we played well against a good team.”

Alex Ovechkin had two goals and Jakub Vrana also scored for the Capitals (7-2-3), who saw a four-game winning streak come to an end.

The Oilers ended a lengthy scoring drought which had seen them go two straight games without a goal. The 165:58 streak ended when they found the back of the net with 6:40 left in the first period. Nurse’s shot ticked off the stick of Washington defender Dmitry Orlov and past Capitals goalie Braden Holtby.

The Capitals tied the game six minutes into the second period as Vrana tucked a shot under the arm of Oilers goalie Mikko Koskinen.

Washington took a 2-1 lead just 47 seconds later as Ovechkin tipped in Jonas Siegenhaller’s shot. Ovechkin extended his points scoring streak to nine games on the goal as did John Carlson, giving him the longest point streak by a defenseman in team history.

Ovechkin added his second of the game and ninth of the season with six minutes left in the second period, picking the top corner on the power play.

Edmonton cut into the deficit on a goal by Draisaitl. McDavid picked up an assist to end a three-game run without a point.

The Oilers got the equalizer with 1:37 remaining in the third and Koskinen on the bench for the extra attacker, as McDavid took a feed from James Neal and trickled a

shot that just got past Holtby and over the line to send the game into overtime.

**Sharks 4, Canadiens 2:** Evander Kane scored two power-play goals and San Jose snapped a two-game losing streak with a win at Montreal.

Kevin Labanc and Melker Karlsson also scored for the Sharks, playing the first game of a back-to-back set. Tomas Hertl had three assists.

San Jose has won nine straight games against the Canadiens dating to March 21, 2015. Montreal’s 30th-ranked penalty kill went 1-for-3 and the Canadiens have allowed 11 goals on 34 opportunities on the penalty kill.

“Special teams have to make the difference,” captain Shea Weber said. “It has to be a lot better. We have to find a way to figure it out.

“We want it to be better. We’re not sitting here saying that it’s good enough. We’re going to work on it in practice. We’re going to continue going over video. The change will come for the positive.”

Nick Cousins and Joel Armia scored for the Canadiens, who were coming off three days’ rest after a 4-3 loss to Minnesota on Sunday.

Carey Price allowed four goals on 23 shots for Montreal.

“Did we get some chances? Absolutely,” Montreal coach Claude Julien said. “We had lots of chances, even in the third period. We didn’t bury them. They didn’t get that many chances but they buried them.

“Sometimes when you need to lift the puck up, we’re shooting at their pads. We had some great chances in the slot but we missed the net. It’s the little details.”

**Flames 6, Panthers 5 (SO):** Matthew Tkachuk scored twice in regulation and again in the shootout in host Calgary’s victory over Florida.

Sean Monahan also scored in the shootout for the Flames, who converted both tiebreaking attempts on Sergei Bobrovsky. David Rittich thwarted Jonathan Huberdeau and Aleksander Barkov to secure the victory.

Austin Czarnik, Mark Giordano and Sam Bennett scored in regulation for Calgary. Huberdeau, MacKenzie Weegar, Josh Brown, Evgenii Dadonov and Mark Pysyk scored for the Panthers.

**Blue Jackets 4, Hurricanes 3 (OT):** Cam Atkinson scored 3:28 into overtime to lift host Columbus past Carolina.

Atkinson tapped in a pass from Pierre-Luc Dubois to give the Blue Jackets a second straight victory in a fourth consecutive

overtime game. Ryan Murray, Alexander Texier and Sonny Milano also scored, and Joonas Korpi stopped 21 shots.

Dougie Hamilton, Ryan Dzingel and Sebastian Aho scored for Carolina, and Petr Mrazek made 27 saves.

**Islanders 4, Coyotes 2:** Anders Lee scored the winner and Semyon Varlamov made 21 saves to help host New York beat Arizona for its fifth straight victory.

Derick Brassard, Josh Bailey and Scott Mayfield also scored for the Islanders.

Michael Grabner and Conor Garland scored for the Coyotes, who had won four in a row.

**Flyers 4, Blackhawks 1:** Kevin Hayes scored after he lost a goal because of an offsides challenge in Philadelphia’s victory at Chicago.

Claude Giroux, James van Riemsdyk and Oskar Lindblom also scored for the Flyers, who beat the Blackhawks 4-3 in Prague in the season opener on Oct. 4. Brian Elliott made 23 saves in his second straight start.

Brandon Saad scored for Chicago.

**Rangers 6, Sabres 2:** Ryan Strome scored his first two goals this season, Henrik Lundqvist made 31 saves and host New York beat Buffalo to snap a five-game losing streak.

Artemi Panarin, Brett Howden, Tony DeAngelo and Chris Kreider also scored for the Rangers.

Marco Scandella and Vladimir Sobotka scored for the Sabres.

**Predators 4, Wild 0:** Pekka Rinne made 26 saves, Colton Sissons had a goal and an assist and host Nashville beat Minnesota.

Rinne improved to 6-0-1 with his first shutout of the season and 56th overall.

Miikka Salomaki, Calle Jarnkrok and Craig Smith also scored for the Predators.

**Blues 5, Kings 2:** Alex Pietrangelo and Robert Thomas scored in a two-minute span of the second period in host St. Louis’ victory over Los Angeles.

Brayden Schenn scored twice, including an empty-netter, Vince Dunn also scored, and Jordan Binnington made 33 saves. Jeff Carter and Alex Iafallo scored for the Kings.

**Stars 2, Ducks 1:** Denis Gurianov ended a personal scoring drought with two first-period goals, and Ben Bishop made 29 saves to help host Dallas beat Anaheim. Gurianov hadn’t scored in 26 games since his first NHL goal on Nov. 18, 2018.