

STARS AND STRIPES[®]

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

US convoy pelted on path from Syria

Associated Press

AKCAKALE, Turkey — Angry over the U.S. withdrawal, residents of a Kurdish-dominated Syrian city hurled potatoes at departing American military vehicles as they drove by on Monday. Defense Secretary Mark Esper said U.S. troops will stay in eastern Syria to protect Kurdish-held oil fields for at least the coming weeks and he was discussing options to keep them there.

“Like rats, America is running away,” one man shouted in Arabic at a convoy of armored vehicles flying American flags passing down an avenue in the northeastern city of Qamishli, according to video by the Kurdish news agency.

The video showed people pelting the vehicles with potatoes and shouting, “No America” and “America liar” in

English. Another man shouted obscenities and talked of babies in Kurdish-held areas who have died in the Turkish offensive. One of the vehicles reversed down the street and over a sidewalk as several people walked after it, shaking their fists in the air and shouting insults.

The scene encapsulated the Kurds’ feelings of betrayal and added a new indignity to a U.S. withdrawal that has been rushed and saw several close brushes with Turkish-backed forces.

The Kurds were stunned when President Donald Trump two weeks ago abruptly decided to pull U.S. troops out of border areas, abandoning their allied Kurdish-backed fighters ahead of Turkey’s invasion. After the assault began Oct. 9, Trump ordered a general withdrawal from Syria.

At another location, near the town of Tal Tamr, a group of protesters raised banners to departing U.S. troops late Sunday, according to an Associated Press video.

One man blocked the way of a U.S. van with a poster reading, “Thanks for US people, but Trump betrayed us.”

The Kurdish-led force was a key U.S. ally in the long and bloody fight that eventually brought down Islamic State’s rule over northeastern and eastern Syria. The U.S. troops near the border were seen by the Kurds as insurance that Turkey would not attack.

After being abandoned by U.S. forces, the Kurds agreed to a cease-fire deal brokered by Washington that requires them to leave a swath of territory along the border, handing it over to Turkish control.

As part of the cease-fire deal, Kurdish forces pulled back Sunday from the border town of Ras al-Ayn, paving the way for Turkish troops to be deployed there. Under the deal, the Kurds are to withdraw from a stretch of territory 75 miles along the border and 19 miles deep. Qamishli is east of that area.

A senior Kurdish official, Redur Khalil, said Monday his forces are complying with the agreement and are preparing to complete the withdrawal. He called for an international mechanism to protect Kurdish civilians who want to stay in their towns after Kurdish-led fighters leave.

Most Kurdish civilians have fled Ras al-Ayn, fearing killings or repression by Turkish-backed forces.

US may keep some troops in Syria to guard oil fields

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Even as American forces make a hasty and chaotic withdrawal from northeastern Syria, the U.S. is considering leaving some troops behind to secure oil fields in the region and make sure they don’t fall into the hands of a resurgent Islamic State, Defense Secretary Mark Esper said Monday.

The Pentagon chief said the plan was still in the discussion phase and had not yet been presented to President Donald Trump. Trump has repeatedly said ISIS has been defeated and has portrayed the withdrawal of American support for Kurdish forces as part of his larger goal of bringing troops home from the Middle East.

Esper emphasized that the proposal to leave a small number of troops in eastern Syria was intended to give the president “maneuver room” and wasn’t final.

“There has been a discussion about possibly doing it,” Esper told a press conference in Afghanistan before heading to Saudi Arabia. “There has been no decision with regard to numbers or anything like that.”

The fact that such a plan was under consideration was another sign the administration was still trying to sort out its overall strategy amid fierce criticism from the president’s Republican allies of his abrupt decision to pull U.S. forces back — essentially clearing the way for Turkey’s military incur-

sion into the border region to push back the American-allied Kurdish forces.

A White House official said GOP Sen. Lindsey Graham raised the issue of keeping U.S. forces in eastern Syria to protect the oil fields and that Trump supported the idea. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal discussions.

Esper said the main goal would be to make sure ISIS doesn’t gain control of the oil fields and the revenue they generate.

The defense secretary said American troops around Kobani are withdrawing and that the U.S. is maintaining combat air patrol over U.S. forces in Syria as the withdrawal goes on.

While Trump has insisted he’s bringing home Americans from “endless wars” in the Mideast, Esper said all U.S. troops leaving Syria will go to western Iraq and the American military will continue operations against ISIS. The troops aren’t coming home and the U.S. isn’t leaving the turbulent Middle East, according to plans outlined by Esper before he arrived in Afghanistan on Sunday.

Trump’s acting chief of staff, Mick Mulvaney, asked about the fact that the troops were not coming home as the president claimed they would, said, “Well, they will eventually.” He said that “the quickest way to get them out of danger was to get them into Iraq.”

Marines: Drill instructor misconduct less

The San Diego Union-Tribune

SAN DIEGO — The Marines say changes in the way they train recruits and their notoriously hard-nosed drill instructors have led to fewer incidents of drill instructor misconduct, officials told the Union-Tribune.

Their statement about training followed an Oct. 5 Washington Post report revealing that more than 20 Marines at the San Diego boot camp have been disciplined for misconduct since 2017, including cases of physical attacks and racist and homophobic slurs.

According to The Washington Post, the Marines punished

one drill instructor who in the fall of 2017 used a staple gun on a recruit and ordered another recruit to eat part of a pine cone. That drill instructor received administrative punishment and left the Marines in September 2018.

The incident was one of several at the two Marine Corps boot camps in recent years, including a case in which a Marine recruit fell to his death after being struck by a drill instructor at Parris Island, S.C.

Every year, almost 18,000 young Marines graduate from Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego. MCRD San Diego is all male; female Marine re-

cruits are trained at Parris Island.

Marine Capt. Martin Harris, an MCRD San Diego spokesman, said that from August 2018 through September 2019, there was a 64 percent decrease in substantiated allegations of drill instructor misconduct. While Harris did not go into detail about those cases, most were minor and did not warrant significant punishment, he said.

Harris estimated that the number of cases over those 13 months were between 20 and 40.

The Marines invited the Union-Tribune to visit the San Diego depot's chief of staff, Col.

Daniel Kazmier, to talk about training recruits and drill instructors.

According to Kazmier, in 2017 the Marines strengthened their reporting requirements for hazing. That led to a corresponding spike in reports, he said.

Those requirements and other changes, such as a new "four-phase model" for recruit training, have led to fewer punishable incidents, he said.

"The good news is that, overall ... the number of incidents that were serious enough to merit punishment of any kind have been drastically reduced," he said.

Military surge in Australia to grow, ex-official says

BY SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

The military buildup in Australia's Northern Territory, which included a record number of U.S. Marines rotating there this past summer, will continue as a response to growing Chinese capabilities, according to a former Australian defense official.

To support U.S. Air Force and Marine activities in the Northern Territory, Australia and the United States will invest about \$2 billion on aircraft maintenance, support facili-

ties, fuel storage and upgrades to accommodations, training areas and ranges, the Australian Defence Force said in a statement Monday announcing the departure of the summer's rotation of 2,500 Marines from Darwin, Australia.

The deployment of such a large Marine contingent is an important milestone, former Australian Assistant Defense Secretary Ross Babbage said by phone Monday.

President Barack Obama announced plans to rotate a 2,500-strong Marine Air-Ground

Task Force to Darwin back in 2011, but it took eight years for the force to reach that level.

The U.S. military buildup in Australia will continue in response to growing Chinese capabilities, Babbage predicted.

Defense experts have kept an eye on Chinese maritime claims in the South China Sea, development of long-range missiles and a growing fleet of Chinese aircraft carriers.

China launched its first carrier — a former Soviet Kuznetsov-class vessel called the Liaoning — in 2012. The

South China Morning Post reported Thursday that China's first homegrown aircraft carrier, the Type 001A, appeared to have set off on its eighth sea trial, with experts predicting it will be commissioned within months.

The buildup in Australia's Northern Territory will likely involve enhanced air and maritime facilities, Babbage said.

"It wouldn't surprise me if the (U.S.) Army said they could send a couple of battalions (on a training rotation). Australia's answer would be, 'Of course you can come,'" he said.

Researchers find 2nd Japanese warship sunk in Battle of Midway

Associated Press

MIDWAY ATOLL, Northwestern Hawaiian Islands — A crew of deep-sea explorers and historians looking for lost World War II warships have found a second Japanese aircraft carrier that went down in the historic Battle of Midway.

Vulcan Inc. Director of Undersea Operations Rob Kraft and Naval History and Heri-

tage Command historian Frank Thompson reviewed high-frequency sonar images of the warship Sunday and say that its dimensions and location mean it has to be the carrier Akagi. It was found in the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument resting in nearly 18,000 feet of water more than 1,300 miles northwest of Pearl Harbor.

The researchers used an au-

tonomous underwater vehicle, or AUV, equipped with sonar to find the ship. The vehicle had been out overnight collecting data, and the image of a warship appeared in the first set of readings Sunday morning. The first scan used low-resolution sonar, so the crew sent their AUV back to get higher-quality images.

"I'm sure of what we're seeing here. The dimensions that

we're able to derive from this image (are) conclusive," Kraft said. "It can be none other than Akagi."

The vessel is sitting among a pile of debris, and the ground around the warship is clearly disturbed by the impact of it hitting the seafloor.

The find comes on the heels of the discovery of another Japanese carrier, the Kaga, last week.

Pelosi meets top officials in Afghanistan

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Afghan President Ashraf Ghani met with U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and a group of American lawmakers in an unannounced visit to the country.

The Afghan government's statement says that Ghani on Sunday thanked the delegation for the U.S.' continued financial and political support for

Afghanistan over the past 18 years.

The delegation met with Ghani and Chief Executive Abdallah Abdallah.

Pelosi on her twitter account said her visit to Afghanistan focused on security, governance and economic development.

Her office said in a statement Sunday night the bipartisan delegation met with top Afghan

leaders, civil society representatives and U.S. military chiefs and troops serving there.

Pelosi said the delegation emphasized the importance of combating corruption and ensuring women are at the table in reconciliation talks.

Pelosi and the delegation stopped in Afghanistan after a visit to Jordan.

Pelosi said that while Afghan

women have made progress in some areas, more must be done to ensure their security as well as economic and educational opportunities for women and girls there.

She praised the courage of U.S. troops and diplomats on the front lines.

The delegation had visited key U.S. ally Jordan the day before.

Hikes coming worldwide to Air Force lodging rates

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN

Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — The nightly rates for rooms at the Air Force's European inns will more than double starting next month as the services begin to foot the bill for most of their operating expenses.

The cheapest rooms at some lodging units on Air Force bases in Europe will be \$149 per night beginning Nov. 1, up from \$70, regardless of whether travel is for official duty or leisure, information provided by officials in Germany shows.

The higher rates mean military units will have to budget more for temporary duty and permanent change-of-station moves. The new rates also could mean that more personnel might look for cheaper lodg-

ing options off base.

Military members are required to stay on base if their temporary duty assignments are to U.S. installations, and are encouraged, but not required, to do so if their assignments are to locations near military installations.

In the Spangdahlem and Ramstein areas, most off-base lodging runs well under 100 euros, or about \$110, according to listings on the travel reservation site booking.com.

As of next month, the cheapest accommodation offered at Spangdahlem's on-base Eifel Arms will be \$149 per night, compared with \$70 prior to the changes, the Air Force's deputy assistant secretary for cost and economics, Pamela Schwenke, said in a memorandum issued last week. The cost of over-nighting in a business suite for

officers ranked O-6 and above will nearly triple, from \$79 per night to just less than \$200, the memorandum shows.

Ramstein and bases in the United Kingdom will see a rate identical to Spangdahlem's. The new rates vary by location and are within per diem levels for all room types at all locations, the memorandum says.

The rate changes were calculated to ensure facilities could fund operations while maintaining standards, the Pentagon said.

At the Army base lodge in Wiesbaden, the cheapest room has gone up from \$55 to \$70 a night, a front desk clerk said by phone Monday. Other rooms at the lodge went up by \$10 to \$15 starting on Oct. 1.

"Customers are upset. They are really complaining about the \$15 increase," said the

clerk, who declined to give his name since he wasn't authorized to give an interview. The increase was the result of the lodge no longer being supported with base funds, he said.

The increases come as service branches scramble to cover costs without taxpayer dollars, which became unavailable at the start of the new fiscal year on Oct. 1.

The rate increases are part of a Pentagon plan announced last year to make military business operations more efficient and shift funds to higher priority programs.

The Navy began raising its lodging rates a year ago. In the Europe, Africa and Southwest Asia regions, rates increased \$11 to \$31 per night, depending on room type, a Navy statement said.

Retailer's Trump-themed ad draws strong reactions

The Washington Post

A small athletic-wear company from Oregon says it is taking a stand against the president and has chosen a 30-foot billboard in Times Square depicting President Donald Trump being hog-tied in front of the White House to do so.

The provocative ad for Portland-based Dhvani, which sells \$58 yoga pants, takes aim at the Trump administration's efforts to block federal funding for

Planned Parenthood and other clinics. It has, predictably, ginned up strong reactions on both sides of the political aisle.

Marketing experts and analysts say the billboard is perhaps the most extreme example of politically charged advertising to date, though they disagreed about just how effective it would be in helping Dhvani achieve its goal of "creating change in the world."

The billboard, which debuted

Tuesday, went largely unnoticed until Thursday, when a handful of media outlets including Fox News reported on it. On Friday morning the president's eldest son, Donald Trump Jr., condemned it on Twitter.

The campaign began with "a lightning bolt of inspiration" over the summer, Dhvani's chief executive, Avi Brown, said in an interview Friday with The Post. The billboard image shows a Trump impersonator

being tied up by model Michal Mesa, a Marine Corps veteran and middle school teacher.

The marketing campaign, which was photographed in August, also includes other photos of a Trump impersonator being bound, gagged and shushed.

The billboard, Brown said, has increased traffic to the company's website and social media accounts. Sales are also up, though he declined to offer specifics.

Firms reach \$260M deal in opioids suit

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — The nation's three dominant drug distributors and a big drugmaker have reached a \$260 million deal to settle a lawsuit related to the opioid crisis just as the first federal trial over the crisis was due to begin Monday.

The settlement means the closely watched trial will not move forward now, but it does not resolve more than 2,600 other lawsuits across the country seeking to hold the drug industry accountable for an opioid crisis that has been linked to more than 400,000 deaths in the U.S. since 2000.

The settlement ends only the suits brought by the Ohio counties of Cuyahoga and Summit.

Hunter Shkolnik, a lawyer for Cuyahoga County, said the agreement calls for the dis-

tributors AmerisourceBergen, Cardinal Health and McKesson to pay a combined \$215 million. Drugmaker Teva would contribute \$20 million in cash and \$20 million worth of suboxone, a drug used to treat opioid addiction.

"People can't lose sight of the fact that the counties got a very good deal for themselves, but we also set an important national benchmark for the others," Shkolnik said.

Separately, the small distributor Henry Schein also announced Monday that it's settling with Summit County for \$1.25 million. The company was not named in Cuyahoga's lawsuit.

After the new settlements and previous ones with five other drugmakers, the only defendant left in the trial that had been scheduled for Monday is

the pharmacy chain Walgreens. The new plan is for Walgreens and other pharmacies to go to trial within six months if they don't reach settlements first.

The judge overseeing the federal litigation had long pushed for settlements that would not only provide for damages for the plaintiffs but also change practices as a way to make a dent in the opioid crisis.

Parties say talks on a global settlement will continue.

Industry CEOs and attorneys general from four states met Friday in a daylong session in Cleveland where the offer in place was a deal worth potentially \$48 billion in cash and drugs over time to settle cases nationally. The deal was not completed partly because of disagreements between state and local governments over

how to allocate the settlement, which would have come from the three big distributors, Teva and Johnson & Johnson.

The epidemic has become more complicated in the past decade, with fatal overdose numbers rising largely because of illicit drugs such as heroin and fentanyl.

The settlement efforts until now have been mixed.

Four drugmakers reached deals only with the two Ohio counties — enough to get them out of the first trial but leaving unresolved the claims from communities across the country.

OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma reached a tentative settlement last month that could be worth up to \$12 billion over time. But half the states and hundreds of local governments oppose it.

Assange loses his bid to delay extradition hearing

Associated Press

LONDON — WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange appeared in a U.K. court Monday to fight extradition to the United States on espionage charges, and he lost a bid to delay proceedings so that his legal team would have more time to prepare his case.

Assange defiantly raised a fist to supporters who jammed the public gallery in Westminster Magistrates Court for a rare view of their hero. He appears to have lost weight but looked healthy, although he spoke very softly and at times seemed despondent and confused.

Assange and his legal team failed to convince District Judge Vanessa Baraitser that a delay in the already slow-moving case was justified. The full extradition is still set for a five-day hearing in late February, with brief interim hearings in November and December.

Assange hadn't been seen in public for several months,

and his supporters had raised concerns about his well-being. He wore a blue sweater and a blue sports suit for the hearing and had his silvery-gray hair slicked back.

After the judge turned down his bid for a three-month delay, Assange said in halting tones he didn't understand the events in court.

He said the case is not "equitable" because the U.S. government has "unlimited resources," while he doesn't have easy access to his lawyers or to documents needed to prepare his battle against extradition while he is confined to Belmarsh Prison on the outskirts of London.

"They have all the advantages," said Assange, 48.

U.S. authorities accuse Assange of scheming with former Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning to break a password for a classified government computer.

Russia eyes Africa as US pulls away, China moves in

Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG — Russian President Vladimir Putin is following China's lead and making a splashy bid for influence in Africa, hosting the continent's leaders this week in the first-ever Russia-Africa Summit. The Kremlin has said 47 of the continent's 54 heads of state or government are expected to attend.

Russia is taking advantage of the Trump administration's seemingly waning interest in the continent of 1.2 billion people that includes some of the world's fastest-growing economies and a strategic perch on the Red Sea.

In addition to its booming youth population, growing middle class and improving infrastructure as well as long-standing natural assets like diamonds, strategic minerals and oil, Africa is also a place where Russia can grow its interests while avoiding Western sanctions imposed over its annexation

of Crimea in 2014.

Russia is trying to revive relationships forged during the more engaged Soviet Union era when the USSR assertively backed countries across Africa in a Cold War of influence with the United States. While the generation of African leaders and officials who trained in the Soviet Union decades ago is aging, some such as President Joao Lourenco of oil-rich Angola are still in influential positions.

Russia sends more arms to Africa than any other country, and the supply is rising, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

Russia has signed military cooperation agreements with at least 28 African countries, the majority in the past five years, often using counterterrorism as a basis, according to an analysis published in August by the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Authorities search for runaway emu

MN FOLEY — Authorities in central Minnesota are searching for a missing emu described as a “habitual runaway.”

The Benton County Sheriff’s Office said the big bird went missing Saturday from the Foley area, about 70 miles northwest of Minneapolis.

Emus are the second-largest living birds in the world by height behind the ostrich. The flightless native Australian birds can sprint at up to 30 mph.

The sheriff’s office said there were two emus and a dog that also wandered away, but one of the emus and the dog were located.

Veteran police officer suspended for 5 days

CT NORWALK — A veteran Connecticut police officer who authorities said fled the scene of a drunken driving crash has been suspended for five days.

State police said Norwalk Officer Hector Delgado was on Interstate 95 in Fairfield on Aug. 8 when he struck a truck and then drove away. The 26-year veteran faces driving under the influence and other charges.

Crop of acorns makes for squirrel paradise

ME PORTLAND — It’s a boom year for acorns in Maine, where parks and lawns are covered in the squirrel-attracting nuts.

The bumper crop of acorns is the result of a phenomenon that happens every two to five years. The Portland Press Herald reported scientists have struggled to explain why these

irregular “mast years” sometimes flood communities with the acorns.

Acorns fall from oak trees, and it’s possible the irregular years of heavy acorn drop are a product of evolution. The Press Herald reported that the acorn ebb and flow suppresses populations of rodents and other acorn-eaters in leaner years.

For now, Maine’s squirrels certainly aren’t complaining.

Explosion spreads fire to 9 nearby homes

PA ALLENTOWN — Authorities said an early morning house explosion in the eastern Pennsylvania city of Allentown blew off the front of the row home and led to a fire that spread to nine other homes, but no serious injuries were reported.

Allentown fire officials said the 3 a.m. Sunday blast and fire displaced almost two dozen residents. Police said one person initially unaccounted for was later found safe. One person was taken to a hospital for a minor injury, and a firefighter was treated for a shoulder injury.

Officials said more than two dozen people were displaced by the blaze.

Capt. John Christopher said Sunday that crews were putting out hot spots but there was no longer an active fire. The cause of the blaze is under investigation.

Airline agent pleads guilty in ticket scheme

MA BOSTON — An airline gate agent in Massachusetts who prosecutors say converted more than 500 mostly low-cost domestic flights to more expensive international ones at no extra cost

has pleaded guilty in federal court.

U.S. Attorney Andrew Lelling in a statement said Tiffany Jenkins, 31, pleaded guilty Friday to wire fraud.

Officials said that from July 2016 to September 2017 Jenkins used her access to the airline’s reservation database to exchange the flights at no additional cost for family, friends and acquaintances. Authorities said the Chelsea woman applied a code often used for passengers who have missed flights or experienced a death in the family, executing approximately 505 ticket exchanges for more than 100 different passengers.

She faces up to 20 years in prison at sentencing scheduled for Jan. 21.

Cemetery cancels Halloween movie

NC FAYETTEVILLE — A cemetery in North Carolina has canceled plans for a Halloween-themed movie night after complaints from people with loved ones buried there.

WTVD reported the free public event at Lafayette Memorial Park in Fayetteville was going to include snacks and a kid-friendly film. A statement from the owner says the park has “a wonderful green space with plenty of room to hold such an event without infringing on any burial spaces.”

But the statement says when families’ concerns became obvious, the event was canceled “out of respect to all.”

Officer injured by SUV while directing traffic

CA LIVE OAK — A California Highway Patrol officer was injured when he was struck by a speeding SUV

while directing traffic around a Northern California railroad crossing.

The Sacramento Bee reported Saturday that two officers were directing traffic about 1 a.m. around malfunctioning rail crossing gates near the city of Live Oak, some 50 miles north of Sacramento.

Sgt. Nelda Banuelos said an SUV sped around a curve and struck one of the officers. She said the other officer chased down the driver of the SUV after he fled on foot. Lucas Julian Nelson, 21, was arrested for driving under the influence with great bodily injury. He is being held on \$50,000 bail.

The injured officer was flown to University of California, Davis Medical Center in Sacramento.

Cyclists ride to raise awareness of poverty

AL MONTGOMERY — A group of cyclists was traveling across Alabama to raise awareness of rural poverty and civil rights.

The group Civil Rides said in a news release that 20 cyclists were to take part in the ride on Saturday and Sunday. Civil Rides said the group sees poverty as a modern civil rights issue in America.

The cyclists were to make stops at sites important to the civil rights movement.

Riders were traveling from Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church in Montgomery and through Selma and Alabama’s Black Belt. The ride was to end Sunday in Birmingham at Kelly Ingram Park.

The ride also raises money for the Together for Hope program and Out Hunger, a hunger initiative.

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STARS AND STRIPES®

Stocked rotations for Series

Associated Press

Now this is a serious World Series throw-down.

Gerrit Cole, Justin Verlander and Zack Greinke vs. Max Scherzer, Stephen Strasburg and Patrick Corbin — all of them All-Star starters, still pitching at their peak.

It's a mound meeting that every fan can enjoy, the Houston Astros against the Washington Nationals.

Capital hill, indeed.

"We've got the best pitcher in the world going. And then after that, we've got the best pitcher in the world going, too. And then after that, we've got the best pitcher in the world going, too," Astros third baseman Alex Bregman said. "It's going to be a lot of fun."

Bregman and fellow MVP candidate Anthony Rendon certainly did their parts to make this the Year of the Home Run. And Jose Altuve lit up Minute Maid Park with his walk-off homer to beat the Yankees in the AL Championship Series.

But the focus of this Fall Classic is right on the rotations. Houston opened as a 2-1 favorite at the Las Vegas sportsbooks.

Cole is set to throw the first pitch on Tuesday night in Hous-

ton. He led the majors with 326 strikeouts, was second to Verlander in the big leagues with 20 wins and topped the AL with a 2.50 ERA.

He also is 19-0 in his last 25 starts. That includes 3-0 in the playoffs so far, allowing one earned run in 22²/₃ innings while fanning 32.

The clubs saw each other back in February when they played in the exhibition opener, and Scherzer gave up a homer to the first batter of the game.

Now, eight months later, they meet for real. The 107-win Astros trying to capture their second crown in three years, the wild-card Nationals making their Series debut.

"The World Series comes through Houston. I like the sound of that. I think it should be that way for many years to come," Bregman said.

No slight to Bregman and other big hitters here: Altuve, the ALCS MVP, postseason star George Springer and top shortstops Trea Turner and Carlos Correa. And not to overlook the young stars on this stage for the first time, rookies like Juan Soto and Yordan Alvarez.

Yet in an era when teams search for new pitching strategies — witness the Astros' pa-

rade of relievers in Game 6 of the ALCS — the two clubs left figure to rely heavily on their starters.

Fine by Houston manager AJ Hinch.

"Philosophically, whether it's about the new-age opener or pulling guys third time through, most of the people that support that haven't had Verlander or Cole on their team," he said.

The Nationals stack up just fine, too. Consider their staff includes Anibal Sanchez, who took a playoff no-hit bid into the eighth inning.

For Washington, the city gets its first World Series since the Senators played in 1933. For the Nationals, the old October question: rest or rust?

The Nationals will have a full week between games while the Astros get only two days off. A fact on this: Boston had two more days of rest last year and beat the Dodgers. But before that, the past nine champs were the clubs that had less rest.

Nationals manager Dave Martinez isn't worried.

"These guys have played unbelievably. I think they needed a break. Some guys really needed a break," he said. "Heal their bodies a little bit."

NHL roundup

Wild get 2nd win of season

Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Zach Parise scored the go-ahead goal midway through the third period and the Minnesota Wild won their second game of the season, beating the Montreal Canadiens 4-3 on Sunday.

Jason Zucker, Marcus Foligno and Brad Hunt also scored for Minnesota, which matched its highest goal total through eight games this season. The Wild also scored four goals in a 7-4 home loss to Pittsburgh.

Devan Dubnyk made 29 saves and earned his first win of the season.

Canucks 3, Rangers 2: Brock Boeser and Jay Beagle scored late in a three-goal first period and visiting Vancouver held on to beat New York.

Bo Horvat also scored and Elias Pettersson had two assists for Vancouver, which bounced back from a 1-0 loss at New Jersey on Saturday to win for the fifth time in six games.

Capitals 5, Blackhawks 3: Tom Wilson broke a tie with 8:13 left and Washington rebounded after blowing a two-goal lead to beat host Chicago for its third straight win.

Wilson beat Corey Crawford from the right edge of the crease with his third goal after he was left open and took a cross-ice pass from Carl Hagelin to put Washington ahead 4-3. Lars Eller added an empty-netter from his own zone with 49.3 seconds remaining.

Flames 2, Ducks 1: Mikael Backlund scored with 11:03 left, Cam Talbot made 29 saves and visiting Calgary rallied to beat Anaheim.

Michael Stone also scored for the Flames, who snapped a three-game road losing streak.

Jets 1, Oilers 0 (SO): Kyle Connor and Patrik Laine scored in the shootout and host Winnipeg snapped a three-game skid.

Hamlin holds off Elliott at Kansas

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Kan. — Denny Hamlin was surrounded by Joe Gibbs Racing teammates at the front on the final restart, and that put Chase Elliott in the most difficult and precarious of situations.

Somehow, he figured, he needed to find a way to beat them all to advance in NASCAR's playoffs.

It turned out second place was good enough.

Hamlin roared away with a push from behind from teammate Kyle Busch on the second shot at a green-white-checkered finish, and Elliott was unable to chase him down. But deep in the field, Brad Keselowski was going backward, and the

spots he lost in the elimination race at Kansas Speedway were enough to send Elliott through in the final cut-off spot to the round of eight.

Hamlin won the race. Elliott felt almost as if he did.

"You have to stay fighting in these things, especially with the late-race restarts," he said. "Just excited we get to fight another race. Back up against the wall, to come out here and battle for the win, that's what you have to do when you're in the position we were in."

In a bit of irony, it was Keselowski who helped bring out the caution in the first overtime when he got into Daniel Suarez and triggered a wreck that collected teammate Joey Logano. The field was nearing the start-

finish line but the caution light came on before the leader took the white flag.

Kyle Busch ultimately finished third, followed by Kurt Busch and William Byron. But the key was Keselowski, who dropped from 13th to 19th on the final restart and out of the next round of the playoffs.

He ended up three points — equal to three positions on the track — below the cutoff line.

Byron was the next driver eliminated despite a strong run at Kansas, where he would have needed a win to advance. Alex Bowman and home-state hero Clint Bowyer also were eliminated.

"I did think we were OK," Keselowski said, "but obviously we weren't."

New-look Clippers heavy favorite in West

Associated Press

Stephen Curry knew roster change was inevitable.

That being said, Curry and the Golden State Warriors aren't changing their expectations.

The five-time defending Western Conference champions aren't the popular pick to represent their side of the league in this season's NBA Finals, understandable after losing the likes of Kevin Durant and Andre Iguodala. But Curry said the Warriors will strive to remain what they've been over the last half-decade — "a team that's feared across the league."

"Look at every era of basketball," Curry said. "For a team to sustain this type of level of play and this greatness, it doesn't happen that often. And when you need to retool, it may look different, but the great teams, great players figure it out as they go."

The Los Angeles Clippers are the prohibitive favorite to win the NBA title, at least according to oddsmakers in Las Vegas, after landing Kawhi Leonard and Paul George. The Los Angeles Lakers still have LeBron James, and added Anthony Davis. Houston reunited James Harden with Russell Westbrook. Denver and Utah bring back strong cores. Portland might have the league's best backcourt.

"You just can't take it for granted," Oklahoma City general manager Sam Presti said. "It's really, really hard to win games in the NBA, especially the Western Conference, the way it is now."

Maybe harder than ever.

"We want to maintain the culture that we've built, but we want to make sure our players are put in the best position to succeed, and the last four years we pretty much knew exactly what that meant," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. "We don't really know what it means this year. That's why we have a lot of work ahead, but it's exciting."

Houston coach Mike D'Antoni said the West will be great for fans and the league — not so

much for coaches, players and owners.

"Somebody is probably going to come in ninth and get fired when they shouldn't because they did a great job," D'Antoni said. "But that's the way it is."

A look at the West, in predicted order of regular-season finish:

Playoff bound

1. Denver — The team that few are talking about, for puzzling reasons. They're young, they already know how to win and the Nuggets' win total has risen in each of coach Michael Malone's first four seasons there. No reason to think that won't continue.

2. Houston — James Harden is entering his 11th season. Russell Westbrook is entering his 12th. Mike D'Antoni is entering the last year of his contract. It sure seems like title-or-bust time in Houston, and the wide-open West could be for their taking.

3. L.A. Clippers — When Paul George gets back from his recovery from shoulder surgeries to join Kawhi Leonard on the new-look Clippers, this is going to be a team with frightening potential on defense. They'll peak toward the end, and could win it all.

4. L.A. Lakers — This is absolutely not to say they're the fourth-best team in the West. LeBron James knows it's all about April, May and June, and he certainly isn't going to care where the Lakers are seeded as long as they're in the playoffs.

5. Utah — Donovan Mitchell is just starting to come into his own, Rudy Gobert is still the defensive player of the year and Joe Ingles is better than people realize. The addition of Bojan Bogdanovic was big, as was adding Mike Conley — if healthy.

6. Golden State — The five-time defending West champs lost Durant, Iguodala and Shaun Livingston — plus won't have Klay Thompson for most of the season. But they still have Curry. Relax.

7. Portland — This is way too low, but that's life in the West

right now. Damian Lillard and CJ McCollum are elite, Terry Stotts is underrated and don't be surprised if the Blazers tweak the roster after Jusuf Nurkic returns.

8. San Antonio — LaMarcus Aldridge and DeMar DeRozan lead a team that features a young core of Lonnie Walker IV, Dejounte Murray and Derrick White. Oh, and Gregg Popovich is still there. Count the Spurs out at your own risk.

In the mix

9. Dallas — Dirk Nowitzki is gone, but the new star pairing of Luka Doncic and Kristaps Porzingis has enormous potential. The Mavs haven't won a playoff series since the 2011 NBA Finals — this season will see them get closer.

10. Minnesota — Ryan Saunders' first full season will lead to improvement, but even a five-game leap to .500 won't get it done as far as a West playoff berth this season. But if Karl-Anthony Towns plays 82 games at his potential, who knows?

11. Sacramento — Rick Adelman took the Kings to their last playoff appearance in 2006. Luke Walton is the team's 10th different coach since; he has Harrison Barnes, De'Aaron Fox, Marvin Bagley and Buddy Hield, yet still faces a tall task.

12. New Orleans — Zion Williamson's knee is already a concern, not a good sign for the No. 1 overall pick. While Lonzo Ball's shot is better and J.J. Redick has never missed a postseason, it may be tough sledding for New Orleans if Williamson can't go all-out.

Facing long odds

13. Oklahoma City — There is a lot of talent on this team: Chris Paul, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, Danilo Gallinari, Steven Adams. If all goes right, the Thunder will contend for a spot. Or will they make more trades and collect more picks?

14. Phoenix — Devin Booker is entering his prime. But the Suns have averaged 22 wins over the last four seasons, are on their fourth coach — Monty Williams — in a span of 24

months and still seem over-matched in the loaded West.

15. Memphis — The Grizzlies' first-round pick in 2020 is top-six protected or else it conveys to Boston. The Celtics might not want to plan on getting this one. This year's goal for the Grizzlies? Simple: Get Ja Morant settled in.

Western wisdom

Three-team ring circus:

Kawhi Leonard has a chance to win a ring with a third different team if the Clippers win the title. LeBron James and Danny Green would do the same if the Lakers win it all. The only players to win a championship with three different franchises: John Salley and Robert Horry.

San Antonio streak: The Spurs — and head coach Greg Popovich — are bidding for a 23rd consecutive playoff appearance, which would give the Spurs outright possession of the NBA record. They're currently tied with Philadelphia with 22 straight playoff trips (1950 through 1971).

Wide open: The league's general managers have wildly different views on which team will win the West. In a poll of GMs, six different West teams — the Clippers, the Lakers, Golden State, Houston, Denver and Portland — got at least one vote as the West's best.

LeBron milestone: LeBron James has 993 games of 20 or more points, third-most in NBA history. When he gets to 1,000 of those, he'll be the last to hit that milestone for many years. Kevin Durant may be the next; he's got 720.

Good Sign: With James Harden and Russell Westbrook, Houston becomes the sixth team to have two players who each won an MVP in the last three seasons. Of the other five, four — the 1959 and 1960 Boston Celtics, the 1983 Philadelphia 76ers and the 2017 Golden State Warriors — won an NBA title. The other was the 1984 76ers.

NFL roundup

Rodgers spectacular in Packers' victory

Associated Press

GREEN BAY, Wis. — Aaron Rodgers had his best game by far under new Packers coach Matt LaFleur, throwing for 429 yards and five touchdowns and running for another as Green Bay beat the Oakland Raiders 42-24 on Sunday.

Rodgers completed 25 of 31 passes to eight different targets and finished with the first perfect passer rating of his career, leading LaFleur's offense to a season high in points.

Even with top target Davante Adams sidelined for the third straight game with turf toe, Rodgers threw for his most touchdowns in a game since Sept. 28, 2015, against the Chiefs.

Derek Carr finished 22 for 28 for 293 yards, two touchdowns and two costly turnovers for the Raiders (3-3), who lost their eighth straight against Green Bay, going back to 1990. The Packers (6-1) have scored 30-plus points in each of their last five games against the Raiders.

Cowboys 37, Eagles 10: Ezekiel Elliott ran over safety Malcolm Jenkins on his way to 111 yards and a touchdown, Dak Prescott threw an easy scoring pass on a great fake to his star running back before a TD run and host Dallas rolled past Philadelphia.

The Cowboys (4-3) won with the NFC East lead on the line while ending a three-game losing streak that followed their 3-0 start and clouded high expectations for the defending division champs.

Carson Wentz threw an interception and had two of Philadelphia's three lost fumbles. The Eagles (3-4) dropped their second straight game after a two-game winning streak that looked like it might get their season going.

Saints 36, Bears 25: Teddy Bridgewater threw for 281 yards and two touchdowns, and visiting New Orleans improved to 5-0 without injured starter Drew Brees with a victory over

Chicago.

The Saints (6-1) again showed why they still see themselves as Super Bowl contenders even though their star quarterback is out indefinitely because of a torn ligament in his right thumb.

Bridgewater completed 23 of 38 passes, Michael Thomas had nine receptions for 131 yards, and Latavius Murray ran for 119 yards and two touchdowns.

Ravens 30, Seahawks 16: Baltimore quarterback Lamar Jackson ran for 116 yards and a touchdown, made key throws when necessary and led the Ravens to an impressive win over host Seattle.

Jackson was the best player on the field, outshining Seattle QB Russell Wilson on a day the Seahawks star finally made his first critical mistake of the season. Jackson was especially good in the second half, when he led Baltimore on a pair of crucial scoring drives.

Titans 23, Chargers 20: Jurrell Casey recovered a fumble by Melvin Gordon at the goal line with 15 seconds left, and Tennessee pulled out a victory over visiting Los Angeles after a frantic finish.

Gordon initially was ruled down shy of the goal line at the 1. Casey came out of the pile with the ball, and the Titans started celebrating. The play was reviewed and overturned the on-field ruling that Gordon was short of the goal line.

The Chargers (2-5) have lost three straight and five of their past six.

Colts 30, Texans 23: Jacoby Brissett threw a career-high four touchdown passes and host Indianapolis sealed a victory over Houston with Darius Leonard's late interception.

Indy (4-2) has won three straight in the series and took over the early season lead in the AFC South. The loss snapped Houston's two-game winning streak.

Brissett was masterful most of the game. He was 26 of 39 with 326 yards, and in a game

the Colts only produced 62 yards rushing, they needed Brissett to be at his best — and he was.

Vikings 42, Lions 30: Kirk Cousins matched a career high with four touchdown passes, leading surging Minnesota over host Detroit.

The Vikings (5-2) have won three consecutive games in part because their quarterback is making plays to complement one of the NFL's top defenses.

Matthew Stafford also threw four touchdown passes, all to Marvin Jones, and became the fastest to reach 40,000 yards passing in NFL history. And Jones became the first Lions player in the Super Bowl era with four receiving TDs in a game.

The Lions (2-3-1) dropped their third straight game after a 2-0-1 start.

Rams 37, Falcons 10: Jared Goff threw for two touchdowns and ran for another, and Los Angeles returned to the site of last season's Super Bowl loss to beat host Atlanta.

The Rams (4-3) snapped a three-game losing streak in the debut of cornerback Jalen Ramsey.

The Falcons (1-6) suffered their fifth straight loss and had quarterback Matt Ryan leave the game with an ankle injury. Ryan's right leg bent awkwardly as he was sacked by Aaron Donald and fumbled early in the fourth quarter.

Ryan limped off the field and was escorted to the medical tent on the sideline. He walked to the locker room, still favoring the ankle, with 7:36 remaining in the game.

Donald was credited with a sack, forced fumble and recovery on the play. It was the Rams' fifth sack of Ryan, matching the five sacks by Atlanta's defense this season — none in the past four games.

Cardinals 27, Giants 21: Chase Edmonds rushed for career highs of 126 yards and three touchdowns, overshadowing the return of Giants star

running back Saquon Barkley in visiting Arizona's victory over New York.

The game was billed as a matchup of rookie quarterbacks Kyler Murray of the Cardinals (3-3-1) and Daniel Jones of the Giants (2-5), and both gave glimpses why they were the first and sixth overall choices in the draft, respectively.

Murray finished 14 of 21 for 104 yards with no interceptions in the Cardinals third straight win. The loss was also the third straight for the Giants, who allowed Jones to be sacked a season-high eight times. Jones finished 22 of 35 for 223 yards, including a 28-yard touchdown pass to Rhett Ellison.

Bills 31, Dolphins 21: Tre'Davious White forced two second-half turnovers, Micah Hyde returned an onside kick for a touchdown, and host Buffalo rallied from a five-point deficit for a victory over winless Miami.

The Bills, who began the day favored by 17 points, avoided what would have been a major upset against the patchwork Dolphins (0-6), who are in a major rebuilding mode.

Jaguars 27, Bengals 17: Gardner Minshew led a fourth-quarter touchdown drive that put Jacksonville ahead to stay, and Yannick Ngakoue returned an interception 23 yards to clinch a victory over winless host Cincinnati.

The Jaguars (3-4) managed only field goals by still-perfect Josh Lambo until their rookie quarterback and their depleted defense made game-turning plays at the end.

49ers 9, Redskins 0: Robbie Gould made field goals from 28, 22 and 29 yards to provide the only points in an ugly win by visiting San Francisco over Washington in steady rain and driving wind to remain undefeated.

It wasn't pretty, but San Francisco is 6-0 for the third time in franchise history, and first since 1990. That 49ers team finished 14-2.