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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Trump calls for troops' return by Christmas

BY PHILLIP WALTER
WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — U.S. troops should withdraw from Afghanistan by Christmas, President Donald Trump said in a tweet Wednesday, shortly after a top White House adviser said some troops would remain in the country in 2021.

"We should have the small remaining number of our BRAVE Men and Women serving in Afghanistan home by Christmas!" Trump tweeted

Wednesday evening.

The U.S. military in Afghanistan did not comment after being asked whether Trump's tweet represented a change in policy. The Pentagon also didn't comment on the tweet, according to multiple media reports.

White House national security adviser Robert O'Brien said Wednesday that the U.S. would reduce its forces in Afghanistan to 2,500 by early next year.

"Ultimately, the Afghans themselves are going to have to work out an accord, a peace agreement ... We think Ameri-

cans need to come home," O'Brien said at an event in Las Vegas, according to Reuters.

The Taliban described Trump's tweet as a "positive step" in a statement Thursday.

Peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government began in Qatar last month and are expected to take months, if not years, to complete.

Roughly 13,000 U.S. troops were deployed to the country at the start of this year, a number reduced to 8,600 by summer.

David Helvey, the Pentagon's

deputy assistant secretary for Indo-Pacific security affairs, told a House hearing on Sept. 22 that the total would be brought down to between 4,000 and 5,000 by the end of November.

Further reductions would be conditions-based, Helvey said.

Some American lawmakers and Afghan officials have expressed concern that a precipitous withdrawal of foreign forces could be exploited by terrorist groups and jeopardize gains that cost the U.S. the lives of over 2,300 service members, as well as \$1 trillion overall.

Pence, Harris spar over virus response at VP debate

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — Trading barbs through plexiglass shields, Republican Mike Pence and Democrat Kamala Harris turned the only vice presidential debate of 2020 into a dissection of the Trump administration's handling of the coronavirus pandemic, with Harris labeling it "the greatest failure of any presidential administration."

Pence, who leads the president's coronavirus task force, acknowledged that "our nation's gone through a very challenging time this year," yet vigorously defended the administration's overall response to a pandemic that has killed more than 210,000 Americans.

The meeting, which was far more civil than last week's faceoff between President Donald Trump and Democrat Joe Biden, unfolded against an outbreak of the coronavirus hitting the highest levels of the U.S. government. Trump spent three days at the hospital before returning to the White House

on Monday, and more than a dozen White House and Pentagon officials are infected, forcing even more into quarantine.

With less than four weeks before Election Day, the debate was one of the final opportunities for Trump and Pence to reset a contest that could be slipping away. They're hoping to move the focus away from the virus, but the president's infection — and his downplaying of the consequences — are making that challenging.

Republicans appear desperate to cast the race as a choice between two candidates fighting to move the country in vastly different directions. Biden and Harris, they say, would pursue a far-left agenda bordering on socialism; the Democrats say Trump's administration will stoke racial and other divides, torpedo health care for people who aren't wealthy and otherwise undercut national strength.

Harris, 55, made history by becoming the first Black woman to stand on a vice presidential debate stage. She con-

demned the police killings of Breonna Taylor in Kentucky and George Floyd in Minnesota and spoke about the protests against racial injustice in policing that followed, which Trump has portrayed as "riots" as he calls for law and order.

"We are never going to condone violence but we must always fight for the values that we hold dear," Harris said. "I'm a former career prosecutor. I know what I'm talking about. Bad cops are bad for good cops."

Pence, 61, said his heart breaks for Taylor's family, but he trusts the U.S. justice system. He called it "remarkable" that Harris, as a former attorney general and prosecutor, would question the grand jury's decision in the case to not charge an officer with killing her.

He also pushed back against the existence of systemic racism in police departments and rejected the idea that law enforcement officers have a bias against minorities.

"I want everyone to know who

puts on the uniform of law enforcement every day, President Trump and I stand with you," Pence said. "We don't have to choose between supporting law enforcement, proving public safety and supporting our African American neighbors."

The candidates also clashed on taxes — or specifically, Trump's refusal to release his tax returns four years after repeatedly promising to do so. The New York Times reported last month that the president pays very little personal income tax but has hundreds of millions of dollars in debt.

"It'd be really good to know who the president owes money to," Harris said.

"The one thing we know about Joe, he puts it all out there. He is honest, he is forthright," she added. "Donald Trump, on the other hand, has been about covering up everything."

Pence defended Trump as a job creator who has paid more than his fair share of taxes and shifted toward Biden: "On Day One, Joe Biden's going to raise your taxes."

Army affirms investigation of NC Senate candidate

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — The military is investigating North Carolina U.S. Senate candidate Cal Cunningham, an Army spokesperson confirmed on Wednesday, a day after The Associated Press reported that the Democratic contender appeared to have had an intimate encounter this summer with a public relations consultant.

Cunningham, a Raleigh-based attorney and lieutenant colonel in the Army Reserve who is trying to unseat Republican Sen. Thom Tillis next month, acknowledged late last week that he and the woman — both of whom are married — had exchanged sexually suggestive text messages.

On Tuesday, the AP, citing previously undisclosed texts and additional interviews, reported the relationship appeared to extend beyond texts to an intimate encounter as recent as July.

“The Army Reserve is investigating the matters involving (Lt. Col.) James Cunningham,” Lt. Col. Simon Flake said in an emailed statement that cited Cunningham by his official first name. “As such, we are unable to provide further details at this time.”

Flake did not explain why the Army is investigating or how Cunningham’s relationship with the woman might affect his military career. Last year the wording in the Uniform Code of Military Justice on adultery was broadened to include any “extramarital sexual contact.”

Cunningham campaign spokesperson Rachel Petri said in a news release that the candidate “will participate in this process,” but she indicated that he had no intention of backing away from the race.

2 US senators warn of Turkey tracking American F-16 jets

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Two U.S. senators are demanding sanctions be imposed on Turkey amid reports that the NATO ally used its recently acquired Russian air defense system to track U.S.-made F-16s operating in the Mediterranean Sea.

“Turkey’s recent reported activation of the S-400 system to detect the U.S. F-16 underscores our grave concerns about Russia’s ability to access sensitive data,” Sens. Chris Van Hollen, D-Md., and James Lankford, R-Okla., said in a letter sent to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Wednesday.

The senators also questioned whether Turkey had integrated NATO’s tactical data link into the S-400, which could allow Russia to gather information on alliance members.

The letter was prompted by an unconfirmed report in Greek media, saying Turkey had activated the S-400 system to track a Greek F-16 as it returned from an exercise in August.

Despite Turkey buying the S-400 in 2017, Washington so far has held off from penalizing Ankara under the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, which says any nation that makes a major defense purchase from Russia should be sanctioned.

That, and the “slow pace at which the Department of Defense is moving to remove Turkey from the F-35 supply chain” after it took delivery last year of a first batch of S-400s, have emboldened Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the senators’ letter said.

Reports that Turkey has now activated the system and used it “to detect U.S.-made F-16

fighter jets returning from the Eunomia exercise conducted by France, Italy, Greece and Cyprus in late August ... make clear that Turkey has no intention of reversing course and divesting of this system,” it said.

When the U.S. first raised the prospect of sanctioning Turkey over its purchase of the S-400, Erdogan threatened to kick the U.S. out of Incirlik Air Base and to close down a U.S. Army site in the small Turkish village of Kurecik, which houses a key radar for NATO missile defense efforts in Europe.

NATO members, and alliance leader Jens Stoltenberg, who visited Turkey this week, have continued to urge Ankara to reconsider the purchase, saying the S-400 is incompatible with other alliance air defense networks and expressing concerns that Russia could use the system to gather intelligence on NATO member states.

Prosecutor claims Navy SEAL’s sexual assault trial tainted by past misconduct

The San Diego Union-Tribune

SAN DIEGO — Five sailors, including three Navy SEALs, have been granted immunity to testify in the case of a SEAL charged with sexually assaulting a fellow sailor during a deployment to Iraq in 2019, prosecutors said during a motions hearing this week.

Petty Officer 1st Class Adel Enayat, in his dress blue uniform, was in a Naval Base San Diego courtroom Tuesday for a hearing in his ongoing court-martial. His legal team, led by civilian attorney Jeremiah Sullivan, argued that previous SEAL cases involving Enayat’s SEAL Team 7 have tainted the Navy legal community and the investigative process.

Enayat is charged with a sexual assault that prosecutors say occurred after an alcohol-fueled Fourth of July party in Iraq in 2019 that left a female sailor with bruises on her face and body. According to the SEAL’s charge sheet, he stran-

gled the woman, bit her face and penetrated her without consent.

It was unclear from discussion in court what each witness with immunity might testify to seeing during that party, though at a previous hearing Sullivan said more than one saw the victim sitting on Enayat’s lap. The victim allegedly told a friend that the encounter started as consensual before it became violent, the AP reported.

The Gallagher case was at the center of arguments by Sullivan, who said the misconduct of San Diego Navy prosecutors, the Naval Criminal Investigative Service and the words of former Naval Special Warfare Commander Rear Adm. Collin Green during and after Gallagher’s court-martial raise questions about Enayat’s ability to get a fair hearing.

Sullivan said witnesses were reluctant to talk to him, in part because of the prosecutorial misconduct that occurred in the Gallagher case and also because it garnered so much media attention.

Marines' assistant commandant tests positive for virus

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — A senior military official who was quarantining after interaction with another uniformed leader who contracted COVID-19 has tested positive for the coronavirus, the Marine Corps said on Wednesday. Gen. Gary Thomas, the assistant commandant of the Marine Corps, received the positive test a day after he began quarantining, the service said in a statement.

"In accordance with established Marine Corps COVID policies, General Thomas will continue to quarantine at home. He is experiencing mild symptoms, but otherwise is feeling well," the statement said.

Thomas is the second senior uniformed official whose diagnosis was announced this week, following news that Adm. Charles Ray, the vice commandant of the Coast Guard, tested positive on Monday. Ray and Thomas were among the senior

officials who attended a meeting at the Pentagon on Friday. Another was Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Now, those that attended are isolating at home where, officials say, they remain able to work. Officials on Wednesday said the group, which included the top officials from the Army, Air Force and Navy, took a second coronavirus test Wednesday.

If they receive three negative results, they are expected to return to their offices as early as next week.

Jonathan Hoffman, a spokesman for Esper, said in a statement that the Defense Department would follow guidelines established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for isolation and contact tracing.

"At this time we have no additional senior leader positive test results to report," he said.

One new coronavirus case at Navy airfield in Japan

BY JOSEPH DITZLER

Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — A naval airfield in Japan reported one new coronavirus patient Thursday, a case identified while the patient was quarantined.

Naval Air Facility Atsugi reported that the patient turned up positive in a test required before exiting quarantine, according to a news release from the base. The individual is isolated and under medical supervision.

Atsugi, 28 miles southeast of central Tokyo, has two active

cases on base. It last reported a new patient on Tuesday.

At Yokota Air Base, the headquarters of U.S. Forces Japan located in western Tokyo, the base commander further loosened coronavirus restrictions in place since spring.

Starting Friday, anyone age 18 and older affiliated with the base and holding a Defense Department ID card may bring one guest per cardholder on base. Up to eight guests are permitted for one ID card holder at the nearby Tama Hills Recreation Area.

Group to study mental health effects of virus

BY STEVE BEYNON
AND CAITLIN KENNEY

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump has ordered the departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs and other agencies to develop a plan within 45 days to tackle the mental health issues made worse by the coronavirus pandemic.

"The pandemic has also exacerbated mental- and behavioral-health conditions as a result of stress from prolonged lockdown orders, lost employment, and social isolation," according to Trump's order, which was issued Monday.

The order calls for the establishment of a Coronavirus Working Group, which would facilitate an "all-of-government" response to the mental health issues, including suicide, which could have spiked after months of widespread isolation and economic troubles in many industries throughout the country.

The group will analyze how the pandemic has impacted the mental health of vulnerable populations, which the White House identified as minorities, seniors, veterans, small business owners, children, individuals potentially affected by domestic violence or physical abuse, those living with disabilities, and those with a substance-use disorder.

The task of tackling a potentially swelling mental health crisis in the wake of the pandemic will use multiple arms of the federal government.

The groups will be made up of representatives from the departments of Defense, Labor, Justice, Agriculture, Education, Veterans Affairs, Housing and Urban Development, the Small Business Administration, the Office of National Drug Control Policy, and the Office of Management and Budget.

Some experts have warned the toll that nearly a year of social distancing and a strained economy can have on veterans. With less access to in-person

therapy and isolation from friends and family, many veterans are reporting feeling disconnected from their community, according to a survey released by Wounded Warrior Project in September.

The survey, the 11th annual membership poll conducted by WWP officials, gathered responses from 28,282 post-9/11 veterans who are WWP members. Of those, 60% felt disconnected from their friends and family, 30% reported having suicidal thoughts in the past two weeks and virtually the same amount said they are having difficulty getting mental health care.

The VA had to cancel 7.3 million in-person appointments early in the pandemic, according to a report from the VA inspector general, as the agency had to suddenly shift to telehealth.

The Associated Press reported last week that military suicide numbers have increased as much as 20% this year compared with the same period last year. The Army's leaders said they have seen about a 30% "jump" in the number of active-duty suicides so far this year and the increased numbers coincide with the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

"I can't say scientifically, but what I can say is — I can read a chart and a graph, and the numbers have gone up in behavioral health-related issues," Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy said in the AP story.

Karin Orvis, director of the Defense Suicide Prevention Office at the Pentagon, said last Thursday that the Pentagon is concerned about suicide risks among service members and their families during the pandemic, but it would be too early to determine whether there will be a statistical increase in suicides during the pandemic until they had a full year's worth of data.

Army and Air Force officials who spoke to the AP stated they believe the pandemic is adding more stress to the force.

Trump vows not to debate Biden virtually

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump vowed Thursday not to participate in next week's debate with Democratic nominee Joe Biden after organizers announced it will take place virtually because of the president's diagnosis of COVID-19.

"I'm not going to do a virtual debate," Trump told Fox Business News, moments after the nonpartisan Commission on Presidential Debates announced the changes.

The shakeup comes a week before Trump and Biden were set to square off for the second presidential debate in Miami. Biden's campaign insisted its candidate was ready to move

forward, but the future of the event is now in serious doubt.

The Commission on Presidential Debates made the decision unilaterally, citing the need "to protect the health and safety of all involved with the second presidential debate."

When Republican Mike Pence and Democrat Kamala Harris squared off for their only vice presidential debate in Salt Lake City on Wednesday night, they shared a stage but were separated by plexiglass to prevent the spread of the virus.

Trump's campaign said the president would do a rally instead of the debate.

"For the swamp creatures at the Presidential Debate Commission to now rush to Joe Biden's defense by unilaterally

canceling an in-person debate is pathetic," Bill Stepien, Trump campaign manager said in a statement. "The safety of all involved can easily be achieved without canceling a chance for voters to see both candidates go head to head. We'll pass on this sad excuse to bail out Joe Biden and do a rally instead."

Trump was hospitalized for three days but is now back at the White House recovering. He has vowed to return to the campaign trail soon. Still, the commission's move is yet another indication that the presidential election is being dominated by the virus — defying the president's monthslong attempts to underplay it and declare that the country was ready to move on.

Trump is thought to be trailing in key battleground states. Even before his COVID-19 diagnosis, he was widely criticized for his chaotic performance during last week's first presidential debate in Cleveland. Next week's debate, and a third one set for the following week in Nashville, Tenn., would have been a chance for him to attempt to reset the election and potentially change its trajectory.

Biden aides argued most voters, especially undecided voters, will see the president as avoiding a second debate out of his own interests, not because he dislikes the format.

With aid in doubt, 840K in US seek unemployment benefits

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of Americans seeking unemployment benefits fell slightly last week to a still-high 840,000, evidence that job cuts remain elevated seven months into the pandemic recession.

The latest sign of a flagging recovery comes two days after President Donald Trump cut off talks over a new rescue aid package that economists say is urgently needed for millions of unemployed Americans and struggling businesses. A failure to enact another round of government aid would crimp household income and spending, and some economists say it would raise the risk of a double-dip recession.

Thursday's report from the Labor Department said the number of people who are continuing to receive unemployment benefits dropped 1 million to 11 million. The decline suggests that many of the unemployed are being recalled to their old jobs. But it also reflects the fact that some have used up the 26 weeks of their regular state benefits and have transitioned to extended ben-

efit programs that last an additional three months.

The weekly count of Americans applying for unemployment benefits has become less reliable as some states have increased their efforts to root out fraudulent claims and process earlier applications that have piled up. California, for example, which accounts for more than one-quarter of the nation's unemployment applications, last week simply provided the same figure it had supplied two weeks ago. That was because the state has stopped accepting jobless claims online for two weeks so it can implement anti-fraud technology and catch up with a backlog of 600,000 applications.

Across the country, hiring has slowed just as federal rescue aid has run out, hampering an economy still climbing out of the deep hole created by the pandemic. Employers added 661,000 jobs in September, less than half of August's gain and the third straight monthly decline. Just over half the 22 million jobs lost to the coronavirus have been recovered, leaving the economy with 10.7 million fewer jobs than in February.

Storm-battered Louisiana braces for Hurricane Delta

Associated Press

MORGAN CITY, La. — Louisiana residents still recovering from the devastation of a powerful hurricane less than two months ago braced for another hit as Hurricane Delta steamed north through the Gulf on Thursday after swiping Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula.

Forecasters warned that the storm could blow ashore Friday with winds of up to 100 mph and a storm surge of up to 11 feet. They placed most of Louisiana within Delta's path, including the southwest area of the state around Lake Charles, where Category 4 Hurricane Laura ripped houses from their foundations, peeled off roofs and tore trailers in half on Aug. 27.

Nearly six weeks later, 5,600 people remain in New Orleans hotels because their homes are too damaged to occupy. Debris left in Laura's wake still awaits for pickup even as forecasters warned that Delta could be a larger than average storm.

The large majority of structures damaged by Laura haven't been permanently repaired, Gov. John Bel Edwards

noted on Wednesday.

"All that debris could become missiles in really strong wind," said Edwards, who also worried about the "sheer anxiety" the storm could cause already traumatized residents.

"We don't want a hurricane to hit anywhere, but we know that the area that is least prepared and ready for a storm happens to be southwest Louisiana," he said.

Edwards said President Donald Trump approved his request to declare a federal emergency, which frees up federal resources. This is the sixth time in the Atlantic hurricane season that people in Louisiana have been forced to flee the state's barrier islands and sail boats to safe harbor while emergency officials ramp up command centers and consider ordering evacuations.

Hurricane Delta is the 25th named storm of the Atlantic's unprecedented hurricane season. Delta hit Mexico as a Category 2 hurricane just south of the resort city of Cancun early Wednesday with high winds and heavy rain. No deaths or injuries were reported.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Tree trimmer crushed to death by palm fronds

AZ PHOENIX — A professional tree trimmer was killed Tuesday after being crushed by an estimated 700 pounds of palm fronds at a Phoenix home, authorities said.

Fire department officials said the tree trimmer was found about halfway up a palm tree in the backyard of a home and declared dead at the scene. They said the man is believed to have suffocated underneath the weight of the palm fronds before they were able to reach him in the tree.

Authorities said the man was in his 40s, but his name wasn't immediately released. Phoenix police said the incident is under investigation.

Sheriff: Child held in room set fire to escape

FL SPRING HILL — A young child who had been locked in a boarded up room set a mattress on fire Monday afternoon in an attempt to escape, sheriff's officials in Florida said.

Deputies and fire rescue crews found the child when they responded to an arson call near Spring Hill, the Tampa Bay Times reported.

Kelley Lynne Davis, 36, and Daniel Andrew Davis, 37, were arrested on aggravated child abuse charges, arrest reports said. They told Hernando County Sheriff's investigators that they have kept the child locked in the room for 11 or 12 hours every night, plus whenever the child misbehaved, since March.

Their relationship to the child was not released. The agency also didn't release the age or gender of the child, citing Marsy's Law, a constitutional amendment designed

to protect victims but that deprives the public of information that had long been available under Florida's public records law. The child's condition also wasn't released.

According to investigators, the room where the fire started had two exterior locks. A board had been screwed over it and the only window was also covered. The ceiling fan in the room was broken and electricity was cut off in the room. The arrest report also said that feces was on the wall and urine was on the floor.

Sculptures relocated to build heritage center

MT HELENA — The Montana Historical Society has relocated two sculptures ahead of construction on the first phase of the Montana Heritage Center project in Helena near the Montana State Capitol building.

The Herd Bull, a metal bison skull, and the "Symbol of the Pros," a large sculpture of a professional rodeo rider, were moved Monday, the Independent Record reported.

The Herd Bull was created by Sioux artist Benji Daniels and Billings sculptor James J. Hadcock in 1990 and was moved south on the museum's front lawn.

The "Symbol of the Pros" was built in 1982 by Bob Scriver for the society and was moved south to the backside of the museum.

Fire set inside big-box store is put out quickly

MO ST. CHARLES — A clothing rack that was set on fire inside a Missouri Walmart created a lot of smoke but was put out quickly.

The fire at a Walmart in St. Charles was reported around 6:30 p.m. Saturday. St. Charles

Fire Department Deputy Chief Mike Grzyb said the fire was confined to a rack of clothes in the men's department. The fire was extinguished quickly by a combination of firefighters and the store's sprinkler system.

No one was injured, but Grzyb said the store sustained smoke damage and some water damage from the sprinklers.

No arrests were reported immediately in connection with the fire that authorities said was set intentionally.

St. Charles Police Lt. Tom Wilkison said Sunday that surveillance video showed that a boy younger than 10 hiding inside the circular rack of clothes shortly before it caught fire. Investigators are working to identify the boy who left the store with his mother shortly after the fire began.

Rabies vaccines distributed by helo

AL BIRMINGHAM — Workers are using helicopters and trucks to distribute thousands of oral vaccines across a 17-county region of Alabama to help stop the spread of rabies.

The state health department said about 900,000 packets containing a vaccine meant to be found by raccoons will be distributed along roadsides in populated areas including Birmingham. Trucks will be used for that work. Vaccine packets will be dropped out of helicopters or low-flying airplanes over forests and other rural areas.

The packs consist of a plastic satchel that contains the rabies vaccine. The shell is coated with fishmeal or dog meal, and raccoons come into contact with the vaccine when they tear open the pack with their teeth. The health department said the contents of the packet don't pose a risk of rabies to other animals or humans.

The state said more than

7,000 animal bites and potential rabies exposures are investigated annually.

Authorities probing possible mail theft

VA RICHMOND — Several U.S. Postal Service offices in Virginia have said that someone tampered with their outside mailboxes.

Michael Romano, a U.S. Postal Service inspector, told the Richmond Times-Dispatch on Monday that it appears that mail was taken from the tampered mail boxes in the Richmond area.

However, neither the U.S. Postal Service nor the Virginia Department of Elections can confirm if any election mail was in the tampered boxes. Virginia is in the midst of early voting.

The U.S. Postal Inspection Service is investigating six locations where there were reports of tampering.

Mail theft is a federal felony, Romano said.

Event at battlefield nixed due to pandemic

MD SHARPSBURG — An annual memorial event at Antietam National Battlefield has been canceled because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Park Service announced.

The 32nd Memorial Illumination that had been set for Dec. 5 will not take place this year, the Herald-Mail of Hagerstown reported Friday.

The event involved tens of thousands of luminaria placed across the park in honor of those who were killed in the Civil War battle. Spectators viewed the illumination from their cars, but it took about 1,000 volunteers to set out and light the candles.

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New York fans suffering with Jets, Giants

Associated Press

NEW YORK — No wins, eight losses and lots of frustrated fans.

The Big Apple is pretty rotten when it comes to its professional football teams, and it's tough to imagine things getting better any time soon.

Both the Jets and Giants are 0-4 for the first time since 1976 — the only other time they've gotten off to similar dismal starts. They've never both opened a season 0-5, but they have a shot at that dubious distinction. The New York teams are both underdogs in Week 5: the Jets at home against Arizona and the Giants at NFC East rival Dallas.

Former NFL offensive lineman Damien Woody, who played for the Jets from 2008-10, lives in New Jersey and works for ESPN as a football analyst. He might as well have been speaking for every tri-state area fan during a rant on ESPN's "Get Up" last Friday — and that was before the Giants lost to the Rams on Sunday.

"They are disgusting to

watch on television!" an exasperated Woody said. "I am literally forced to watch disgusting football every week!"

He's not alone, of course.

Just four games into the NFL season, the Jets and Giants have firmly established themselves as the league's worst teams. The Giants rank 31st in this week's AP Pro32 poll, with the Jets dead last. And that's even with Houston and Atlanta also still winless.

"I think it's a joke," said Rob Janicke, a 47-year-old Jets fan from Staten Island. "I know location doesn't mean what it once did years ago, but having two utterly embarrassing teams in the NYC area is unacceptable. The ownership groups of both teams have been pretty clueless for a long time now. Bad drafts, poor hires and not allowing real football people to run the show. I know there's a long way to go — assuming they play the full season — this year, but both the Jets and Giants may be in a race for the first overall pick in next year's draft.

"That's not what you want for

two teams in the biggest market in the world."

At least the Buffalo Bills — the only NFL team that actually is headquartered in and plays in New York state — are 4-0. But being closer to Toronto than Broadway takes them out of the rooting section of the tri-state area.

So, the fans' venom is spewed at the Jets and Giants. How about this: The San Francisco 49ers have more wins at MetLife Stadium — two — this season than the teams who call it home. And there's plenty of blame to go around for each team's struggles, depending on who you ask.

Many Jets fans want to see coach Adam Gase gone, convinced he's not the right person to lead quarterback Sam Darnold to the next step in his progression. Others point to ownership. Some to general manager Joe Douglas for not doing enough to put together a competitive roster. Still others half-jokingly believe this is all part of some curse brought about by Joe Namath's infa-

mous Super Bowl guarantee back in 1969.

Stephan Pechdimaldji is a 46-year-old resident of San Ramon, Calif., who rooted for the Jets while growing up on Long Island and then northern New Jersey before moving to the West Coast in 2006. His passion for his favorite team hasn't waned with his move across the country, but his frustration is clear — even 3,000 miles away.

"While I realize that the Johnsons will never sell the team, I do think that it all starts from the top," Pechdimaldji said. "Jets fans are a resilient bunch, but I've never seen the fan base so despondent and down — and I lived through the Kotite years."

Ah, the Rich Kotite years; then owner Leon Hess fired Pete Carroll so he could hire the former Jets tight end as coach. In 1996, the Jets started 0-8, beat Arizona on the road but finished 1-15 — the worst record in franchise history.

This year's rough start has some Jets fans' sights set on the No. 1 overall pick and Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence.

New positive test results puts Titans' numbers at 23

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — The Tennessee Titans have had another positive test result to raise their outbreak to 23 cases, a person familiar with the situation told The Associated Press on Thursday.

Also, an inconclusive positive result from Wednesday now is positive. The Titans' facility remains closed and the team remains prohibited from any in-person activities, putting Sunday's game with Buffalo (4-0) at risk of at least being postponed.

Now 21 have been returned since Sept. 29 for the Titans (3-0) with at least one positive test on eight of the past 10 days with the latest results, according to the person who spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because neither the NFL nor

Tennessee has announced the latest results.

The NFL already postponed, then rescheduled the Titans' game with Pittsburgh from Oct. 4 to Oct. 25.

The league's investigation into how Tennessee turned into the league's first COVID-19 outbreak found "several specific incidents" of the Titans possibly breaking protocols dealing with the coronavirus pandemic, a person with knowledge of the inquiry told the AP on Wednesday.

Also, the headmaster of a private school in Nashville confirmed to the AP on Wednesday that several Titans, including quarterback Ryan Tannehill, practiced on its field Sept. 30. That was a day before the NFL first postponed Tennessee's game with Pittsburgh before

rescheduling to Oct. 25.

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell warned all 32 teams Monday that following league protocols is mandatory and that violations forcing changes in the schedule could lead to forfeiting games. The NFL also updated protocols on Oct. 2.

The Patriots are missing a second straight day of practice Thursday after reigning NFL Defensive Player of the year Stephon Gilmore joined quarterback Cam Newton on the reserve/COVID-19 list Wednesday. New England also has a defensive tackle from the practice squad on the list in the league's other mini-outbreak.

New England coach Bill Belichick said Thursday the team closed its facility for the health and safety of the club and is continuing to prepare

for Sunday's game with Denver virtually. Whether the Patriots return to their facility Friday will be a medical decision rather than a football one, Belichick said.

"Things are changing very quickly so or could change very quickly. Sometimes they do sometimes they don't," Belichick said. "We knew that at the beginning of the season that there were going to be challenges. There have been. And we're ready to work through them. And that's what we're doing."

Once a team is deemed to be in the midst of an outbreak, the NFL has new protocols sent to all 32 teams Oct. 1 detailing additional steps including a second daily test when dealing with an outbreak or having been exposed to an outbreak.

Trades dominate day two of NHL Draft

Associated Press

Two Stanley Cup-winning players got traded, a few others got new contracts and almost 200 prospects got to — virtually — live out their dreams by having their names called on the second day of the NHL Draft.

It took more than seven hours to complete rounds 2-7 Wednesday at the draft held online from 31 teams' draft rooms to the league's central registry and a TV studio in New Jersey. The draft dragged on with no need for general managers, scouts and coaches to catch a flight home, but that didn't dampen the excitement of young players finding out where they're going or stop the movement of established NHL players with free agency looming Friday.

Some creativity was needed to manage the flat, \$81.5 million salary cap, which is becoming the theme of the 2020 offseason.

"Making a trade as you can see is pretty easy: There's a

lot of them, a lot of jockeying up and down for position in each round and people trading up for maybe a guy they like," said New York Rangers general manager Jeff Gorton, who traded 2017 seventh overall pick Lias Andersson to Los Angeles for a second-rounder. "If you're looking at some of the deals that are happening, money is almost a part of every deal here. You're not seeing too many hockey deals straight up."

Trade action started early with the Pittsburgh Penguins dealing goaltender Matt Murray to the Ottawa Senators and the Nashville Predators continuing to shed salary by sending center Nick Bonino to the Minnesota Wild.

"You just know on days like these if you get a phone call from your GM, it's usually a trade," Bonino said. "We got a spam call that woke me up around 7 a.m. and it obviously wasn't (Predators general manager) David Poile. My wife slept through it luckily and then

we were up at 9:30 a.m. and got the call from David and knew right away. It's weird how it works out."

Murray and Bonino became the third and fourth members of Pittsburgh's 2016 and 2017 back-to-back championship teams to be traded in the past few weeks. The Penguins previously traded winger Patric Hornqvist to Florida, and Chicago traded defenseman Olli Maatta to Los Angeles.

Vegas goalie Marc-Andre Fleury could make it five after the Golden Knights committed long term to Robin Lehner. Vegas is looking to trade the 35-year-old and even sweeten the deal with a pick but has to deal with an overflowing goalie market.

Several netminders will be available in free agency, including 2018 Cup champion Braden Holtby and longtime face of the New York Rangers Henrik Lundqvist. General manager Brian MacLellan said the Washington Capitals are a "solid candidate" to sign Lundqvist, who at 38 is

still trying to win the Cup for the first time.

Pittsburgh got a second-round pick and forward prospect Jonathan Gruden for Murray, who split time with Fleury on two Cup runs and was in net for each clincher. Murray, 26, helped the Penguins win the Cup in 2016 and 2017, but they committed to Tristan Jarry, signing him to a \$10.5 million, three-year deal after his All-Star season.

The Penguins used the 52nd overall pick they got from Ottawa to select Finnish goalie Joel Blomqvist, one of hundreds of prospects who had to find out they were drafted by phone and do video interviews since they couldn't walk on stage in Montreal.

"This wasn't exactly what I dreamed of as a kid," said Sam Colangelo, the Anaheim Ducks' No. 36 pick out of Northeastern. "I dreamed of walking up on stage and walking down to get my jersey from someone there. But doing it on Zoom was incredible."

Kenin, Swiatek advance to French Open women's final

Associated Press

PARIS — Sofia Kenin entered 2020 with an 11-11 record in Grand Slam action. She had not made the quarterfinals at any clay-court tournament until this trip to Roland Garros — and lost her only tuneup match on the surface 6-0, 6-0 last month.

Look at the 21-year-old American now.

Already the owner of a major trophy from this year's Australian Open, the No. 4-seeded Kenin moved into the French Open final by beating No. 7 Petra Kvitova 6-4, 7-5 Thursday.

Kenin will carry a 16-1 mark in Grand Slam action this season into Saturday's championship match against Iga Swiatek of Poland.

"I'm going to be, like, an 'underdog,'" Swiatek said, using

her fingers to make air quotes.

Swiatek is just 19. She's ranked 54th. She's never won a tour-level title. She'd never been past the fourth round at a Slam. And she's been as dominant as can be so far at the French Open.

Swiatek became the lowest-ranked women's finalist at Roland Garros since the WTA computer rankings began in 1975, advancing with her latest lopsided win, this one 6-2, 6-1 against Argentine qualifier Nadia Podoroska.

"It seems unreal," Swiatek said. "On one hand, I know that I can play great tennis. On the other hand, it's kind of surprising for me. I never would have thought that I'm going to be in the final. It's crazy. I just kept believing in myself. It's amazing for me."

She has won all 12 sets she's played in the tournament and

dropped merely 23 games.

Kvitova, a two-time Wimbledon champion, came in having won every set, too. But she hadn't played anyone close to Kenin's caliber.

The lefty from the Czech Republic had grabbed 77% of her service games in the tournament, but Kenin stole two of the first three. Part of it was strong returning. More of it was the manner in which Kenin was moving Kvitova around, pushing her this way and that and pinning her to the baseline with well-struck forehands and backhands.

Also working in Kenin's favor was an ability to sense where a ball was headed and use her speed to track it down, repeatedly stretching points that seemed lost.

Eventually, that appeared to make Kvitova play as if she felt that she needed to try to do

more, maybe do too much, because she would cut off points early by attempting to end them — and, too often, she would miss the mark.

By the end, Kvitova produced 31 unforced errors, to 20 for Kenin, whose shouts of "Come on!" grew louder as the end grew closer. Her intensity also came through when she chucked her red-white-and-blue racket.

When Swiatek's 70-minute tour de force ended before a crowd in the hundreds at Court Philippe Chatrier — there was a daily limit on spectators because of the coronavirus pandemic — she asked for more noise, waving her arms and cupping a hand to her ear.

Swiatek vs. Podoroska was the first women's semifinal at Roland Garros between unseeded opponents since 1983.

American League Division Series

Arozarena powers Rays past Yankees

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — The Tampa Bay Rays are unanimous in their praise of Randy Arozarena, who is living up to his nickname, “The Cuban Rocket.”

Arozarena homered for the third straight game and Kevin Kiermaier and Michael Perez also went deep for the Rays, who beat the New York Yankees 8-4 Wednesday night to move within one victory of reaching the AL Championship Series for the first time in 12 years.

“He’s the best player on the planet,” Kiermaier said. “He’s incredible. He’s very unique in so many ways. Everyone loves him. He’s the man. What he’s doing is incredible.”

New York slugger Giancarlo Stanton hit a two-run homer off Shane McClellan to center field in the eighth inning to become the first player with a home run in each of his team’s first five games of a single postseason. Stanton has six homers and 13 RBIs in those five games. McClellan made his major league debut in Game 1 on Monday night.

Arozarena, a 25-year-old rookie from Havana, is having a breakout postseason. He homered off Gerrit Cole in the first inning of Game 1, a 9-3 Yankees win, and off rookie Deivi Garcia in the first inning of Game 2, a 7-5 Tampa Bay win.

Arozarena hit a shot deep to left leading off the fifth Wednesday night to chase Masahiro Tanaka and give his team a 5-1 lead.

The Rays took a 2-1 lead in the best-of-five Division Series. Game 4 was Thursday night at Petco Park, which has yielded 16 home runs in three games — nine by Tampa Bay.

The Rays are looking to advance out of the ALDS for just the second time.

Athletics 9, Astros 7: Ramon Laureano sensed his teammates’ energy dragging. They were down three runs with time running out to save their season.

So the Oakland outfielder lit into them in the dugout during the sixth inning, getting so loud he was heard easily in mostly empty Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles.

And just in case Laureano’s words did not get the message across, he ripped a double as Oakland got a pair of sacrifice flies in the eighth to rally past the Houston and avoid elimination in their AL Division Series.

“We live another day,” Oakland manager Bob Melvin said.

Suitably inspired by Laureano’s outburst, Chad Pinder tied the score with a three-run homer in the seventh before Sean Murphy hit the go-ahead sac fly in the eighth.

“Ramon got everything fired up, saying this wasn’t it, we’re not going to let it be our last game, we’re gone through too much this season,” Pinder said. “It was awesome.”

Houston leads the best-of-five series 2-1 and can advance to its fourth straight AL Championship Series with a victory in Game 4 on Thursday.

“There’s never a doubt in this team,” Athletics starter Jesus Luzardo said. “We can go ahead and win three in a row.”

The Astros wasted leads of 2-1 and 7-4, and Oakland bounced back after giving up advantages of 1-0 and 4-2.

The Astros led 7-4 when Marcus Semien and Tommy La Stella had back-to-back singles off Josh James starting the seventh. Pinder hit a first-pitch slider to the opposite field for Oakland’s fifth homer, a drive chased by right fielder Kyle Tucker until he ran out of room at the short wall.

National League Division Series

Bellinger, Dodgers thwart Padres again

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Cody Bellinger would take the homer-robbing catch over the home run he hit if he had to pick from the two. The Los Angeles Dodgers needed both from their MVP center fielder.

Bellinger nearly went to a knee to hit his long home run, and later made a spectacular, leaping catch at the center-field wall to take away a go-ahead shot from Fernando Tatis Jr. as the Dodgers barely held off the San Diego Padres 6-5 Wednesday night.

Los Angeles took a 2-0 lead in the NL Division Series when Joe Kelly finally got the last out with the bases loaded in a tension-filled ninth inning.

“It’s going to take a while to wind down from that one,” said Bellinger, the 2019 NL MVP. “That’s postseason baseball right there.”

Kelly retired Eric Hosmer on a routine grounder to earn the save after Dodgers All-Star closer Kenley Jansen wobbled in the ninth. Los Angeles can sweep the best-of-five set from its NL West rival Thursday night.

The Padres were down one with a runner on and two outs in the seventh when Tatis, the 21-year-old budding superstar, hit a towering drive to center. Bellinger ran nearly 100 feet while watching the ball, then jumped and extended his gloved right hand above the 8-foot wall to make the grab.

“I just kind of turned around as fast as I could, got to the fence and saw that it was probable, so I decided to try to time up the jump, and it’s how it worked out,” Bellinger said. “I didn’t know if it was a homer or not, but I knew I caught it.”

Brusdar Graterol, the second Dodgers reliever after starter Clayton Kershaw, slung his glove and cap away and thrust both arms into the air to celebrate what Bellinger said was only the second homer he has

robbed in his career — the first in the playoffs.

Braves 2, Marlins 2: Rookie Ian Anderson pitched like an October veteran. Old pro Nick Markakis threw the best strike of the game. And just like that, Atlanta is on the verge of something it hasn’t done since the days of Chipper, the Big Three and Bobby Cox.

Anderson blanked the Miami Marlins into the sixth inning in Houston, Markakis made a nifty play in right field to help preserve the lead late, and the Braves threw another playoff shutout for a 2-0 lead in the NL Division Series.

Atlanta has pitched three shutouts in four games during this year’s playoffs. It is just the third team in MLB history to toss three shutouts in the first four games of a postseason, joining the 1966 Baltimore Orioles and the 1905 New York Giants.

Travis d’Arnaud and Dansby Swanson each homered for the second straight day, putting the Braves one win away from a sweep in the best-of-five matchup. Game 3 was Thursday in Houston.

“It’s hard to bunch hits together, pitching is too good,” Atlanta manager Brian Snitker said. “Power, I think is something that plays in the postseason and was witnessed today.”

The Braves haven’t reached the NL Championship Series since 2001.

The team has lost in the division series eight times since then, including the last two seasons — a fact star slugger Freddie Freeman said put a chip on their shoulders.

Anderson scattered three hits and struck out eight over 5.2 innings. The lanky right-hander who made his major league debut in late August added to his impressive outing last week in the wild-card series when he fanned nine in six scoreless frames against Cincinnati.