

Navy scandal has echoes of 'Fat Leonard'

The Washington Post

Federal agents are investigating a new U.S. Navy corruption case that has strong echoes of the Fat Leonard scandal, with a defense contractor facing accusations that he delivered cash bribes and bilked the Navy out of at least \$50 million to service its ships in foreign ports, according to recently unsealed court records.

The Justice Department is trying to extradite the contractor — Frank Rafaraci, chief executive of Multinational Logistics Services, or MLS — from Malta, the Mediterranean island where he was arrested last week after an international manhunt.

Rafaraci, 68, is a dual U.S.-Italian citizen who splits his time between the United Arab Emirates and Sicily. Since 2010, the Navy and federal agencies have awarded MLS about \$1.3 billion in contracts to resupply and refuel U.S. warships in the Middle East, Asia and other regions.

According to an arrest warrant unsealed last week in U.S. District Court in Washington, Rafaraci and MLS defrauded the Navy of at least \$50 million by inflating invoices for port services between

2011 and 2018. In one instance, when the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson visited Manama, capital of the Persian Gulf kingdom of Bahrain, in January 2015, MLS billed the Navy for more than \$231,000 in “port authority fees,” even though the Manama port authority charged only \$12,686, the court documents show.

Federal authorities are also seeking Rafaraci’s extradition on suspicion of money laundering and bribery. The arrest warrant alleges that he met with an unnamed U.S. Navy official at the Diplomat Hotel in Manama in August 2015, handed over an envelope stuffed with \$20,000 in cash and told the official to “keep up the good work.”

Three years later, at a Miami hotel, Rafaraci passed another envelope to the same U.S. official that contained \$13,500, according to the arrest warrant.

The unnamed U.S. Navy official served for several years as a liaison officer in Bahrain before taking a job with the U.S. Army. Court papers show that the official pleaded guilty in June to a bribery charge in U.S. District

Court in Washington and agreed to become a cooperating witness for the government. His identity and his criminal case file remain under seal.

In many ways, the allegations against Rafaraci and MLS mirror the “Fat Leonard” corruption scandal that has rocked the Navy since 2013. In that case, a rotund Malaysian defense contractor, Leonard Glenn Francis, pleaded guilty to bribing scores of Navy officials with cash, prostitutes, extravagant meals and other favors so he could overcharge the Navy for port services in Asia. Several hundred Navy officials came under investigation, and 27 people have pleaded guilty in federal court to corruption-related charges. Seven more defendants — all current or retired Navy officers — are scheduled to go on trial in San Diego in February.

Navy officials pledged to clean up their contracting processes in response to the Fat Leonard scandal, but the case against Rafaraci alleges that corruption persists.

MLS took over numerous U.S. government contracts that had been handled by Francis’s Singapore-based firm, Glenn Defense

Marine Asia, and became the largest provider of port services to the Navy in the world. It operates throughout Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Europe. The Navy relies on private contractors to supply fresh water, fuel, food, security, tugboats, barges and other equipment and services in foreign ports.

The Navy suspended MLS and Rafaraci on Friday from doing future business with any federal agency, though they will be allowed to fulfill their current contracts with the Navy, according to Cmdr. Courtney Hillson, a spokeswoman for the branch.

Hillson said agents from the Naval Criminal Investigative Service and the Defense Criminal Investigative Service uncovered the alleged wrongdoing and “have been actively coordinating with other law-enforcement authorities around the globe.”

Federal agents had been tracking Rafaraci’s movements and learned last month that he was planning a brief visit to Malta, where MLS is headquartered. He arrived in Malta on Sept. 26 and was arrested hours later by local authorities at a hotel.

3 aircraft carriers, 1 from UK, train together near Okinawa

By ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

Three aircraft carriers — two American and one British — were among an armada of 17 warships from six countries that trained together over the weekend in the Philippine Sea.

The USS Ronald Reagan, fresh off its deployment to the Middle East, met the USS Carl Vinson and HMS Queen Elizabeth on Saturday southwest of Okinawa, according to a Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force news release Monday. They were accompa-

nied by other vessels from the United States, Japan, United Kingdom, New Zealand, Netherlands and Canada.

The training, which included air defense, anti-submarine warfare, tactical maneuvers and communication drills, continued through Sunday, the release said.

Seventh Fleet on Monday referred questions about the exercise to the Hawaii-based U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, which did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment.

U.S. Navy ships involved in the

exercise included the guided-missile destroyers USS Shiloh, USS Chafee, USS The Sullivans and the guided-missile cruiser USS Lake Champlain, according to the release.

The other nations’ vessels included destroyers, frigates and replenishment ships.

Photos of the training showed the three carriers, along with Japan’s flattop helicopter destroyer JS Ise, leading the 13 other vessels through the sea.

The exercise wrapped up as the Chinese military flew 16 war-

planes over waters south of Taiwan, less than 400 nautical miles from Okinawa.

China sent 38 warplanes into the area on Friday and 39 aircraft on Saturday, the most in a single day since Taiwan began releasing reports on flights in September 2020. The flights came in daytime and nighttime sorties.

A statement from U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price warned that China’s military activity near Taiwan risks miscalculation and undermines regional peace and stability.

N. Korea restores hotline, answers South

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — Communication hotlines between the two Koreas were restored at 9 a.m. Monday after lying dormant since this summer, according to South Korea's Ministry of Unification.

An opening call was made from the joint liaison office channel, laying a "foundation for stabilizing the situation on the Korean Peninsula and restoring inter-Korean relations," the ministry said in a statement Monday.

The South Korean government expects "practical discussions" to restore relations between the two countries, the statement added.

North Korea's state-run Korean Central News Agency announced the hotlines' restoration in a report early Monday, noting that Seoul "should keep in mind the meaning of reopening of the communication lines and make active efforts to solve pending important issues for saving the inter-Korean relations and opening its bright prospect."

China's special envoy to the Korean Peninsula, Liu Xiaoming, who held talks about inter-Korean relations with South Korean officials last week, described the restoration as "remarkable progress," in a tweet Monday.

The nearly 50 communication channels between the two Koreas are intended to reduce tensions during a crisis and to build a dialogue for better relations. The countries conduct two calls each morning and afternoon. South Korea, regardless of the North's bellicose statements, at-

tempts to contact its neighbor at the same time every day.

The lines have been cut and restored many times throughout the years, as relations soured and improved between Seoul and Pyongyang.

North Korea discontinued the daily calls last year after anti-North Korean protesters and defectors flew propaganda leaflets across the border. Communication was reinstated in July, but Pyongyang severed them again after two weeks in an apparent protest over joint U.S.-South Korean military drills.

USS Johnson destroyer joins 7th Fleet in Japan

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The USS Ralph Johnson steamed into Yokosuka on Monday, completing a nearly three-week journey from the United States to its new homeport in Japan.

The guided-missile destroyer arrived at 10 a.m. with more than 100 sailors manning the rails and working the decks. It departed its former home, Naval Station Everett in Washington state, on Sept. 15.

"Ralph Johnson comes over as one of the newest and most capable destroyers in the U.S. Navy," Capt. Chase Sargeant, commander of Destroyer Squadron 15, said in a Navy new release. "The addition of Ralph Johnson demonstrates our unwavering commitment to maintain maritime security in the Indo-Pacific alongside our alliances and partnerships."

The ship is replacing the USS Mustin, which departed Yokosuka for San Diego in June.

Commissioned in March 2018, the Ralph Johnson boasts one of

the newest versions of the Aegis Combat System. Those ballistic-missile defense capabilities can make significant contributions to the 7th Fleet, according to executive officer Cmdr. Isaiah Infante.

"It has the upgraded baseline, which obviously has different capabilities when it comes to missile defense," he told Stars and Stripes on Monday.

The Baseline 9 system, launched in 2015, features remote launching capabilities, improved target identification and better performance against "more advanced threats," according to a Sept. 30 report from the Congressional Research Service.

The USS Rafael Peralta, which joined 7th Fleet in February, is also equipped with the Baseline 9 system.

The Ralph Johnson arrives in the wake of a series of North Korean missile tests over the past few weeks, the most recent of which launched Sept. 30. Those weapons include short-range hypersonic, long-range cruise and anti-aircraft missiles.

Another defendant sentenced in ID theft of troops and vets

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

A former U.S. Army medical records administrator in South Korea was ordered to serve more than 12 years in prison for his role in an identity theft scheme that targeted military members and their families, including elderly and disabled veterans.

Fredrick Brown, 40, of Las Vegas, was sentenced last week, nearly two years after pleading guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering and one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud, according to a Justice Department statement.

Brown was also ordered to pay more than \$2.3 million in restitution.

The victims, who included eight general officers and numerous disabled veterans, lost more than \$1.5 million, according to the Justice Department.

Brown had access to personal identifying information while working as a civilian medical records technician and administrator with the Army's 65th Medical Brigade at Yongsan Garrison in Seoul.

He admitted in court that between July 2014 and September 2015, he stole names, Social Security numbers, military ID numbers, dates of birth and contact information for thousands of service members, civilians, veterans and their families.

He captured the information by taking digital photographs of his computer screen while he was logged into a military electronic health records database, according to court documents.

He provided the stolen data to co-defendant Robert Wayne Boling Jr., a U.S. military dependent raised in South Korea and living in the Philippines who was described in court documents as the scheme's ringleader.

Boling and others used the information to access Defense Department and Veterans Affairs benefits sites to steal or attempt to steal millions of dollars in pensions and disability benefits.

They also stole from personal bank accounts, in some cases contacting banks and other financial institutions and posing as military-affiliated individuals, according to court documents.

Confederate flag flying at Vilseck base prompts probe

By IMMANUEL JOHNSON
Stars and Stripes

GRAFENWOEHR, Germany — Military police are investigating after a Confederate flag was found flying from a flagpole outside 2nd Cavalry Regiment headquarters Monday and removed upon discovery, Army officials said.

An American flag and a German flag also were stolen from inside the headquarters building in Vilseck sometime between Sunday night and Monday morning by an unknown person, regiment spokesman Maj. John Ambelang said.

The incident at Rose Barracks, which is home to a regiment of about 4,800 soldiers, comes more than a year after the Defense Department effectively banned the Confederate flags and other symbols deemed divisive from public display on military bases.

"The regiment takes this misconduct very seriously," Ambelang said in a statement.

"Should the culprit be identified, the command will take appropriate action after considering all the facts surrounding the incident."

Commanders across the regiment conveyed the seriousness of the situation to soldiers at a morning formation, the statement said.

Neither the theft nor the display of the Confederate battle flag reflect the Army's values, Ambelang said.

Earlier this year, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin directed the military to conduct training to address extremism in the ranks. Service members gave the training mixed reviews.

The regiment is working with military police to review base camera footage, Ambelang said. Officials have also asked anyone with information on the incident to contact the Department of Emergency Services on Rose Barracks at +49 966-283-3397.

Navy awards \$122M contract to build range for Marines on Guam

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Navy awarded a \$122 million contract to a Guam-based construction company to build a machine-gun range at Andersen Air Force Base that will support the new Marine Corps Base Camp Blaz.

The new facility will include a multilane, multipurpose gun range, a range control tower, an ammunition distribution point and covered bleachers. The project is expected to be completed in October 2024.

The Navy gave the firm-fixed price contract to Black Construction Corp., based at Harmon, Guam, on Tuesday, according to a news release from Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command Pacific.

Blaz's commander, Col. Christopher Bopp, called the range a "significant step" toward completing the installation.

"This range will provide critical training capabilities to our forces while ensuring our continued operational readiness to respond to any crisis or contingency in the region," he said in the release.

It will be part a larger complex known as the Mason Live-Fire Training Range at An-

dersen's Northwest Field.

The Navy previously awarded Black Construction a \$78 million contract in August 2017 to build four other ranges and supporting facilities for the complex.

The other ranges are for rifles, pistols, non-standard small arms and a modified record fire, a spokeswoman for Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command Pacific, Krista Cummins, told Stars and Stripes in an email Friday.

The announcement follows a slew of other projects on Guam recently announced by the Navy as part of the camp's ongoing construction. Blaz, activated in October 2020, is the first newly commissioned Marine Corps base since 1952.

The Navy has awarded more than \$1 billion in contracts to build medical and logistics facilities, barracks and officer quarters.

Blaz and the associated projects are part of the Defense Policy Review Initiative, a deal between the U.S. and Japan that includes the relocation of 5,000 members of the III Marine Expeditionary Force from Okinawa to Guam.

Afghan refugees in Germany get taste of America

By KARIN ZEITVOGEL
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — The sounds of gleefully screaming children rose from a large tent that had been transformed from a dining hall to a party venue on a fall evening on Rhine Ordnance Barracks.

A DJ spun Afghan and American tunes, a machine spewed out bubbles, disco lights threw off shafts of color and kids lined up for fresh popcorn and slushies that didn't quite freeze, provided by the USO.

Sgt. Michael Daniels, a lead firefighter with the 23rd Ordnance Company out of Grafenwoehr in Bavaria, who has been working with the 5,400 evacuees at ROB, roused the crowd while DJ Corey Mackey sorted out some electrical and WiFi problems.

"I do this because I love the kids and love having the opportunity to share joy with them," Daniels said.

"I know they have been through a difficult situation and want to allow them to be kids again, having fun, dancing," he said before marching to the far end of the tent, clapping and shouting, "Hey! Let's go!" as a group of children followed him.

The glee at ROB contrasted sharply with the situation in Afghanistan, where in the six weeks since the Taliban returned to power, music and dancing have been severely limited.

Flights from overseas bases to the United States were temporarily halted last month after some evacuees were diagnosed with measles. They could resume over the Columbus Day weekend, Lt. Col. Will Powell, spokesman for the 86th Airlift Wing, said in a statement sent to Stars and Stripes.

As the Afghans wait to move on, they are being introduced to aspects of American life — things like popcorn, slushies and different ways of doing things, like teaching.

"We saw that the kids really needed some play," American Red Cross volunteer Yuki Hwang said. "We're working to help them express their emotions and what they're going through, to deal with the trauma and stress of their situation."

Girls sat next to boys, and sometimes outnumbered them. Military cots served as desks or seats. Whiteboards, pens and erasers were handed out at the start of class and collected at the end, ready for the next students.

Kishida picked by parliament to lead Japan

Associated Press

TOKYO — Japan's parliament on Monday elected Fumio Kishida, a former moderate turned hawk, as prime minister. He'll face an economy battered by the coronavirus pandemic, security threats from China and North Korea and leadership of a political party whose popularity is sagging ahead of a fast-approaching crucial national election.

With his party and its coalition partner holding a majority in both houses, Kishida won by a comfortable margin against Yuki Edano, head of the largest opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan. After being

sworn in at a ceremony in the royal palace, Kishida was to hold his first news conference as prime minister and chair his first Cabinet meeting later Monday.

He replaces Yoshihide Suga, who resigned after only one year in office as his support plunged over his government's handling of the pandemic and insistence on holding the Tokyo Olympics as the virus spread.

Kishida is expected to make a policy speech in parliament on Friday but is looking to dissolve the lower house to hold elections on Oct. 31, Japanese media reported. Observers see the early date as a move to take advantage

of his government's fresh image to rally support.

Jun Azumi, senior Constitutional Democratic Party lawmaker, criticized Kishida over his plan to dissolve the house in just over a week.

"It's like a delicatessen that forces customers to buy without a chance to try samples," Azumi said.

A former foreign minister, Kishida, 64, used to be known as a moderate but turned hawkish on security and more conservative on gender equality and other issues, apparently to show loyalty to influential conservatives in the Liberal Democratic Party and

win their support. He is firmly entrenched in the conservative establishment, and his victory in last week's vote to replace Suga as the party's leader was a choice for continuity and stability over change.

Kishida replaced all but two of Suga's 20 Cabinet members and 13 will hold ministerial posts for the first time, according to the lineup announced by new Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno. Most of the posts went to powerful factions that voted for Kishida in the party election. Only three women are included, up from two in Suga's government.

Response time questioned in Southern Calif. oil spill

Associated Press

HUNTINGTON BEACH, Calif. — Some residents, business owners and environmentalists questioned whether authorities reacted quickly enough to contain one of the largest oil spills in recent California history, caused by a suspected leak in an underwater pipeline that fouled the sands of famed Huntington Beach and could keep the beaches there closed for weeks or longer.

Booms were deployed on the ocean surface Sunday to try to contain the oil while divers sought to determine where and why the leak occurred. On land, there was a race to find animals harmed by the oil and to keep the spill from harming any more sensitive marshland.

People who live and work in the area said they noticed an oil sheen and a heavy petroleum smell Friday evening. But it wasn't until Saturday afternoon that the Coast Guard said an oil slick had been spotted and a unified command established to respond. And it took until Saturday night for the company that operates the pipeline believed responsible for the leak to shut down operations.

Rick Torgerson, owner of Blue Star Yacht Charter said on Friday evening "people were emailing, and the neighbors were asking, 'Do you smell that?'" By Saturday morning, boats were returning to the marina with their hulls covered in oil, he said.

Garry Brown, president of the environmental group Orange County Coastkeeper, decried a lack of initial coordination among the Coast Guard and local officials in dealing with the spreading oil slick.

"By the time it comes to the beach, it's done tremendous damage. Our frustration is, it could have been averted if there was a quick response," said Brown, who lives in Huntington Beach.

An estimated 126,000 gallons of heavy crude leaked into the water and some washed up on the shores of Orange County. The city and state beaches at Huntington Beach were closed, and late Sunday the city of Laguna Beach, just to the south, said its beaches also were shuttered. Huntington Beach Mayor Kim Carr said the beaches of the community nicknamed "Surf City" could remain closed for weeks or even months.

2 win Nobel Prize showing how we react to temperature, touch

Associated Press

STOCKHOLM — Two scientists won the Nobel Prize in medicine on Monday for their discoveries into how the human body perceives temperature and touch, revelations that could lead to new ways of treating pain or even heart disease.

Americans David Julius and Ardem Patapoutian identified receptors in the skin that respond to heat and pressure. Their work is focused on the field of somatosensation, which explores the ability of specialized organs such as eyes, ears and skin to see, hear and feel.

"This really unlocks one of the secrets of nature," said Thomas Perlmann, secretary-general of the Nobel Committee, in announcing the winners. "It's actually something that is crucial for our survival, so it's a very important and profound discovery."

The committee said Julius, who was born in New York and now works at the University of California at San Francisco, used capsaicin, the active component in chili peppers, to identify the nerve sensors that allow the skin to respond to heat.

Patapoutian, who was born in

Lebanon and now works at Scripps Research Institute at La Jolla, Calif., found separate pressure-sensitive sensors in cells that respond to mechanical stimulation, it said.

"In our daily lives we take these sensations (of temperature and touch) for granted, but how are nerve impulses initiated so that temperature and pressure can be perceived?" the committee wrote in the announcement. "This question has been solved by this year's Nobel Prize Laureates."

Perlmann said he managed to get hold of both of the winners — who shared the prestigious Kavli Award for Neuroscience last year — before Monday's announcement.

"I ... only had a few minutes to talk to them, but they were incredibly happy," he said. "And as far as I could tell they were very surprised and a little bit shocked, maybe."

The prestigious award comes with a gold medal and over \$1.14 million. The prize money comes from a bequest left by the prize's creator, Swedish inventor Alfred Nobel, who died in 1895.

The prize is the first to be awarded this year.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

New landmark recognizes Chinese contributions

CA YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK — A century-old building originally used as a laundry by Chinese workers at Yosemite's iconic Wawona Hotel has been restored and turned into a visitor's attraction, recognizing Chinese Americans' contributions to the early history of the national park.

Officials unveiled a new sign Friday marking the Chinese Laundry Building in Yosemite Valley, the Fresno Bee reported. New exhibits inside tell the story of Chinese workers who helped build Tioga Road and Wawona Road, critical infrastructure that allowed tourism to the park.

The building — later used as a storage facility — is part of a cluster of structures that will make up the new Yosemite History Center, which will tell the histories of immigrants who made the park what it is today, said Park Ranger Adam Ramsey.

Over 175 bronze vases stolen from cemeteries

LA LAKE CHARLES — At least one person has been arrested after more than 175 bronze vases were stolen off graves in two southwest Louisiana cemeteries.

More than 100 vases were stolen from Consolata Cemetery in Lake Charles and, next door, nearly 70 vases were taken from Prien Memorial Park.

At least one arrest has been made in connection with the investigation. Kenneth Stillson, 36, of Ragley, faces several charges including aggravated assault with a motor vehicle, desecration of graves, obstruction of justice, aggravated flight from an officer

and illegal possession of stolen things. He was being held without bond at the Calcasieu Parish Jail.

All 112 vases stolen from Consolata Cemetery have been recovered, and 34 of the stolen vases from Prien Memorial Park Cemetery have also been recovered, authorities said.

Sheriff probing stolen, vandalized road signs

ND SOLEN — The Morton County Sheriff's Office is seeking information about the vandalism and theft of road signs in south-central North Dakota, near the South Dakota border.

The Bismarck Tribune reported road crews on Thursday found that about 15 signs at intersections on a 6-mile stretch north of Solen had been run over or stolen.

Sheriff Kyle Kirchmeier said replacement of each sign costs about \$250, and the vandalism also "causes a significant risk for motorists relying on those signs."

Oldest living American celebrates turning 115

NE OMAHA — A Nebraska woman who is believed by many to be the oldest living American has celebrated her 115th birthday.

The Omaha World-Herald reported that Thelma Sutcliffe marked her birthday quietly at the facility where she lives in Omaha.

Sutcliffe was born Oct. 1, 1906, in Benson, Neb. (now part of Omaha). Her parents owned a farm. At age 17, she married Bill Sutcliffe, who worked for the Postal Service. He died in the early 1970s.

The Gerontology Research Group said Sutcliffe became the nation's oldest living person on

April 17 when Hester Ford died in North Carolina at age 115. The oldest person in the world is believed to be 118-year-old Kane Tanaka of Japan, who was born Jan. 2, 1903.

County gets new sheriff after ex-sheriff ousted

WA KENNEWICK — A former sheriff's supervisor who left the Benton County Sheriff's Office over "horrible working conditions" created by his embattled boss is the new sheriff.

Tom Croskrey was temporarily in charge of the agency in fall 2019 when then-Sheriff Jerry Hatcher took a leave of absence because of domestic violence and witness tampering allegations related to his divorce, The Tri-City Herald reported.

Hatcher faced recall when an employee accused Hatcher of intimidating witnesses and public servants in investigations, retaliating against them, tampering with physical evidence and violating his oath of office.

Man dies after falling off top of subway train

NY NEW YORK — A man who was riding atop a subway train as it crossed the Williamsburg Bridge in New York City was killed early Saturday when he fell off and was run over by the train, city police said.

The 35-year-old man was "surfing" on top of a J train heading into Manhattan when he lost his balance and fell onto the tracks at about 4:30 a.m., police said. Witnesses reporting seeing the man "falling from the train and getting run over," a police spokesperson said.

The man was pronounced dead at the scene. His name was with-

held pending notification of relatives, officials said.

Subway service over the bridge was suspended for about two hours after the incident.

Semi crash spills liquid manure, injures driver

WI MADISON — Authorities said about 5,500 gallons of liquid manure spilled after a semi-tractor overturned in Decatur, injuring the driver.

The Wisconsin State Journal reported deputies from the Green County Sheriff's Office responded to the crash at about 12:44 p.m. Friday.

Authorities said Jeffrey M. Brewer, of Evansville, was driving a semi-tractor hauling the fertilizer and failed to negotiate a curve. The semi-tractor went off the road and into a ditch where it overturned.

Authorities said the driver suffered minor injuries.

State upping child care aid rates for providers

TN NASHVILLE — Tennessee officials said they are increasing the reimbursement rate the state pays child care providers on behalf of families who need help shouldering the cost of care.

The Tennessee Department of Human Services said child care payment assistance rates will increase 10% across all categories of care in the Child Care Certificate Program beginning Friday.

Families must be enrolled and meet the income and work or education requirements of the program. State officials said the rate increase will help many families save on child care tuition by reducing their share of the overall cost.

— From wire reports

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MLB playoff field settled in a flash Sunday

Associated Press

Rafael Devers delivered big time for the Boston Red Sox. Aaron Judge did just enough for the New York Yankees. And Buster Posey boosted the San Francisco Giants to the NL West crown, dropping the 106-win Dodgers into a dangerous wild-card game.

In a flash, the Major League Baseball playoff field was all settled Sunday.

No crazy tiebreaker scenarios. No chaos on the final day. And for fans who wanted drama — no problem, that's on deck.

Yankees-Red Sox to start the postseason in an all-or-nothing October duel at Fenway Park. Sound familiar?

"We'll be ready," Boston manager Alex Cora said. "It should be fun."

The Red Sox and New York both scored the winning run in the ninth inning in Game 162 to seal their spots in the AL wild-card matchup Tuesday night, when it'll be Yankees ace Gerrit Cole against Nathan Eovaldi.

So between now and then, count on seeing endless replays of Bucky Dent's home run over the Green Monster that lifted New York over Boston in their famed 1978 one-game meeting for the AL East title.

Shut out of this year's postseason party were Vladimir Guerrero Jr. and his Toronto

Blue Jays, along with the Seattle Mariners; they each needed a loss by either the Red Sox or Yankees to have a chance.

"Unfortunately, our fate was in the hands of another team," said George Springer, who homered twice in Toronto's win over Baltimore. "We were hoping for something, but obviously it didn't happen."

The Giants clinched the NL West with their franchise-record 107th win, routing San Diego 11-4 behind Posey's three RBIs. They needed all of those victories to hold off the World Series champion Dodgers.

"You're going to be hard-pressed to see another race like this for quite a while," said Posey, the three-time champion catcher who sat out last season because of COVID-19 concerns.

The Dodgers dropped into the NL wild-card game Wednesday night, when they'll host the hard-charging St. Louis Cardinals. Pretty neat tilt, too: Max Scherzer vs. Adam Wainwright.

The best-of-five Division Series begin Thursday with a pair of AL games.

It'll be 76-year-old Hall of Fame manager Tony La Russa leading the Chicago White Sox into Houston to match wits with 72-year-old skipper Dusty Baker and the Astros.

Also, 20-year-old rookie sensation Wan-

der Franco and the Tampa Bay Rays will welcome the AL wild-card winner.

On Friday, the NL series start up with Charlie Morton and the Atlanta Braves visiting Corbin Burnes and the pitching-rich Milwaukee Brewers, who are still bidding for their first World Series crown.

Posey and the Giants will play the wild-card winner at Oracle Park.

By design, all 15 games on the last day of the regular season began at roughly the same time. That was set up to create an inning-by-inning, back-and-forth scramble.

And the possibility for a tangle loomed large: The Yankees and Red Sox began the afternoon tied for the two AL wild cards, with Toronto and Seattle a game behind.

Down 5-1 going into the sixth inning at Washington, the Red Sox rallied. Devers launched his second homer of the game, a tiebreaking, two-run drive in the ninth that capped a four-hit, four-RBI performance in a 7-5 win.

At Yankee Stadium, it was scoreless until the ninth. With one out and runners on second and third, Judge hit a liner off reliever Andrew Kittredge's glove for a single and, remarkably, his first career walk-off hit in the majors.

"I wouldn't say we exhaled," Judge said. "We still have a lot of work to do."

Dodgers' Turner, Astros' Gurriel win 1st batting titles

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Trea Turner of the Los Angeles Dodgers and Houston's Yuli Gurriel won their first batting titles Sunday in a season of boom and bust that saw four teams lose 100 games for only the third time, and four 90-game winners in the AL East alone.

Shohei Ohtani of the Los Angeles Angels was a singular sensation with a superlative two-way season, unmatched even by Babe Ruth.

Turner hit .328 to top defending NL batting champion Juan Soto of Washington, who hit .313.

"It's consistency, which I pride myself on and showing up every day," said the 28-year-old Turner, traded from Washington to Los Angeles in late July. "You've got to qualify for certain

awards and have a certain amount of at-bats, and it's hard if you're not out there on the field. That's part of being prepared and being lucky. It's been a good season from a health standpoint."

Gurriel batted .319 to lead the AL; Astros teammate Michael Brantley was second at .311, just ahead of Toronto's Vladimir Guerrero Jr., also at .311. Gurriel entered as a defensive replacement in the ninth inning Sunday and hit a game-ending single that beat Oakland 7-6.

"It's something really important," Gurriel said through a translator. "I think everybody knows it's a big deal and it's tough to win a batting title."

At 37, he is the second-oldest batting champion behind 38-year-old Barry Bonds in 2002.

"It says a lot about the fact that veteran players still have a lot to offer in this game," Gurriel said.

The 27-year-old Ohtani was second in the AL to Guerrero Jr. with a .592 slugging percentage. Ohtani led the AL with eight triples and was third in the major leagues with 46 home runs. He hit .257 with 100 RBIs and 26 stolen bases.

On the mound, he paced AL pitchers with a .122 opponents' batting average with runners in scoring position. Batters hit .087 (11-for-127) against his splitter, the lowest for any pitch in the majors with a minimum 110 plate appearances.

On the basepaths, his 4.09 seconds sprint time from home to first was the fastest in the big leagues.

Kansas City catcher Salvador

Perez and Guerrero tied for the major league home run title with 48 each, two more than Ohtani had, and San Diego's Fernando Tatis Jr. topped the NL with 42. Perez also led the AL with 121 RBIs and Adam Duvall led the NL with 113 for Miami and Atlanta.

Standings reflected the trend to teams going all in or bailing out and tearing down. San Francisco (107), the Los Angeles Dodgers (106) and Tampa Bay (100) gave the major leagues three 100-win teams for the fourth straight full season. Before this run it occurred only in 1942, 1977, 1998, 2002 and 2003.

The Dodgers set a record for the most wins by a second-place team, topping the 104 of the 1909 Chicago Cubs and 1942 Brooklyn Dodgers.

Giants beat Padres, win NL West title

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — San Francisco finally won the NL West without needing to wait for the rival Dodgers' result on the season's final day, pounding the San Diego Padres 11-4 on Sunday for a franchise-record 107th victory to top the 1904 New York team.

Logan Webb (11-3) allowed four runs and six hits in seven-plus innings, struck out eight, walked one and hit his first big league homer, a two-run drive in the fifth. Buster Posey drove in three runs on a pair of singles and got his 1,500th hit.

The Giants finished with one more win than Los Angeles and will host the winner of Wednesday night's wild-card game between the Dodgers and Cardinals for Game 1 of the NL Division Series.

Reiss Knehr (1-2) allowed two runs in three innings. San Diego lost eight of their final nine and at 79-83 finished below .500 for the 10th time in 11 years.

Dodgers 10, Brewers 3: Trea Turner hit his second grand slam in less than 48 hours and won the NL batting title at .328, but host Los Angeles finished as the winningest second-place team in major league history.

The Dodgers' streak of eight straight NL West titles over, they will host St. Louis in the NL wild card game on Wednesday.

Walker Buehler (16-4) allowed one run and three hits in five innings of his career-high 33rd start. He struck out a season-high tying 11.

Aaron Ashby (3-2) was the loser. Milwaukee hosts Atlanta in the Division Series starting Friday.

Red Sox 7, Nationals 5: Rafael Devers' second home run of the game and 38th this season, a two-run drive in the ninth off Kyle Finnegan (5-9), lifted visiting Boston into the AL wild game game against the Yankees at Fenway Park on Tuesday night.

The Red Sox finished second at 92-70, eight games behind AL champion Tampa Bay, and will host because they won the season series from New York 10-9 and the Yankees finished with the same record.

Eduardo Rodriguez (13-8), who started and won at Washington on Friday night, threw a perfect eighth and Nick Pivetta, a starter who pitched Thursday, came on for the ninth inning and collected his first save since 2019.

J.D. Martinez left in the sixth inning with a sprained left ankle.

Yankees 1, Rays 0: Aaron Judge had his first big league walk-off hit, a one-out single in the ninth off Andrew Kittredge after

Rougned Odor led off the inning against Josh Fleming (10-8) with host New York's second hit.

Gio Urshela sprinted 126 feet and tumbled at full speed into the Rays dugout from a shifted shortstop position in the sixth inning to catch Austin Meadows' popup. His left thigh bruised, Urshela was replaced in the ninth.

Aroldis Chapman (6-4) struck out two and stranded a runner in the ninth, the sixth pitcher in a five-hitter.

Angels 7, Mariners 3: Shohei Ohtani led off the game with his 46th home run to reach 100 RBIs, Jared Walsh added a two-run shot in the fourth and host Seattle (90-72) was unable to end a playoff drought that reached 20 years.

The Mariners finished two games behind Boston and New York. Their absence from the postseason is the longest in any of the four major pro sports in North America.

Blue Jays 12, Orioles 4: George Springer hit two home runs, including a grand slam, and Vladimir Guerrero Jr. launched his 48th homer but host Toronto finished with 91 wins, one short of the Yankees and Red Sox.

The Blue Jays went 25-11 at home after moving back to Rogers Centre.

Indians 6, Rangers 0: Visiting Cleveland closed its 107th and final season as the Indians with a win as Aaron Civale (12-5) allowed only three singles and Yu Chang homered. The team will become the Guardians by next season, as they finished with their first losing season since 2012.

Rookie right-hander Dane Dunning (5-10) allowed four runs and five hits over three innings for Texas, which finished with 102 losses — its most since 1973 — and was shut out 15 times.

Astros 7, Athletics 6: Yuli Gurriel hit a winning RBI single in the ninth inning as AL West champion Houston finished with a home win before starting the Division Series at home against the Chicago White Sox on Thursday.

Gurriel hit .319 and became Houston's second player to win a batting title after Jose Altuve in 2014, '16 and '17.

Seth Brown's two-run homer off Zack Greinke — his second homer of the game — and Khris Davis' solo homer off Blake Taylor (4-4) tied the score in a three-run ninth. Oakland was 86-76, finishing nine games back of the Astros in third place.

Tigers 5, White Sox 2: Daz Cameron homered off Reynaldo Lopez (4-4) leading

off the ninth to spark Detroit's three-run inning in a win at Chicago.

Reds 6, Pirates 3: Joey Votto capped off a resurgent season by hitting his 36th home run, and Nick Castellanos reached the 100-RBI plateau for the second time in his career, helping visiting Cincinnati finish over .500 (83-29) over the course of a 162-game season for the first time since 2013.

Pittsburgh's 61-101 mark is the franchise's worst since 2010.

Diamondbacks 5, Rockies 4: Josh VanMeter hit a tiebreaking homer off Carlos Estevez (3-5) with two outs in the ninth, a rare happy moment as host Arizona finished 52-110 and tied with Baltimore for the worst record in the majors. Colorado went 74-87.

J.B. Wendelken (4-3) pitched a scoreless ninth.

Braves 5, Mets 0: Austin Riley drove in two runs with two hits for host Atlanta.

New York finished with three hits and ended at 77-85 after leading the division for 90 consecutive days, leaving manager Luis Rojas unsure of his fate under new owner Steven Cohen.

Noah Syndergaard (0-1) allowed two runs, including a leadoff homer to Jorge Soler, in his one scheduled inning during his second start after returning from Tommy John surgery.

Cubs 3, Cardinals 2: Matt Duffy extended his hitting streak to a career-high 13 games with a pair of run-scoring singles in a game shortened to seven innings by rain as Chicago won at St. Louis.

The Cubs lost 91 games, the most since they went 66-96 in 2013, and used a major league-record 69 players.

Marlins 5, Phillies 4: Nick Fortes hit a tie-breaking two-run home run in the fourth off Hector Neris (4-7) and host Miami finished its 11th losing season in 12 years with a win.

Bryce Harper doubled and walked before being replaced in the bottom of the third. A contender for NL MVP, he hit .309 with 35 homers, 84 RBIs and a major league-best 1.044 OPS.

Twins 7, Royals 3: Byron Buxton and Jorge Polanco homered as host Minnesota got to rookie Jackson Kowar (0-6) by scoring five runs in the first inning, three on Polanco's homer.

Nick Vincent (1-0) got the win after throwing two scoreless innings for the Twins, last in the AL Central at 73-89 in the AL Central after winning the division the previous two years. Kansas City went 74-88.

Brady gets win, passing mark in NE return

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — From the moment the NFL schedule came out with the Buccaneers playing at New England, to the rainy night that concluded with, of course, a victory at Gillette Stadium, Tom Brady knew this would be very different.

He admitted to getting emotional about facing the Patriots on Sunday night in “a great stadium for me.” He mentioned the “Patriots-type weather” and the supportive crowd — for the home team, not for the visiting quarterback.

He even recognized how annoying “the foghorn” that rallies the New England defense can be.

Oh yeah, he also cherished a 19-17 victory that was anything but vintage Brady, but was good enough.

“These are people I shared my life with and I’m grateful for everything they contributed to my life,” Brady said. “I feel like I always will be a part of the community.”

“It was just emotional moments thinking about coming up here and playing. It’s a tough football environment. The crowd was into it.”

The seven-time Super Bowl champion, six with the Patriots, struggled in the rainy conditions much of the evening. He was booed — often.

Being Brady, he also won.

Brady took Tampa Bay on a 45-yard drive aided by a 31-yard pass interference penalty, and Ryan Succop made a 48-yard field goal for a 19-17 victory. While most of the game was not a classic for the 44-year-old quarterback, the march to victory seemed fitting in a place Brady has won 135 of 158 games.

“That was pretty cool,” Brady said. “It’s been my home for 20 years. I have the best memories. My kids were born here. It’s just a great town, a great city, a great area. I love it up here. I have so many people I have relationships with, but this was about this team coming up here to win. This wasn’t about one player. This was about our entire team going on the road beating a good team.”

Brady threw for 269 yards, but the Bucs (3-1) scored only one touchdown, on an 8-yard run by Ronald Jones. With the game in the balance, he watched from an unfamiliar sideline as Nick Folk had a 56-yard field goal hit the left upright in the final minute for

New England.

Brady then hugged dozens of his former teammates and coaches at midfield — a quick one with Bill Belichick — as the rain intensified and Gillette Stadium emptied in silence.

“My football journey took me somewhere else,” Brady noted, the ball with which he set the NFL career passing yardage record at his side at a crowded news conference.

Even when the Tampa Bay quarterback got that record on a 28-yard completion to Mike Evans in the first quarter, there was a mixture of cheers and applause along with the jeers. Brady, 44, reached 80,359 yards through the air, passing Drew Brees’ mark, and then called a timeout before the next play — though no announcement had been made about setting the mark. That came during the timeout.

Despite soaring expectations and hype, this was no classic. Indeed, when Brady was sacked by Matt Judon in the second quarter, the crowd went wild.

Brady now has beaten all 32 NFL teams, equaling an achievement by Brett Favre, Peyton Manning and Brees.

Murray keeps Cardinals unbeaten with rout of Rams

Associated Press

INGLEWOOD, Calif. — In every quarter of a dominant victory on the Rams’ home turf, Kyler Murray and the Arizona Cardinals confirmed they’re no longer the annual afterthought in the NFC West.

The unbeaten Cards have shoved their way to the front of this ultracompetitive division with an offense that could run up the score on anybody, combined with a defense that finally managed to outsmart Sean McVay.

Murray passed for 268 yards and two touchdowns and ran for 39 more yards, and the team extended its longest perfect start since 2012 with a 37-20 win over Los Angeles on Sunday.

A.J. Green caught a 41-yard TD pass, Chase Edmonds ran for 120 yards and James Conner rushed for two short scores for Arizona (4-0), which ended the Rams’ streak of eight consecu-

tive victories in the rivalry during McVay’s career.

The Cards haven’t won the division or had a winning record since 2015, but they’re off to a roaring start to 2021 highlighted by this blowout of previously unbeaten Los Angeles.

“I feel like as a team, we’re building towards something,” said cornerback Byron Murphy Jr., who made an interception in the first half. “We hadn’t beaten the Rams in how many years? I don’t know the exact number. Five years? But this is something definitely growing.”

Kliff Kingsbury’s team won with style, lighting up Los Angeles defense for 465 total yards and scoring touchdowns after two early takeaways to affirm their status as a contender despite playing three of their first four games on the road.

“Not really too worried about what other people think,” Murray said. “I think the guys in the

locker room understand what we’re doing, what we’re capable of and where we can take it.”

Maxx Williams caught a TD pass from Murray, who went 24-for-32 and repeatedly frustrated the Rams’ defense while Arizona scored on seven of eight possessions after a game-opening punt. The Cards’ defense made several big plays, and they sealed the team’s first victory over Los Angeles since Jan. 1, 2017, by stopping Matthew Stafford and the LA offense on downs at the 1 with 12:05 to play.

The NFL’s only remaining unbeaten teams are Arizona and Las Vegas, which faced the Chargers at SoFi Stadium on Monday night. The Cardinals celebrated their win on the same field, but were mostly buttoned up in their postgame comments.

“Not a statement,” Kingsbury said. “We wanted to get a week better. Division games are im-

portant. We’ve got to continue to play physical football and clean some stuff up.”

Stafford went 26-for-41 for 280 yards and two touchdowns in his first ineffective game for the Rams (3-1), who failed to start 4-0 for the first time since 2018. One week after a statement victory over defending Super Bowl champion Tampa Bay on the same field, Los Angeles produced an ugly performance on both sides of the ball.

“This is a prove-it (sport), and you’ve got to go out there and do it every time,” Stafford said. “I wasn’t good enough at doing that today. I think as a team, we probably weren’t good enough as far as going out in every single play and executing it.”

Van Jefferson caught an early TD pass and Robert Woods made a TD grab with 1:14 to play, but Stafford was frequently off in his connections with his receivers.