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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Defense secretary tackles servicemembers' questions in first 'Worldwide Troops Talk'

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Ash Carter took questions from the ranks Tuesday on issues from budget gridlock to women in combat arms during a first-ever "Worldwide Troop Talk" with servicemembers around the world.

Troops used social media, email, video conference and phone calls from the U.S., Germany, South Korea, Japan, Kuwait, Greenland and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to submit questions to Carter, who spoke from Fort Meade, Md.

Concerning his "Force of the Future" initiative, Carter said developing strategies to shape the military for the next several decades is among his chief priorities.

"I've got a whole lot of ideas that we're going to sift through," he said, without providing specifics. "You are the finest — all the people watching all around the world — you are the finest fighting force the world has ever known, and that's a gift that I inherited from my predecessors and the generations before me. That's something I want to make sure my successor and my successor's successor and so forth all have."

Carter blamed partisan "gridlock in Washington" for continued budget cuts at the Defense Department and other federal agencies, adding that the nation couldn't afford to fix the country's more than \$17 trillion deficit on the backs of such key institutions.

"It doesn't work. We need to rise above this and come together behind an overall approach to deficit reduction. ... You're just continuing to undermine important public functions, of

which national security is the most sacred," Carter said. "I have nothing good to say about it. There's no reason for it but gridlock in Washington."

The Pentagon, Carter said, has taken a "balanced approach" in responding to shrinking budgets. That includes President Barack Obama's announcement last week that the military pay increase would be capped at 1.3 percent for 2016.

"We can't pay you enough for what we ask you to do. ... That said, we have a limited budget," the defense secretary said. "In addition to paying you more, I want to make sure you're fully trained, and that costs money, too. I want to make sure that you have the best equipment, and that takes money, too, and I want to make sure that there are enough of you to carry us to victory."

'Looking to do more'

Protecting U.S. forces both stateside and abroad is "No. 1 for all of us," Carter said.

"We're going to tighten security, and we need to," he said. "We're looking at doing more."

That could include arming more servicemembers on installations and potentially at off-post sites like recruiting centers, a topic that's been heavily debated in the wake of the July 17 attack in Chattanooga, Tenn., that killed four servicemembers.

Carter said he's currently reviewing service recommendations submitted to him last month on ways the military can better protect itself against people he called "lone wolves and sort-of losers who have been online too much." The defense secretary did not provide specifics about those potential changes.

Early next year Carter will

announce which, if any, currently male-only combat arms jobs will be opened to women.

"What matters most is who is qualified and can meet the rigorous standards of service. ... I want to have the widest possible pool of people from which we can draw the force of the future, and that includes half of our population, which is women," Carter said.

The services have until the end of the year to recommend whether any combat arms jobs — primarily in the Army and Marine Corps — should remain closed to women.

The defense secretary said he has instructed service leaders to "really think hard about that and tell me whether any restrictions should be kept in the future, and if any [should], exactly why."

Carter said he has no doubt that the American military can defeat the Islamic State group. But he said simply defeating the militant group would not guarantee long-term stability in the Middle East.

"That's not the trick," he said. "The trick is to defeat [the Islamic State group] in a lasting way, and that means that after they are defeated, they need to stay defeated, which means there need to be local forces representing the local people who keep the kind of extremists that [the Islamic State group] represents from taking over again."

That's the reason the U.S.-led coalition has chosen to enable "friendly" fighting groups including the Iraqi Security Forces, moderate Syrian rebels and Kurdish fighters to battle the Islamic State group on the ground with the support of coalition air power.

'We will win'

"Our strategic approach ... is to enable capable ground forces that are local and can keep the peace after we've helped them win the peace," he said. "... Otherwise, it won't stick, and we'll be back there in five years or back there in 10 years, 15 years."

Carter said the Pentagon is committed to closing the Guantanamo Bay detention camp, where the U.S. is currently holding 116 people, "if it can be done safely."

The main issue, Carter said, is finding a new location for half of the current detainees who "are not safe to be released."

Guantanamo Bay "ends up being part of jihadi recruiting, and I'd just assume not leave that to future presidents," he said. "It's tricky to do that because some of the people there at Guantanamo Bay have to be detained indefinitely. ... We are looking at places in the United States, prisons and other places, where these people could be moved."

About half the population at Guantanamo could be released to other countries under conditions that "mitigate that they'll never return to the battlefield."

Military leaders have recently identified Fort Leavenworth, Kan., and the U.S. Naval Consolidated Brig in Charleston, S.C., as potential sites that could house the remaining detainees. Congress would have to approve moving any detainees from the facility in southeast Cuba.

"We'll try to come up with a plan and work with Congress and see if we can do that or not," he said. "It would be a nice thing to do, and an important thing to do if we can do it. But we've got to be realistic about the people who are in Guantanamo Bay. They're there for a reason."

US-led strikes against insurgents spike

By TARA COPP

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The U.S.-led coalition has ramped up its air campaign against the Islamic State group, with the number of munitions dropped on targets in Iraq and Syria increasing by 60 percent in July over the previous month, the Pentagon said Tuesday.

The Department of Defense reported that in July, the most recent data available, the coalition dropped 2,829 munitions on Islamic State targets compared with 1,686 munitions in June.

“We’re certainly going to pound [the Islamic State],” Secretary of Defense Ash Carter said Tuesday at a global forum

with troops.

The increase came as the U.S. and the coalition passed its one-year anniversary of Operation Inherent Resolve. In August 2014, the month the operation was launched, the coalition dropped about 200 bombs.

The Pentagon has been criticized by members of Congress, particularly by Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John McCain, R-Ariz., for not escalating its bombing campaign even as the Islamic State seized the western Iraqi city of Ramadi and expanded its control in other parts of Iraq’s Anbar province and Syria.

The Air Force chief of staff, Gen. Mark Welsh, told reporters last week that not all missions end with bombs dropped.

“Remember we are not at war with Iraq, so we do not want to drop bombs indiscriminately,” Welsh said.

Kenneth Katzman, a Middle East expert at the Congressional Research Service, said the jump in munitions dropped likely reflects the impact of the additional U.S. forces sent back to Iraq earlier this year. In June, President Barack Obama ordered 450 additional forces to Taqqadum air base, a facility that’s been used as a training post to reach out to Iraq’s Sunni population.

“We have sent more people in to the Ramadi area, Anbar province — they may be getting better information on where the targets are,” Katzman said.

The actual bombs dropped

is a different statistic than the number of airstrikes conducted, and may be a better way to measure the pace of the air campaign’s intensity.

On Monday, the Pentagon clarified how it defines an “airstrike.”

Spokesman Navy Capt. Jeff Davis said that in Pentagon parlance, an airstrike could involve a single weapon used against a lone [Islamic State] vehicle or a “single strike in which multiple weapons are used” against multiple buildings in a single targeted complex.

That means reports on the number of airstrikes alone offer little clarity about the extent of an attack.

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Poll: Iowa voters angry

Bloomberg News

If Iowa voters are any indication, 2016 may be shaping up as the year that angry voters coalesce on their gripes more than any single candidate.

Responses from Republicans and Democrats who described themselves as likely to attend next year’s caucuses in the latest Bloomberg Politics/Des Moines Register Iowa Poll reveal discontentment over the state of American politics. When asked to assess their feeling about “politicians in general,” just 7 percent of Republicans and 16 percent of Democrats said they were either “happy” or “satisfied”; 91 percent of Republicans and 82 percent of Democrats said they were either “unsatisfied” or “mad as hell” about politicians.

The figures help explain the strong poll numbers for Donald Trump, Ben Carson and Bernie Sanders, presidential hopefuls who have pitched themselves as political outsiders or alternatives to the mainstream.

Drones, airmen in Latvia to reassure

By JENNIFER H. SVAN

Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — Two MQ-1 Predators and about 70 U.S. airmen have arrived at Lielvarde Air Base, Latvia, in the latest of a series of temporary aircraft and personnel deployments aimed at promoting security in eastern Europe and the Baltics.

The airmen and the drones are from the 147th Reconnaissance

Wing of the Texas Air National Guard based at Ellington Field in Houston. They began arriving in Latvia on Aug. 24, U.S. Air Forces in Europe-Air Forces Africa officials said in a statement late Monday.

In addition, two A-10s arrived at Lielvarde on Aug. 26, marking the first time U.S. fighter aircraft have landed at the former Soviet base, Air Force officials said. The pilots are with the 303rd Fighter Squadron out

of Whiteman Air Force Base, Mo. The purpose was to show the buildup of the base, Lt. Col. Tim Brock, bilateral affairs officer for the U.S. Embassy in Riga, said in a statement.

The drone deployment is funded by the European Reassurance Initiative, a strategy backed by Congress to bolster military activities, particularly in eastern Europe, where allies have been rattled by Russia’s aggression in Ukraine.

From tan to green, tanks in Europe change spots

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

MANNHEIM, Germany — Europe-based tanks and other armored vehicles will soon be repainted to woodland green in a strategic shift away from the desert tan that has marked the Army’s fighting vehicles for more than a decade.

The vehicles had been painted desert tan for operations in the Middle East. The return to the forest colors coincides with security concerns among east-

ern NATO allies since Russia’s intervention in Ukraine last year.

During a stop at the Army’s Coleman Barracks in Mannheim on Tuesday, U.S. Army Europe commander Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges said the conversion is more than symbolic.

“It is about deterrence and reassurance, and paint — all of a sudden that matters,” Hodges said during a tour of Coleman Barracks, where nearly 200 Bradley Fighting Vehicles, tanks and other heavy vehicles

are stored for use by troops rotating through eastern Europe and the Baltics.

Hodges, along with a team from USAREUR and several other commands, examined the facilities at Coleman as part of a “Terrain Walk” through key logistical hubs in Germany.

Coleman, which the Army left in 2011, was set for turnover to the Germans last year. But after Russia’s annexation of Ukraine’s Crimea Peninsula, the Army decided to keep the site.

Buckeyes coach changes mantra

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Victory meal is a tradition for Urban Meyer's teams and pretty much a weekly occurrence during football season since the coach got to Ohio State in 2012 — just as it was when he was at Florida.

There was a time back in 2009, as Tim Tebow and the Gators tried to win a second straight national title, when Meyer was no longer savoring success.

"I just remember that sometimes I'd go in there real fast, rush upstairs and start watching film and all that," Meyer said of a season when the fear of losing overtook the joy of winning.

This season the defending champion Buckeyes will try to do what those Gators fell just short of accomplishing.

Meyer doesn't want to hear any talk of repeating or defending. Each team stands on its own. He does acknowledge that the similarities between the 2009 season and the one approaching for Ohio State could make it his most challenging yet with the Buckeyes. Pursuing perfection took such a physical and mental toll on Meyer back then he was ready to quit coaching.

The goal this season: To be as vigilant as ever in stamping out complacency while still allowing the Buckeyes — and himself — to appreciate accomplishments.

"You have to make sure everyone enjoys the journey," he said.

How?

"To be determined."

The journey for Ohio State will begin at the top, just as it did for Florida in '09.

The Buckeyes were No. 1 in the The Associated Press preseason Top 25. Since the AP poll started naming a national champion in 1936, 11 teams have won two titles in a row. The last was Alabama in 2012. Few teams in recent memory have been better positioned to repeat than Ohio State.

Florida in '09 was one of those teams. Like the Buckeyes, the Gators had a star-studded and experienced roster: Tebow, Percy Harvin, Brandon Spikes, Joe Haden,

to name a few players.

Ohio State's power-packed lineup includes Ezekiel Elliott, Joey Bosa, Vonn Bell and not one but two of the best quarterbacks in the country — J.T. Barrett and Cardale Jones.

Another similarity: Meyer will have a new offensive coordinator this season. The 2009 season was Meyer's first at Florida without Dan Mullen, who left to become Mississippi State's coach after the Gators beat Oklahoma in the BCS championship game. After Ohio State beat Oregon to win the first College Football Playoff, Tom Herman left to take over at Houston.

Still, the expectations could not be higher in Columbus, and when that happens it can feel like winning isn't enough. That was the case for the '09 Gators.

Former Florida assistant Dan McCarney, now the coach at North Texas, recalled an October game at LSU in which the Gators smothered the then-fourth-ranked Tigers 13-3.

"We're in the locker room and I thought, did we win this thing or did we lose?" McCarney said. "It just didn't feel we were enjoying it the way we should have with a victory like that."

Florida's offense was one of the best in country that season, but without Mullen when it sputtered even a little, Meyer took added responsibility to try to fix it.

"It just seemed like it was harder and harder as the season went on," McCarney said.

Meyer would not disagree. Florida pounded rival Georgia 41-17 at the end of October, but he knew something wasn't right.

"My mind was kind of shot. I remember walking into victory meal and sitting down real fast and finally saying, 'I'm going to enjoy this,'" Meyer said this past spring. "I look around, 'Where's everybody at?'"

Meyer said strength and conditioning coach Mickey Marotti told him a lot of players had been skipping the Sunday celebration.

"It's just taking it for granted," Meyer

said. "Where are they getting that cue from?"

Chest pains sent Meyer to the hospital after Florida lost the SEC championship game to Alabama, ending hopes of another national title. He lost 30 pounds that season. Not long after the hospital scare, he stepped down as Gators coach only to change his mind and return for one forgettable year — and then quit again.

After a year away, and working for ESPN, he returned to his home state to coach the Buckeyes, vowing to strike a better balance between football and family and to take better care of his health. That now-famous, hand-written contract his daughters made him sign still hangs on his office wall. His friends say he's better equipped to handle what lies ahead.

McCarney saw a difference in January when he visited practice a few days before the Oregon game.

"He had this big grin on his face," McCarney said. "Just the confidence that he had and the comfort level and peace of mind that he had to me ... Urban rarely when I was around him felt that way, looked that way a couple days before a huge game like that."

Marotti, who has been Meyer's right-hand man since 2005, said he only needs to look at his cellphone to know his boss has changed.

"I don't get the texts and the phone calls like I used to," Marotti said. "I think he's done a way better job of getting away when he has to get away."

Meyer lives in Muirfield. A Jack Nicklaus golf course is his backyard. He interacts with neighbors in a way Marotti said he never saw him do in Gainesville, Fla.

Don't think for a second, though, Meyer is easing up — especially during two-a-days.

"It's a friggin' grind right now, man, and whether it's repeating or not, it's the same as our first year here," Meyer said at media day. "At this point in time, there's not much balance. These next few weeks, man, there's not a whole lot of ... I'm not playing Muirfield."

Seminoles going with Golson as No. 1 QB

Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — After playing coy for the past couple weeks, Florida State coach Jimbo Fisher ended the suspense on Monday of who will be his starting quarterback by announcing Everett Golson had earned the job.

Golson, a graduate transfer from Notre Dame, beat out junior Sean Maguire.

"He came in, related to our players well and showed what kind of player he was," Fisher said of Golson. "He has a good grasp of things. Making reads, plays and getting on the edge with his legs when he has to."

Golson and Maguire "have both had their moments and shined," Fisher said earlier Monday during his weekly press conference. "They have really improved in a lot of the things they don't do as well. I really feel comfortable with either guy playing."

Golson started 23 games for the Fighting Irish in 2012 and '14. He has been on campus less than three months and was listed third on the preseason depth chart but his comfort level with the offense has garnered praise from Fisher the past couple weeks.

A big reason why Fisher went with Golson is likely experience.

Florida State has only four returning starters on offense and Fisher acknowledged that where his team is right now Golson is the better option.

Golson's ability to make plays with his legs could be important early in the season, especially with four new starters on the offensive line. Besides throwing for 5,850 yards and 41 touchdowns at Notre Dame, he ran for 14 touchdowns and averaged 23.2 rushing yards per game.

In assessing his offense going into the opener, Fisher considers it to be a big, strong athletic group with versatility among the skill positions.

The first test for the 10th-ranked Seminoles will be in what should be tune-up Saturday against Texas State in their season opener.

Maguire has played in 13 games the past two seasons, including a start against Clemson last year where he led the Seminoles to a 23-17 overtime win.

He appeared to be the heir apparent to Jameis Winston going into spring drills, but Maguire struggled in the spring game, which opened the door to a Golson transfer. Even with the struggles, Fisher has been pleased with Maguire's preseason camp.

"I think he's really ramped it up this year because he felt like he was the guy," Fisher said of Maguire. "I've been very pleased with his attitude and everything."

Both Golson and Maguire are expected to see plenty of playing time early. Florida State has a 12-game winning streak in September games with an average margin of victory of 31.8 points.

TCU, Baylor are teams to beat in Big 12

Associated Press

TCU coach Gary Patterson and Baylor's Art Briles know a way for their teams and the Big 12 Conference to avoid being left out of the College Football Playoff again — go 12-0.

"Our key is to control our own destiny, and the best way to do that is to try to win them all," Patterson said. "That's what we're going to try to get done. Then we'll see how everything else falls."

The Horned Frogs might pull that off with record-setting senior quarterback Trevone Boykin, an early Heisman Trophy front-runner. The Big 12's top offensive player is among 10 returning starters after the Frogs averaged 47 points and 533 total yards in their new spread-out offense last year.

Baylor, the only team to beat TCU last season, returns 1,000-yard receivers

Corey Coleman and KD Cannon, along with a 410-pound tight end who caught a TD in the Cotton Bowl. But two-year starting quarterback Bryce Petty is now with the New York Jets.

"If we'd have gone 12-0, there's no doubt," Briles said about last season's playoff. "If we line up and we win 12 games this year, we're going to be in the final four. I think you can put that in ink."

A week after overcoming a 21-point deficit in the final 11 minutes for that wild 61-58 home win over TCU, the Bears lost at West Virginia.

Big 12 co-champs Baylor and TCU were the first teams in the final playoff standings behind Alabama, Oregon, Florida State and Ohio State — all who won conference championship games.

Just one team could go undefeated in the Big 12, the only of the five power conferences with a round-robin schedule and

no championship game.

TCU and Baylor play the Friday after Thanksgiving, not the second Saturday in October like last season. That will be the Frogs' regular-season finale, while the Bears will still have a home game left against Texas.

"Some of you, I know, have Nov. 27 circled ... but I can assure you there will be a lot of great games between now and then," said Bob Bowlsby, the league's commissioner. "We don't want to just be in the playoff. I think our league has always been about aspiring to win national championships."

Texas won the league's last national title 10 seasons ago, and Oklahoma was the champion in 2000.

Oklahoma under coach Bob Stoops had never gone two years in a row without winning a conference title until last season.



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Serena advances at US Open

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Even before Serena Williams set foot in Arthur Ashe Stadium on Monday night, her path through the U.S. Open to complete a true Grand Slam became a lot easier thanks to losses by other top women.

And when it was the No. 1-seeded American's turn to play her first-round match, she was not tested one bit by a woman who appeared overwhelmed by the opponent, the occasion and, to make matters worse, an injured left foot.

So Williams moved a step closer to tennis' first calendar-year Grand Slam since 1988 without much of a workout, reaching the second round when 86th-ranked Vitalia Diatchenko of Russia stopped playing while behind 6-0, 2-0. Williams was out there for only 27 minutes and took 32 of the 37 points that were played.

"It was definitely different and bizarre," Williams said. "But at the same time, I was still focused. I kept thinking: Just stay focused; don't lose it. You never know what can happen."

The 33-year-old American told the crowd she appreciates the support she is receiving "on this journey and this milestone that I'm trying to take one match at a time."

Diatchenko, who wore a walking boot to her news conference, said she hurt herself running sprints before the match and that she felt "sharp pain" chasing a backhand during a point. When she was drawn to face Williams, Diatchenko was happy to finally get a chance to meet a player she grew up admiring, but the experience turned out to be "terrible."

"So painful, every step," Diatchenko said.

Next up for Williams is Kiki Bertens, who is ranked 110th, only once made it as far as the fourth round at a major, and picked up just the second U.S. Open match victory of her career by eliminating Mirjana Lucic-Baroni 3-6, 6-4, 6-2 Monday. Bertens and Williams have never played each other.

As good as Williams has been, it doesn't hurt to face less-challenging opposition, and several who might have offered a test are gone. On her half of the draw, four top-10 seeds were gone by the end of Day 1: No. 3 Maria Sharapova pulled out Sunday with an injured right leg, and No. 7 Ana Ivanovic, No. 8 Karolina Pliskova and No. 10 Carla Suarez Navarro lost Monday.

The second day of the tournament started just like the first, with sixth-seeded Lucie Safarova the one getting upset this time. The French Open runner-up had a

tough first-round matchup against 37th-ranked Lesia Tsurenko and lost 6-4, 6-1 in just 65 minutes Tuesday.

Three other seeded women in Williams' side of the bracket departed on Monday. No. 29 Sloane Stephens, who beat Williams at the 2013 Australian Open and was a potential third-round opponent in New York, lost to CoCo Vandeweghe 6-4, 6-3. No. 30 Svetlana Kuznetsova, a two-time major champion, and No. 21 Jelena Jankovic, who lost to Williams in the 2008 U.S. Open final, were beaten, too.

"I'm not a person that usually looks at the draws," Williams said. "I just take it as it comes and as it goes."

If Williams defeats Bertens, she would face the winner of an all-U.S. matchup between Wimbledon quarterfinalist Vandeweghe and wild-card entry Bethanie Mattek-Sands.

"I don't look ahead. I just look at the next opponent," Vandeweghe said when asked about a possible showdown against Williams. "If you don't get by your next opponent, you have no chance of making a third round."

The only real surprise in men's action was 2014 runner-up Kei Nishikori's 6-4, 3-6, 4-6, 7-6 (6), 6-4 loss to Benoit Paire, who never before had beaten someone ranked in the top five.

Rio to do viral testing

LONDON — Olympic organizers promised Tuesday to introduce viral testing in the polluted waters in Rio de Janeiro where about 1,400 athletes will compete in next year's games.

The IOC and Brazilian organizers had repeatedly insisted that only bacterial testing was required despite an independent five-month analysis by The Associated Press showing dangerously high levels of viruses from human sewage at all Rio Olympic water venues.

Acknowledging that viral water testing was now necessary, local organizing committee head Carlos Arthur Nuzman told the AP that his team was still studying how best to carry out the analysis and what pathogens to search for.

"The viral tests, we will do and we will repeat this because the most important (thing) for us is the health of the athletes," Nuzman said in an interview in London. "We are working with our medical department and looking for this."

Nuzman said he did not know when organizers would be ready to start the testing.

Nuzman's comments came as a German sailor who fell ill after competing in a pre-Olympic test event in the filthy waters off Rio said he was recovering from his skin infections.

Erik Heil believes he was infected while competing in a regatta in Marina da Gloria, where he says untreated sewage is allowed to flow into the water.

Heil needed daily hospital treatment for multiple infections on his legs and hip. The Berlin hospital where he was treated said he had contracted MRSA, a type of bacteria resistant to many antibiotics.

Rio organizers now face a challenge of finding a lab with the equipment and trained professionals who can carry out viral testing of water. Fewer than five such labs exist in Brazil, including just one in Rio de Janeiro at the federal Health Ministry's Oswald Cruz Foundation research center.

FIFA cases get update

GENEVA — The American prosecutor who launched the bribery case that rocked FIFA is stepping on Sepp Blatter's home turf.

On Sept. 14 in Zurich, U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch will join her counterpart from Switzerland, Michael Lauber, for a news conference about their separate investigations of corruption in world soccer.

The joint conference will explain the "status of the two criminal proceedings," Swiss officials said in a statement Tuesday.

Jackson, Seattle meet

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — After being released by the Buffalo Bills, running Fred Jackson is looking for an opportunity to reunite with former teammate Marshawn Lynch in Seattle.

A person familiar with the situation told The Associated Press on Tuesday that Jackson was traveling to Seattle to meet with the Seahawks in a bid to sign with the team. The person spoke on the condition of anonymity Tuesday because the visit is private and the two sides have not reached a formal deal.

Jackson, an eight-year veteran, became a free agent on Monday, when the Bills cut the respected team leader and fan favorite.

In other NFL news:

■ The Browns placed quarterback Connor Shaw on injured reserve after ligament surgery on his right thumb.

■ The agent for New Orleans Saints veteran Anthony Spencer says the former Pro Bowl linebacker will be placed on injured reserve, ending his season.

From The Associated Press

Dodgers win opener of key series

The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A.J. Ellis drew a leadoff walk in the bottom of the 14th inning before the Los Angeles Dodgers loaded the bases with no outs. With slugger Adrian Gonzalez at the plate, the slow-footed Ellis knew he would have to hustle to score.

Gonzalez singled to deep left field, driving in Ellis for a 5-4 victory over the San Francisco Giants early Tuesday in the opener of a crucial series between the NL West's top two teams.

"There was a high level of panic," Ellis said. "As soon as I saw [left fielder Nori] Aoki's number turn around and not facing me anymore I felt comfortable."

Ellis entered the game as a pinch-hitter in the ninth and caught the final five innings.

"When you set the table for Gonzalez, you know he's going to find a way to come through," he said. "That was a great team win. So many guys contributed."

The first-place Dodgers' lead increased to 4½ games over their second-place rivals after the longest game by innings between the teams since May 2, 1995.

"It stinks," Giants starter Jake Peavy said. "We've got to win 'em all against the Dodgers. We know that."

San Francisco's Mike Broadway (0-1) started his first inning of relief by walking Ellis and then gave up consecutive singles to Jimmy Rollins and Chase Utley to load the bases. Giants reliever Yusmeiro Petit came on and Gonzalez hit his first pitch to deep left field, finishing off the 5-hour, 29-minute game that started in August and ended in September.

"We had our chances, they did too," Giants manager Bruce Bochy said, "but the pitchers on both sides just found a way to get out of it all night."

Chris Hatcher (2-5) pitched three innings for the win. The Dodgers used seven pitchers, with their much-maligned bullpen coming through in the clutch.

Mets 3, Phillies 1: Bartolo Colon breezed through eight snappy innings

and host New York got homers from Curtis Granderson and Michael Conforto, extending its dominant run against Philadelphia.

After throwing seven shutout innings last Wednesday at Philadelphia during New York's four-game sweep, the 42-year-old Colon (12-11) was one better this time. He struck out nine, walked one and yielded four harmless singles, pushing his scoreless streak to 16 innings.

Cardinals 8, Nationals 5: Jason Heyward hit a tie-breaking, two-run double in the seventh inning to key a five-run rally for host St. Louis.

The Cardinals sent 10 batters to the plate in the seventh and erased a 5-3 deficit with five two-out runs.

St. Louis won for the eighth time in nine games and moved five games ahead of idle Pittsburgh in the NL Central.

Ryan Zimmerman hit a three-run homer and drove in four runs for the Nationals, who fell 6½ games behind New York in the NL East.

Athletics 11, Angels 5: Mark Canha hit a three-run homer and Jake Smolinski's three-run double highlighted a decisive third inning for Oakland on another quirky night at the Coliseum when part of the outfield wall fell down and delayed the game.

Danny Valencia added a two-run double in the third and another RBI double in the fifth to back Felix Doubront (2-1) in his first win for Oakland.

A piece of the outfield wall came loose after Los Angeles left fielder Shane Victorino crashed into it trying to chase down Valencia's double in the fifth, causing a 10-minute delay as players briefly returned to their dugouts.

Red Sox 4, Yankees 3: David Ortiz hit his 495th home run and Jackie Bradley Jr. had three hits and threw out a runner at the plate to lift host Boston.

Mookie Betts hit a two-run homer for the Red Sox, who earned their ninth win in 13 games.

The Yankees remained 1½ games behind AL East-leading Toronto, which lost

4-2 to Cleveland on Monday.

Astros 8, Mariners 3: Dallas Keuchel allowed one run and struck out eight in seven innings to become the American League's first 16-game winner and lead host Houston over Seattle.

Rookie Carlos Correa, who returned after missing four games with a hamstring injury, hit a two-run homer and Jed Lowrie and Hank Conger added solo shots to help the AL West-leading Astros to the victory.

Rays 6, Orioles 3: Chris Archer pitched six shutout innings, and visiting Tampa Bay hit three home runs in a victory over fading Baltimore.

The loss was the 11th in 12 games for the Orioles.

Indians 4, Blue Jays 2: At Toronto, Jerry Sands singled home the go-ahead run in the seventh inning, Danny Salazar struck out 10 and Cleveland won its sixth straight game.

Marlins 4, Braves 0: Martin Prado and Justin Bour each had an RBI double in the eighth inning and visiting Miami extended Shelby Miller's winless streak to 19 starts with a victory over Atlanta.

Miller, an All-Star with a sparkling 2.56 ERA, began the night with the worst support in the majors, and the Braves, losers in six straight and 13 of 14, stayed true to form.

Padres 7, Rangers 0: Tyson Ross allowed just three hits in seven innings and hit an RBI single, and host San Diego handed Texas just its third loss in 10 games.

The Rangers dropped four games behind first-place Houston in the AL West and remained in the second AL wild-card spot.

Reds 13, Cubs 6: Eugenio Suarez and Adam Duvall hit two-run homers in a four-run sixth inning and visiting Cincinnati took advantage of two late Chicago errors.

Rockies 5, Diamondbacks 4: Ben Paulsen hit a two-out, two-run single and Colorado rallied for four runs in the bottom of the ninth to beat Arizona.