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Marines test women in combat roles

The Washington Post

Over the past nine months, the Marine Corps tested a gender-integrated task force in both Twentynine Palms, Calif., and Camp Lejeune, N.C., in an attempt to gauge what the Marine Corps might look like with women in combat roles.

According to a recent report in the Marine Corps Times, only a small number of women were left by the experiment's conclusion — two of the roughly two dozen who started — in part because of the physical and mental stress that comes with combat roles. Both the men and women in the task force also reported a breakdown in unit cohesion, with some voicing a perceived unequal treatment from their peers.

The experiment comes as all branches of the military face a Jan. 1, 2016, deadline to open all combat positions to women — from basic infantry battalions to elite special operations units such as Navy SEALs.

The Ground Combat Element Integrated Task Force served as a snapshot of sorts of what the Marine Corps might look like if women were a staple in combat positions.

Each closed position was represented: infantry, artillery and mechanized units, such as tank platoons and light armored reconnaissance detachments, all operated in tandem with one another. The women were spread among them in ratios that would be expected in an integrated Marine Corps, with roughly 90 percent of the branch made up of men.

Most of the feedback, both negative and positive, has thus far been anecdotal.

The Marine Corps Times report cites a number of instances where women had a difficult time completing physical tasks, such as moving 200-pound dummies off the battlefield or from the turret of a “damaged” vehicle. Peer assessments were also mixed.

Lance Cpl. Chris Augello, a reservist who prior to the experiment was pro-integration, submitted a 13-page essay — which he shared with the Marine Corps Times — on why he had changed his mind. “The female variable in this social experiment has wrought a fundamental change in the way male [noncommissioned officers] think, act and lead,” he wrote, referring to the fe-

male presence and its effect on how Marine Corps small-unit leaders do their job.

Augello, according to the report, also noted that relationships between the female and male Marines in his platoon sometimes turned romantic and in turn became a distraction.

Another issue was training. Female Marines received different training from their male infantry counterparts, and so there was a gap in their preparedness, according to the Marine Corps Times report.

In the end, though, male members of the task force pointed out a number of women who impressed them. And the two women who stayed until the experiment's conclusion told the Marine Corps Times they had found their true calling as infantrywomen.

“Every time a female would drop, it motivated the crap out of me to stay there,” Lance Cpl. Callahan Brown, one of the two final women to remain in the task force, told the Marine Corps Times. “Only 7 percent [of Marines are female] and so few even wanted to be in the infantry, and that's all I want, is to be with grunts.”

Taliban leadership rift may drive fighters to Islamic State

BY JOSH SMITH
Stars and Stripes

NANGARHAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan — After initially dismissing the Islamic State threat in Afghanistan, Western military officials and private **ANALYSIS** analysts are increasingly concerned that a leadership struggle within the Taliban as well as dissent over peace talks will drive more fighters into ranks of the foreign-led extremist group.

The true scale of the Islamic State threat in Afghanistan is hotly debated. But largely because the West was caught by surprise when the Islamic State seized wide swaths of Syria and Iraq last year, the group's limited efforts in Afghanistan have already sparked worries about its possible spread into

Afghanistan and Central Asia.

The lawless border regions between Afghanistan and Pakistan have long been a haven for insurgents, and as tensions within the Taliban have increased, the Islamic State group — also known as ISIL, ISIS and Daesh — is just one of an “alphabet soup” of militant groups that have sought to take advantage of fracturing within the Taliban to establish footholds, said Graeme Smith, a Kabul-based senior researcher for the International Crisis Group.

Smith compared the Islamic State in Afghanistan to a skin blemish. “In some ways it's like worrying about a mole: It's a tiny speck, but could it give you cancer? You don't know,” he said. “Right now Daesh is a tiny phenomenon, but there may be a broader constituency of insurgents that may disagree with

any political compromise, and we just don't know how deep those feelings run.”

Insurgent-on-insurgent violence has more than tripled in the past two years, according to several confidential databases maintained by Western intelligence organizations, with such clashes occurring in more than half of Afghanistan's 34 provinces.

Just as the Taliban rose from the ashes of a fractured Afghanistan, analysts fear that new groups could emerge to add to the violence in the region and make striking political deals to end the fighting impossible for the government and its Western backers.

Recruiters acting in the name of the Islamic State made little progress after they first appeared in the region last year, NATO officials said. But in

2015, a group of militants who had mostly split from Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, or TTP, was recognized and money reportedly started to arrive from foreign sources.

Islamic State forces picked fights with local Taliban, and are reported to exert majority control in at least three districts in Nangarhar.

While many of the current fighters linked to the Islamic State appear to have connections to the Taliban, a truly large-scale shift will require more than flying a black flag, as the two groups have differences in ideology and vision for the country, analysts caution.

“Daesh does not care much about political power in Afghanistan, but rather they want to use Afghanistan as a strategic route to the whole region,” Haqyar said.

Continued presence in Afghanistan urged

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The chairman of the House Armed Services Committee said Tuesday the United States should retain at least the current number of troops in Afghanistan indefinitely to counter a terrorism threat that is unlikely to die out even with the defeat of the Taliban or Islamic State.

Rep. Mac Thornberry, R-Texas, said the country will remain a magnet for terrorist groups due to its history, lawless areas and opium trade, and he called for a freeze on any

further military withdrawals under an Obama administration plan to whittle the 9,800 troops there to an embassy security force after 2016.

He cited U.S. bases established in Europe after World War II and bases built in South Korea following the war there in the 1950s as precedents for a lasting military presence.

The Republican chairman had just returned from a trip to Afghanistan to meet with President Ashraf Ghani and top U.S. commander Gen. John Campbell, who is expected to make recommendations to the White House in the coming weeks on

troop levels amid growing reports of Islamic State activity and political pressure to slow any withdrawal.

“Whatever they call themselves, I believe Afghanistan will be a central point for terrorists well into the future ... we’ve got to have a presence there to keep up with it and for homeland planning to be able to do something about it,” Thornberry said. “To follow the Iraq model of just having a few people stationed at the embassy, I think, would be a colossal mistake.”

Thornberry and other Republican lawmakers have ham-

pered Obama for his 2011 withdrawal from Iraq, claiming it cleared the way for the Islamic State group to sweep in and seize large swaths of territory. The U.S. is now locked in a year-old air and proxy war with the Islamic State fighters in Iraq and across the border in Syria.

A further reduction of troops in Afghanistan could leave the U.S. partially blind to extremist activities there and limit its ability to conduct counterterrorism operations, Thornberry said.

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VA whistleblower gets job back

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Disabled Army veteran and retired Sgt. Bradie Frink didn’t think it could happen to him.

But it did. He was fired from his job as a clerk at the Baltimore Regional Office of the Veterans Benefits Administration.

His crime? He contacted Congress requesting assistance in finding his lost Veterans Af-

fairs benefits claims folder. (He wanted to make changes to his service-connected disability payments — adding one of his children as a beneficiary.)

He spent 26 months without a job, straining financially to help raise his two young children.

The Office of Special Counsel, an independent federal agency that investigates whistleblower claims, found this week that he was wrongly fired. On Tuesday,

Frink was finally back at work, after being fired in July 2013.

His case is part of an entrenched problem inside the agency where VA whistleblowers say they are demoted, have their lives upended and their mental health and personal lives investigated.

Frink received back pay along with a settlement that helped get him out of the debt he amassed during his unemployment.

Thai police say suspect admits role in bombing

Associated Press

BANGKOK — Police said Wednesday a key suspect in last month’s deadly Bangkok blast has admitted he handed a backpack containing a bomb to a man in a yellow shirt who was later seen leaving a similar bag at a downtown shrine just before the blast occurred.

The account offered the first possible reconstruction of events leading to the Aug. 17 attack at Erawan Shrine, an unprecedented act of violence in the Thai capital that left 20 people dead and more than 120 injured. Authorities say they still don’t know the motive but are also reluctant to call the blast an act of terrorism, which would harm Thailand’s image as a tourist destination.

After an initial slow start, police have arrested two foreigners, raided two apartments on the outskirts of Bangkok where they confiscated bomb-making materials, and say they are looking for 10 other suspects.

Clinton apologizes for email practices

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Hillary Rodham Clinton apologized for her use of a private email account as secretary of state after declining since last week to express remorse for the arrangement that has shaken her presidential campaign.

Asked about setting up the private email account by ABC News, Clinton said Tuesday, “That was a mistake. I’m sorry about that. I take responsibility, and I’m trying to be as transparent as I possibly can.”

The front-runner for the Democratic presidential nomi-

nation declined to apologize for using a private email system when asked directly by NBC News on Friday, saying she was “sorry that this has been confusing to people.” In an interview with The Associated Press on Monday, she said an apology wasn’t necessary because what she did was “allowed” by the State Department.

The apology evolution is the latest chapter for an issue that has dogged Clinton’s presidential campaign for months. Despite a big fundraising advantage and a slew of endorsements from party lead-

ers, Clinton’s standing with voters has slipped. Multiple polls show a majority of Americans don’t find her honest and trustworthy.

After the shaky summer, Clinton’s advisers say she’ll more fully address the email saga as the campaign presses on. Top campaign officials have started emailing memos to anxious supporters and convening late-night conference calls with prominent Democrats.

Republican presidential candidates see the issue as a way to discredit Clinton for the general election.

Pats focus on Steelers amid scandal

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — There is always something when it comes to the New England Patriots.

With “Deflategate” out of the way for the time being, “Spygate” has resurfaced following a published report of new allegations regarding secret videotaping nearly eight years ago.

The ESPN report, which includes many interviews with anonymous sources, includes allegations that league owners were upset at the way the Patriots were punished for admitting videotaping other teams’ hand signals.

New England said in a statement that it had “never filmed or recorded another team’s practice or walkthrough.” It also criticized the reporting on “Spygate” over the years.

“It is disappointing that some choose to believe in myths, conjecture and rumors rather than giving credit for the team’s successes to Coach Belichick, his staff and the players for their hard work, attention to detail, methodical weekly preparation, diligence and overall performance,” the statement read.

The Super Bowl champions open the season Thursday night at home against the Steelers.

“Things are going to be written, things are going to be said, but it’s up to us as a team to ignore the noise and just focus on the Pittsburgh Steelers,” wide receiver Matthew Slater said Tuesday. “Simple as

that.”

Included in the ESPN report are details on the scope of the videotaping — saying New England coach Bill Belichick admitted taping signals at more than 40 games. One unnamed owner told ESPN the punishment NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell insisted on for the deflated footballs scandal was really a “makeup call.”

Among the penalties Goodell tried to impose was a four-game suspension of quarterback Tom Brady, which was tossed out by a judge, pending an appeal by the NFL.

“It’s not going to help you win the football game, so everything that’s said outside this building you can’t pay attention,” defensive end Rob Ninkovich said.

Added wide receiver Danny Amendola: “I’m just focused on the Steelers and getting ready to play the game. We had a good practice today. Everybody feels good, everybody’s running around. We’re excited to get it started.”

Getting even: The Patriots are expert at blocking out distractions, but they’re also pretty good at using external factors to motivate them, too. After they were penalized for illegally videotaping opponents in 2007, they ran off a perfect record in the regular season before losing in the Super Bowl to blow their chance at the NFL’s first 19-0 season.

The scandal known as “Deflategate” put the finger on Brady, who was already competitive. Now that U.S. District Judge Richard Berman has cleared Brady to

play, expect him to do so with an extra edge.

Gronk: When he’s been healthy, tight end Rob Gronkowski has been virtually unstoppable. He had 90 catches for 1,327 yards and 17 touchdowns in 2011, then lost time the next two seasons to major injuries.

Last year, Gronkowski had 82 catches and 12 TDs. Even with the injuries that have cost him almost an entire season, he has 54 touchdown catches are the most for a tight end over the past five seasons.

The Future: Even before the whole deflated footballs mess raised the possibility of Brady missing one-quarter of the season, the Patriots were grooming Garoppolo to replace him. Brady turned 38 during training camp, and though he has said he wants to play into his mid-40s the number of quarterbacks who have been able to do so at a high level is vanishingly small.

So the future could belong to the second-year, second-round draft pick from Eastern Illinois. Garoppolo played well filling in for Brady in garbage time during the regular season. This year in the exhibition season, he led the Patriots to victories in two of their first three games, completing 61 of 90 passes for 554 yards and two touchdowns. He was intercepted twice and was sacked seven times in the loss to Green Bay in the exhibition opener.

Super Bowl hero: The Patriots may

have found themselves a defensive backfield star in Malcolm Butler, who intercepted Russell Wilson at the goal line at the end of the Super Bowl to clinch New England’s 28-24 victory over the Seattle Seahawks.

But they’ve definitely lost one when they allowed Darrelle Revis to leave for the New York Jets as a free agent. The other cornerback, Brandon Browner, signed with the New Orleans Saints.

Super Bowl heroics aside, Butler seems like a cinch to move into the starting lineup. Logan Ryan or seventh-round draft pick Darryl Roberts could line up at the other corner.

Shuffling: The injury to James Develin in the third preseason game left the Patriots short at fullback. But Belichick wouldn’t commit to using a traditional fullback, saying he could use a tight end in the backfield and potentially use an offensive lineman to fill in at tight end.

The Patriots have Gronkowski as the No. 1 tight end, and Michael Hoomanawanui and Scott Chandler have also been useful. But more intriguing is the possibility that the Patriots would work some offensive linemen into the rotation.

Belichick shuffled his tight ends and offensive linemen in as eligible and ineligible receivers during the playoff victory over the Baltimore Ravens. The move — totally legal, by the way — helped New England reach the Super Bowl.

Serena beats sister to keep Slam bid alive

Associated Press

NEW YORK — For stretches of the 27th edition of Williams vs. Williams, Venus gave Serena all she could handle.

And when Serena took control down the stretch to emerge with a 6-2, 1-6, 6-3 victory in a well-played U.S. Open quarterfinal, allowing her to continue pursuing the first calendar-year Grand Slam in more than a quarter-century, a smiling Venus wrapped both arms around her little sister for a warm hug at the net and whispered, “So happy for you.”

“Obviously we are very, very tough competitors on the court,” Serena said later, “but once the match is over, the second it’s done, you know, we’re sisters, we’re roommates, and we’re all that.”

Serena called their unique sibling rivalry “the greatest story in tennis,” and who would argue? A couple of kids taught by their dad on cement courts in Compton, Calif., making it all the way to the top.

With two more match wins, the No. 1-ranked Serena would become the first player since Steffi Graf in 1988 to collect all four Grand Slam titles in a single season. Plus, if she can win what would be her fourth U.S. Open in a row, and seventh overall, she would equal Graf with 22 major championships, the most in the professional era and second-most ever behind Margaret Court’s 24.

“That would be huge, not just for me, but for my family, just for what it represents and how hard we have worked and where we come from. So it would be a moment for our family,” said the 23rd-seeded Venus, who is 15 months older. “But at the same time, if it doesn’t happen it’s not going to make or break you. We don’t have anything to prove. She has nothing to prove. She’s really the best ever.”

Serena is 16-11 in their all-in-the-family matches, including 9-5 in majors and 3-2 at the U.S. Open. And 14 years to the day after Venus beat Serena in the 2001 final at Flushing Meadows, they met again with so much at stake.

Well-known folks such as Donald Trump — who was booed when shown on video screens — Oprah Winfrey and Kim Kardashian dotted the teeming stands in Arthur Ashe Stadium, and the sellout crowd of 23,771 got its money’s worth.

“They both played their best,” said Serena’s coach, Patrick Mouratoglou. “If they were feeling uncomfortable with playing each other, they could not play at that level.”

The sisters combined for 57 winners (Serena had more, 35) and only 37 unforced errors (Venus had fewer, 15). How close was it? Serena won 76 points, Venus 75.

Both pounded serves fast, very fast, each topping 120 mph. Both returned

well, oh so well, each managing to put into play at least one serve at more than 115 mph by the other.

Venus often attempted to end baseline exchanges quickly. Serena showed tremendous touch by using drop shots, one paired with a backhand passing winner, another with a perfectly curled lob.

When a reporter implied he wasn’t sure whether Venus really wanted to beat Serena, the reply was drenched with incredulity.

“I tried,” Venus replied. “Were you there?”

On Thursday, Serena faces unseeded Roberta Vinci of Italy, who reached her first Grand Slam semifinal at age 32 by outlasting Kristina Mladenovic 6-3, 5-7, 6-4.

In the men’s quarterfinals, No. 1 Novak Djokovic defeated 18th-seeded Feliciano Lopez of Spain 6-1, 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (2) in a match that ended after 1 a.m. Wednesday. Djokovic’s semifinal opponent Friday will be defending champion Marin Cilic, who edged 19th-seeded Jo Wilfried-Tsonga 6-4, 6-4, 3-6, 6-7 (3), 6-4.

“It was frustrating at times,” the No. 1-ranked Djokovic said, “but this is the quarterfinals of a Grand Slam. This is what you expect.”

The 43rd-ranked Vinci is playing in the 44th major tournament of her singles career, the second-most appearances by a

woman before reaching her initial semifinal. Vinci is 0-4 against Serena and joked about wearing a helmet for protection from some of the 33-year-old American’s booming shots.

“She’s the favorite. Maybe she’ll feel the pressure. Who knows? It all depends on her. If she serves well, it’s tough to return,” Vinci said. “But I have nothing to lose.”

Against Venus, Serena earned a key break to lead 2-0 in the third set thanks to a down-the-line backhand winner that landed in a corner, then she gritted her teeth, held clenched fists near her head and leaned forward, holding the pose. When she got to match point as a shot by Venus sailed long, Serena dropped to a knee behind the baseline and pumped an arm, her back to her sister.

Serena then smacked a 107 mph ace, her 12th, to end it.

At 35, the oldest woman to enter the tournament, Venus had her own reasons for wanting to beat Serena, of course. She hasn’t reached the semifinals at any Grand Slam tournament since the 2010 U.S. Open, and might have considered this her last, best chance to collect an eighth major singles championship of her own.

Mouratoglou was asked whether Venus can do that.

“I think so,” he responded, “except if she plays Serena.”



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Mets primed for playoff run

Associated Press

NEW YORK — David Wright can hardly contain his excitement.

Thanks to a dramatic summer make-over, the New York Mets are pushing hard toward their first playoff appearance in nine years — with their captain aboard for the ride.

"Every game is a big game from here on out," Wright said. "This is what it's all about. This is what I've missed for the last few years, is playing in these types of games and these types of situations. So I'm pumped."

Following a string of injuries and losing seasons, the 32-year-old Wright returned in late August after more than four months on the disabled list due to a strained hamstring and spinal stenosis. In full uniform, he greeted teammates with a batch of cookies when they arrived at their Philadelphia hotel following a long flight from Colorado.

The next night, he homered on his first swing in the majors since mid-April.

For a Mets squad that's been on a sweet roll the past five weeks, it only seemed fitting. After completely transforming a moribund lineup into a dangerous one in a matter of days, New York (77-61) has won 24 of 33 to open a 6-game lead in the NL East over Washington with 24 to play.

Along the way, Wilmer Flores, Yoenis Cespedes and a cast of young arms have revitalized the fan base.

"This is what I've kind of been thinking about since '06, '07, is getting back to this point where the stadium's full, it's rocking on a nightly basis and bringing the energy," said Wright, the longest-tenured active big leaguer to play all his games with one team.

"You can just tell the enthusiasm's rubbing off on the players."

Of course, there's much more work to do. And that's a history lesson not lost on Wright.

Back in 2006, the Mets fell just short of

the World Series with a Game 7 loss to St. Louis. They thought they had a championship contender for years to come, but Wright and his teammates squandered a seven-game division lead with 17 remaining and missed the '07 playoffs.

The next year, they collapsed down the stretch again.

Those are bitter memories frustrated Mets fans have been waiting to erase. The club has endured six consecutive losing seasons since moving from Shea Stadium to Citi Field in 2009.

Wright is getting his chance now, too. "There's still a long time to go. I know as well as anybody that nothing is safe. Until it happens, anything can happen," Wright said. "I mean, you probably ask the majority of guys in here, they probably have no idea about that. So I don't think about it. I've learned from it, but I don't think about it. I've learned some valuable lessons from those years."

What are they? "Don't look ahead. Just try to win series. You can't focus too much on the big picture," he said. "Being in a pennant chase in New York, it's unlike any other place. The excitement's at a different level, the energy's at a different level, and it should be fun."

Here are some things to know about the new-look Mets and their postseason prospects:

Turning point: Led by Jacob deGrom, Matt Harvey and closer Jeurys Familia, the pitching staff has been one of baseball's best all season. But the Mets were a one-dimensional team until general manager Sandy Alderson overhauled an inept offense just before the trade deadline. The additions of Cespedes, rookie Michael Conforto and veterans Juan Uribe and Kelly Johnson — plus the healthy returns of Travis d'Arnaud, Michael Cuddyer and Wright — have helped the Mets become the top-scoring team in the majors since July 25. After mustering only 3.4 runs per game before that date, they've aver-

aged 6.1 since even though slugger Lucas Duda has been on the DL since Aug. 22. "Night and day," Phillies outfielder Jeff Francoeur said. "They've just got a lot of firepower now."

Trade chips: Using young assets stockpiled as the Mets were rebuilding, Alderson has also acquired relievers Tyler Clippard, Eric O'Flaherty and Addison Reed since July 27. New York traded eight minor league pitchers (all right-handers) to get six new big league players, increasing payroll by more than \$9 million. Reed is the only one the club controls beyond this season.

Thinking ahead: Even as they attempt to put away a scuffling Nationals team that was heavily favored before the season, the Mets are keeping an eye on the future and trying to protect their prized pitchers. DeGrom starts Friday night at Miami, but young Noah Syndergaard will be skipped this weekend when fellow rookie Steven Matz returns from injury. Harvey likely will be passed over once more in his first season back from Tommy John surgery. It's part of the organization's plan to limit innings for Harvey and Syndergaard in the hope of preventing arm trouble and keeping them fresh for October.

Managing expectations: September also offers an unexpected chance at redemption for 66-year-old Terry Collins, the oldest manager in the majors. He's never reached the postseason as a big league skipper, blowing several late leads and finishing in second place five times with the Astros and Angels during the 1990s.

Inside the schedule: New York is 24-2 against the three last-place teams in the National League and 53-57 vs. everyone else. But that bodes well down the stretch as the Mets play 14 of their final 24 games against clubs currently at least 22 games under .500. They face Washington four more times, with one series in each city.

Brazil hammers US men

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Neymar scored twice as Brazil beat the United States 4-1 in an international friendly on Tuesday, the last warmup for the American squad ahead of a playoff against Mexico next month for a 2017 Confederations Cup berth.

Hulk scored in the ninth minute for Brazil, which opened a 4-0 lead before Danny Williams scored from about 30 yards in injury time. Brazil has won 10 consecutive games against the U.S.

With Fabian Johnson and DaMarcus Beasley sidelined by injuries, the American defense was outclassed.

Left back Tim Ream was outmaneuvered in the run-up to the first and third goals, right back Geoff Cameron conceded a penalty kick for the second, and central defenders Michael Orozco and Ventura Alvarado gave the five-time world champions time and space.

"I don't think we handled it as well as we should have," U.S. captain Michael Bradley said. "We'll look at it and we'll talk about it, but we have bigger things to come."

U.S. coach Jurgen Klinsmann said the Americans missed Johnson and Beasley and he hopes to have both back to face Mexico on Oct. 10. Klinsmann also said forward Jozy Altidore showed he wasn't yet in game shape following his return from a hamstring injury.

Brazil went ahead when Willian dribbled around Bedoya and got a cross past Ream. The ball sailed over goalkeeper Brad Guzan and rebounded off the far post to Hulk. He took a touch with his left foot, played the ball back to his right and sent an 8-yard shot over Guzan's left shoulder for his 12th international goal.

Neymar doubled the lead in the 51st after he took a long pass from David Luiz and fell over when his feet got tangled with Cameron's, earning a penalty from Salvadoran referee Joel Aguilar.

Rafinha entered in the 63rd in his second international appearance and scored almost immediately, taking a pass from Lucas and using three quick touches to get Ream to lean the wrong way. Rafinha then slotted past Guzan.

Neymar got his 46th goal in 67 international appearances in the 67th minute when the defense gave him space following a feed from Lucas.

"It was just a completely different tempo that they set," Klinsmann said, "and we couldn't go that tempo."

SEC has 10 in Top 25

The Southeastern Conference has a record 10 teams ranked in the first Associated Press college football poll of the regular season.

Ohio State remained a unanimous No. 1 after pulling away 42-24 at Virginia Tech on Monday night.

The SEC already held the record for most teams from one conference in the Top 25 with eight, a mark it matched in the preseason. After the conference went 12-1 to open the season, No. 16 Texas A&M and No. 25 Mississippi State moved into the poll to go with the eight teams already there.

Alabama moved up a spot to No. 2. The rest of the SEC roll call is: No. 6 Auburn, No. 10 Georgia, No. 14 LSU, No. 17 Mississippi, No. 18 Arkansas, No. 20 Missouri and No. 23 Tennessee.

Rangers pull to within game of West lead

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Cole Hamels shook off a line drive that deflected off his left shoulder, and the Texas Rangers homered four times to beat the Seattle Mariners 9-6 Tuesday night.

Hamels pitched seven innings to help Texas move within one game of first-place Houston in the AL West. The Astros lost 4-0 at Oakland.

Mitch Moreland, Shin-Soo Choo and Rougned Odor connected off Mariners starter Taijuan Walker, who lasted just three innings.

With two runners aboard in the third, Jesus Sucre lined a 1-0 pitch straight back to the pitcher's mound. Hamels (3-1) managed to deflect the ball with his glove before it slammed into his shoulder, causing the left-hander to stumble and fall to the ground.

After being checked by the Rangers' staff, Hamels remained in the game and got out of the jam with just one run allowed on a fielder's choice by Kyle Seager.

Hamels, acquired from Philadelphia in late July, gave up four runs on eight hits and improved to 9-8 overall.

Mets 8, Nationals 7: Kirk Nieuwenhuis hit a tiebreaking, pinch-hit homer in the eighth inning off Jonathan Papelbon, and resilient New York rallied from a six-run deficit to beat host Washington after Matt Harvey struggled on the mound.

Cubs 8, Cardinals 5: Starlin Castro and Anthony Rizzo homered and com-

bined for seven RBIs and Chicago earned its fifth straight win, beating host St. Louis in the middle game of a three-game series.

Pirates 7, Reds 3: Andrew McCutchen hit a three-run homer and left-hander Francisco Liriano pitched six shutout innings as he finally beat Cincinnati on his 11th try, leading visiting Pittsburgh to a victory.

Royals 4, Twins 2: Eric Hosmer hit a three-run double, Kendrys Morales drove in another run and host Kansas City hung tough through eight more innings for a victory over Minnesota that snapped a four-game skid.

Edinson Volquez (13-7) settled down after a shaky start to last seven innings, allowing six hits and two runs — consecutive RBI hits by the Twins' Brian Dozier and Joe Mauer.

Orioles 2, Yankees 1: Chris Davis led off the ninth inning with his major league-leading 41st home run and Baltimore beat host New York for just its fourth win in 19 games.

Blue Jays 5, Red Sox 1 (10): Troy Tulowitzki singled in the go-ahead run off Alexi Ogando to trigger a four-run 10th inning that lifted AL East-leading Toronto to a victory over host Boston.

Phillies 5, Braves 0: Rookie Aaron Nola pitched seven innings and Odubel

Herrera hit a three-run homer to lead Philadelphia over visiting Atlanta.

Marlins 6, Brewers 4: J.T. Realmuto hit two home runs, including an inside-the-parker, to help lead host Miami over Milwaukee.

Tigers 8, Rays 7 (13): Rajai Davis' sacrifice fly gave host Detroit the win in a game that was tied four times, the last at 7-7.

White Sox 7, Indians 4: Rob Brantly smacked a three-run homer for his first American League hit, and rookie Carlos Rodon allowed one run through seven innings to lead host Chicago.

Giants 6, Diamondbacks 2: Tim Hudson pitched six effective innings in his return to the rotation and hit his first homer in two seasons for visiting San Francisco.

Athletics 4, Astros 0: Sonny Gray out-pitched close friend Scott Kazmir, and host Oakland spoiled the former lefty's return to the Coliseum.

Dodgers 6, Angels 4: Clayton Kershaw gave up four hits and two runs over seven innings to win his eighth consecutive decision, and Justin Ruggiano hit a leadoff homer for the visitors in their 13th victory in 15 games.

Padres 2, Rockies 1: Brett Wallace's fielder's choice grounder drove in the winning run in the bottom of the ninth for host San Diego.