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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Report: DOD turned blind eye to Afghan allies' child assault

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon and the White House on Monday condemned the alleged sexual assault of boys by Afghan forces who worked with U.S. military personnel. Meanwhile, members of Congress complained about a U.S. soldier being forced out of the military because he intervened in 2011, attacking an Afghan police commander he believed was raping a child.

Republican Rep. Duncan Hunter and others are questioning whether the U.S. military routinely discouraged troops from intervening in such sexual assaults. Hunter said Army Sgt. 1st Class Charles Martland must leave the Army by Nov. 1 because his intervention to stop a child rape triggered a negative mark on his service record.

Hunter is asking Defense Secretary Ash Carter to review the case, saying he has little confidence that the Army leaders will admit they made an error in deciding to punish Martland.

"I hope that when making a decision between supporting an elite warrior like Martland or a child rapist and criminal, the organizations or individuals in a position to make a decision will side with Martland," Hunter said in a letter to Carter earlier this month.

Defense officials would not comment on the specifics of the case.

Navy Capt. Jeff Davis, a Pentagon spokesman, said the U.S. has no policy directing forces to overlook human rights abuses. Davis told reporters on Monday that U.S. troops can report such incidents through their chain of command, but added that sexual assault of children, "while abhorrent, it's fundamentally an Afghan law-enforcement matter."

The State Department, in its annual human rights report, has consistently said that sexual abuse of children remains pervasive in Afghanistan. And it documents the practice called "bacha bazi" — which means dancing boys. Bacha bazi involves the sexual abuse of boys, often by powerful or wealthy local business-

men, who sexually abuse young boys trained to dance in female clothes.

In its 2014 report, the State Department said that many child sexual abusers are not arrested, and "there were reports security officials and those connected to the ANP (Afghan National Police) raped children with impunity."

A number of U.S. House and Senate members have asked the Army about Martland's case.

Republican Rep. Vern Buchanan sent a letter to Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, calling for the Pentagon to reverse what he said was its policy of ignoring sexual abuse of children in Afghanistan.

"It is bad enough if the Pentagon is telling our soldiers to ignore this type of barbaric and savage behavior, but it's even worse if we are punishing those who try to stop it," said Buchanan in the letter. "The only people who should be punished are the ones who created and condoned this immoral and savage code."

White House press secretary Josh Earnest said Monday that the U.S. works with the Afghan government to stop the exploitation of children.

"The United States is deeply concerned about the safety and welfare of Afghan boys who may be exploited by members of the Afghan national security and defense forces," Earnest said.

"This form of sexual exploitation violates Afghan law and Afghanistan's international obligations. More broadly, protecting human rights, including by countering the exploitation of children, is a high priority for the U.S. government."

According to Hunter and others familiar with the 2011 incident, Martland acted professionally. But Hunter said that a commanding general signed an order of reprimand against Martland, saying his conduct during the incident was inexcusable and "demonstrates a flagrant departure from the integrity, professionalism and even-tempered leadership I expect from all soldiers of this command, especially a special forces professional."

'It is bad enough if the Pentagon is telling our soldiers to ignore this type of barbaric and savage behavior, but it's even worse if we are punishing those who try to stop it.'

Rep. Vern Buchanan
R-Fla.

Navy F/A-18 fighter jet crashes in California

Associated Press

FRESNO, Calif. — A Navy fighter jet crashed near a California military base Monday, but the pilot ejected and safely parachuted to the ground, authorities said.

No one else was aboard the F/A-18 Super Hornet that crashed south of the Lemoore Naval Air Station shortly before 4 p.m.

The pilot underwent medical evaluation, was found to be fine and was released, the base's commanding officer, Capt. Monty Ashliman, said at a news conference.

The airfield was shut down for a few hours before operations resumed, Ashliman said.

The plane went down in a dirt field about 3 miles from the base, California Highway Patrol Officer Scott Jobinger said.

A fire from the crash was extinguished, and no roads in the area were closed, Jobinger said.

When the pilot hit the ground, he walked over to paramedics, said Chief Bill Lynch, of Kings County Fire Department, in the Hanford Sentinel newspaper.

The fire department also responded to the crash.

Lemoore Naval Air Station, about 45 miles south of Fresno, is a center for the Navy's West Coast F/A-18 fighter-jet operations.

Posting pope a social media revelation

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Pope Francis' personality is more joyful than grumpy cat, his vestments undeniably white and gold — not blue or black — and you'll never hear him say OMG or ermahgerd.

The 78-year-old pontiff isn't your typical social media star. He doesn't even carry a cell phone. But wherever Pope Francis goes, millions of tweets, posts, pictures and video streams are sure to follow.

Two weeks after spurring a viral frenzy with a trip to a Rome eyeglass shop to get new lenses, the wildly popular Francis is embarking on his first journey to the greatest fishbowl of all: America.

Social media platforms and wireless carriers anticipate activity related to his Sept. 22-27 visit to rival the Super Bowl — there's even a ban on drones and selfie sticks. Wireless carriers are using the big game as a guide as they add capacity near the pope's stops in Washington, New York and Philadelphia. They're trucking in portable cell towers and adding antennas atop street lights on Philadelphia's Benjamin Franklin Parkway, where a closing Mass is expected to draw more than 1 million people. Comcast is offering free Wi-Fi.

Bishops are getting crash courses on tweeting and live streaming, and organizers are pushing the official hashtags: #PopeInUS and, for Spanish speakers, #PapaEnUSA.

US to step up Syria campaign

The Washington Post

With the offensive to reclaim territory from the Islamic State group largely stalled in Iraq, the Obama administration is laying plans for a more aggressive military campaign in Syria, where U.S.-backed Kurdish forces have made surprising gains in recent months.

The effort, which would begin by increasing pressure on the Islamic State stronghold of Raqqa, marks an important shift in an administration strategy that for most of the past year has prioritized defeating the militant group in Iraq and viewed Syria as a place where there were few real prospects for battlefield success.

The White House's top national security officials met last week and will convene again in the next few days to discuss ways to capitalize on recent

About 70 US-trained rebels back in Syria

BEIRUT — About 70 U.S.-trained rebels have returned to Syria after receiving training in Turkey, crossing the border in gun-mounted four-wheel drives, the U.S. military's Central Command said Monday.

The development comes as U.S. administration has been struggling to defend its military strategy in Syria, directed against the Islamic State militant group with an air campaign and programs to train, assist and equip local

forces. Last week, CENTCOM spokesman Air Force Col. Patrick Ryder said that about 100 Syrians were completing their U.S.-led training programs and that most would soon be in Syria.

In July, shortly after the first 54 U.S.-trained fighters arrived, Syria's affiliate of al-Qaida known as the Nusra Front, or Jabhat Al-Nusra, attacked them, killing several and taking others hostage while many fighters fled.

From The Associated Press

and unexpected gains made by Syrian irregular forces. The administration is considering providing arms and ammunition to a wider array of rebel

groups in Syria as well as relaxing vetting standards, effectively deepening America's involvement in the ongoing civil war.

Petraeus: Consider military force in Syria

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — In his first testimony since his conviction for leaking classified information, retired Gen. David Petraeus on Tuesday said the U.S. should confront and consider using military force against Syrian President Bashar Assad to turn momentum in the faltering war there.

Moderate Syrian rebels will not join in the fight against the Islamic State group until they

see that the United States will protect them from the Assad regime and its indiscriminate bombing, said Petraeus, who was sentenced in April to two years of probation and a \$100,000 fine.

The former head of the CIA, who resigned amid scandal, came to advise the lawmakers. But he opened with an apology for the "serious mistake" of sharing classified documents four years ago with his biographer, Paula Broadwell, with whom he had an adulterous

relationship.

Petraeus was invited before the Senate Armed Services Committee by Republicans in majority control who are increasingly frustrated by a lack of progress in the year-old war against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

He is widely regarded as one of the top military minds on counterinsurgency tactics and credited with a military surge in Iraq in 2007 that turned back al-Qaida forces and rallied Sunni tribes to the U.S. side.

Navy opens anti-sub warfare training center in Conn.

Associated Press

GROTON, Conn. — The U.S. Navy on Monday formally opened a new training center at the Connecticut submarine base, which now once again has an admiral in residence.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held at Naval Submarine

Base New London for the Undersea Warfighting Development Center, which will lead training of the submarine force in the latest tactics and techniques for anti-submarine warfare.

The center began operations on Sept. 1, led by Rear Adm. Jeffrey Trussler.

The military base in Groton, which bills itself as the submarine capital of the world, had been without a flag officer following a Navy reorganization last year that eliminated a Connecticut-based administrative grouping of submarines. The base in Groton remains the pri-

mary homeport for attack submarines on the East Coast.

The center in Connecticut has command authority over similar centers in San Diego and Norfolk, Va. It brings 52 new positions to the base in Groton, including 14 officers, 19 enlisted sailors, and 19 civilians.

Overreactions abound in NFL

Associated Press

Hail to the Redskins! Hail (one) Victory!
The Washington Redskins won a game and suddenly they're favorites to win the NFC East, er, East.

The Cowboys (2-0) won't have Tony Romo and Dez Bryant for at least half the season. The Eagles (0-2) look dismal on offense. The Giants (0-2) can't protect any lead.

So, those dysfunctional Redskins (1-1) are your team to beat.

Typical overreaction.
Sure, the Redskins were impressive in a 24-10 win over St. Louis, which came off its own impressive victory over Seattle in the opener. But don't make playoff plans in the nation's capital just yet.

The Cowboys may not have Romo or Bryant for a while, but their defense was outstanding against Philadelphia and will add Greg Hardy and Rolando McClain in three weeks. With Romo and Bryant, they could've run away with their second straight division title. Now, they'll have to win games on defense and hope Brandon Weeden doesn't make crucial mistakes.

As for the Eagles, they have too much talent to be this bad. Kelly led them to a division title after a 1-3 start in 2013.

Of course, he had Nick Foles, LeSean McCoy, DeSean Jackson and the best offensive line in the league that season. Then he got rid of Foles, McCoy, Jackson, Jeremy Maclin and two-thirds of the line — Evan Mathis and Todd Herremans. His collection of high-priced stars led by Sam Bradford and DeMarco Murray isn't doing the job, but it's too early to count them out.

The Giants could be undefeated. Poor clock management cost them a win in Dallas and they blew another double-digit lead in the fourth quarter against Atlanta.

Don't bet against Eli Manning and Odell Beckham Jr.

Then there's the Redskins. Rookie Matt Jones and Alfred Morris give Washington a formidable 1-2 punch. With the league's best rushing attack, Kirk Cousins might only have to be a game manager at quarterback. Is it enough to win the division? Thursday night's game at the Giants will be telling.

Here are other overreactions from Week 2:

Overreaction: Move over, Seattle. Arizona is the beast of the NFC West. The Seahawks are 0-2 following a loss at Green Bay. The Cardinals are 2-0 and look dominant.

Realistic reaction: Yes, Seattle faces an uphill battle. Only 11.2 percent (23 of 204) of teams made the playoffs after an 0-2 start since 1990. But the Seahawks had a fourth-quarter lead at Lambeau Field before Aaron Rodgers rallied the Packers. They might be just a Kam Chancellor away from fixing things and making a run. The Cardinals are always a Carson Palmer injury away from falling apart.

Overreaction: DeMarco Murray's record-breaking season in Dallas was a fluke. Murray is averaging 1.6 FEET (not yards) per carry in two games with the Eagles.

Realistic reaction: Murray isn't going to run for 1,800 yards again, especially behind this offensive line in Philadelphia. But if Kelly makes some adjustments, Murray should get going.

Overreaction: Tom Brady and the New England Patriots are going 16-0. Brady is on pace to throw for 6,032 yards and 56 TDs. He's unstoppable.

Realistic reaction: After a tumultuous offseason, Brady has predictably come out with something extra to prove

in wins over Pittsburgh and Buffalo. But the Patriots can't keep this up in an improved division. They won't run the table, but maybe 14-2.

Overreaction: Travis Benjamin is the new Randy Moss. Benjamin has TD catches of 54, 50 and 60 yards and he's also returned a punt 78 yards for a score.

Realistic reaction: Benjamin's three long TD receptions are a fantasy owner's dream, but he has just three other catches in two games. Defense should be more aware of him now, so let's not send him to Hawaii already.

Overreaction: The Saints are cooked. New Orleans is 0-2 following a home loss to Jameis Winston and the Buccaneers and Drew Brees might have a shoulder injury.

Realistic reaction: If Brees is out, things could get ugly for the Saints. Then again, this is the NFC South. Carolina won the division at 7-8-1 last year. No team is out of it.

Overreaction: Same old Rex Ryan. He brought his bravado to upstate New York, but still couldn't beat Bill Belichick and the Patriots.

Realistic reaction: Brady and Belichick have made plenty of coaches look bad over the past 15 seasons. The Bills (1-1) aren't ready to topple New England, but they can contend for a playoff spot.

Overreaction: This is the best Gang Green defense in Jets history. A 20-7 road win over Andrew Luck and the Colts (0-2) showed the Jets are the real deal.

Realistic reaction: Shutting Luck down is more impressive than doing it to Johnny Manziel in Week 1, but it's only two games. Ryan's crew did it for 16 games in 2009 and 2010 when the Jets went to the AFC title game both seasons.

Browns must deal with QB questions

Associated Press

BEREA, Ohio — Johnny Manziel's antics have the Browns in a jam. This time, a positive one.

Browns coach Mike Pettine said Monday that Manziel's first career win on Sunday over Tennessee has Cleveland's coaching staff considering maybe keeping him as their starting quarterback even if Josh McCown returns from a concussion.

Manziel threw two long touchdown passes to wide receiver Travis Benjamin, the second an improvised 50-yarder with 2:52 left to seal a 28-14 victory.

Although his statistics (8-for-15 for 172 yards) weren't great and he fumbled twice, Manziel led the Browns (1-1) to the win and that may be enough to move him ahead of McCown, who sustained a concussion in the season opener and remains on the sidelines.

Until McCown is cleared to play, Manziel will start for the Browns, who host Oakland this week. But that could change.

"To me, it's a positive conversation because you have a young quarterback that's been through a lot, that has gone out and led his team to a win," Pettine said.

"We were all able to enjoy it last night. I'm proud of him because if you had said back early in the offseason if this was going to happen, I think a lot of people would have said pretty slim chance."

McCown may give the Browns the better chance to win, and Pettine and his coaches have to weigh that against getting the 22-year-old Manziel playing time to see if he can be their long-term answer at quarterback.

Sticking with Manziel might be an easier choice if McCown, who signed a three-year, \$14.5 million deal in March, hadn't shown promise while guiding Cleveland on a 17-play, 90-yard drive before he got drilled in the helmet diving into the end zone.

Pettine said last week that McCown would have likely played against the Titans if he had practiced just one day, but he suffered a setback on Friday.

Manziel's performance was personally satisfying for the former Heisman Trophy winner, whose bad rookie season was followed by a stint in rehab.

He has been a fixture in U.S. tabloids since the Browns selected him in the 2014 draft, repeatedly photographed while partying in Las Vegas. In November, he was involved in an altercation at a downtown Cleveland hotel where he lived.

But he's worked hard at getting himself turned around both on and off the field, and Pettine has been impressed by his growth.

"Johnny has made a lot of progress in the right direction," Pettine said.

Jets force five turnovers, bounce Colts

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Todd Bowles is keeping the Jets grounded.

Sure, they're off to their first 2-0 start since 2011, the defense forced five more turnovers Monday night against Andrew Luck and, of course, the New York fans are already revving up for more after a 20-7 win at Indianapolis. Bowles knows there's still a lot of work to be done.

"It's a good win, but it's only win No. 2," the first-year Jets coach said after a 20-7 victory at Indianapolis. "We're not where we want to be, but we're on the way."

The defense might not be able to get much better.

New York already has five takeaways in each of the first two games and has scored 31 points off those miscues after producing only 20 points all of last season.

The reason is that they've been able to relentlessly pressure quarterbacks and lock down outside receivers with their two veteran cornerbacks, Darrelle Revis and Antonio Cromartie, who played Monday on a sore knee.

"As a secondary we're trying to be the best we can be and be the best secondary unit in the league," said Revis, who picked off one pass and recovered two fumbles. "That's what we're trying to showcase out there."

"The name of the game is turnovers and keeping the score down, regardless of whatever else happens," Bowles said.

But there was plenty to critique about the Jets' offense, which struggled to seal the game until the closing minutes.

Ryan Fitzpatrick was 22-for-34 for 244 yards with two touchdowns and one interception in his first win at Lucas Oil Stadium, Brandon Marshall caught seven passes for 101 yards and one TD and Eric Decker caught eight passes for 97 yards and a TD before leaving with a knee injury.

"It wasn't a pretty win, but we'll take it," Marshall said. "We've got a long way to go."

Indy is 0-2 for the second consecutive season, but this time seems a lot different. After going 21-for-37 for 250 yards with one touchdown and three interceptions, Luck has now thrown five picks in

the first two weeks. He also lost a fumble to the Jets.

Part of the problem was Revis and his teammates.

The other problems were self-inflicted. On Monday, Indy was called for 11 penalties. Gore bobbed a handoff at the Jets 1-yard line that Revis recovered in the end zone, Adam Vinatieri missed a 29-yard field goal — the first time he's missed one from shorter than 30 yards since 2007 — and for the first time since 1997, the Colts were shut out in the first half in back-to-back weeks.

"You can't penalize yourself, you can't turn the ball over," Colts coach Chuck Pagano said. "We have to protect, give him (Luck) a clean pocket. You can't drive the length of the field and put the football on the ground."

The Colts' problems began early. On Indy's first series, Calvin Pryor intercepted a pass and ran it back to the Colts 9-yard line. Four plays later, Ryan Fitzpatrick threw a 6-yard TD pass to Eric Decker.

A 35-yard field goal from Nick Folks made it 10-0 at halftime.



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Buckeyes' starting QB undecided

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The question that won't go away at Ohio State: Who's the starting quarterback?

Coach Urban Meyer said the matter is undecided because neither Cardale Jones nor J.T. Barrett has been impressive through three games.

"Not one is beating out the other, and they're not playing great," said Meyer, whose top-ranked Buckeyes (3-0) host Western Michigan on Saturday.

Jones started the first three games. But Barrett has played in each, including the final 45 snaps in Saturday's 20-13 win against Northern Illinois after Jones threw two interceptions in the first half.

Meyer bristles at the suggestion he is platooning.

"Let's be clear. I did go with one guy," he said. "The guy didn't perform well, so we went with the backup. There is no set thing saying that we're a two-quarterback system — we're not. The backup's a very good player, whomever that may be. So we are going with 'the guy.'"

The defending national champions were

expected to have one of the most explosive offenses in the nation with either quarterback joining a Heisman Trophy hopeful in running back Ezekiel Elliott and former star quarterback Braxton Miller a hybrid back.

The Buckeyes looked the part in beating Virginia Tech 42-24 in the opener on Sept. 7. They had six plays of 26 yards or more from the line of scrimmage, including Elliott's 80-yard touchdown run and Miller catching a 54-yard TD pass and running 53-yards for another.

In the following two games Ohio State's longest play was Jones passing 25 yards to Michael Thomas against Northern Illinois.

Even in the 38-0 win Sept. 12 against Hawaii, a six-touchdown underdog, Jones was pulled for three series in the second quarter. The Buckeyes led only 17-0 through three quarters.

Meyer said the "feel of the game" determines when he makes a change.

"It's not something I have written down," he said. "It's something that I have to make sure that you're on the same page that they are, and that's not

easy. The thing that I worry about, and I know that's happening, is just the overwhelming mess that is on these 19-, 20-, 21-year-olds."

Jones this season is 26-for-46 (56.5 percent) for 334 yards with two touchdowns and three interceptions and a 118.82 efficiency rating. He has 115 yards on 21 carries (5.5) and a score.

Barrett has 103 yards passing on 20-for-35 (57.1) percent, two touchdowns, an interception and a 116.61 rating. He's rushed five times for 65 yards (13.0).

The Buckeyes committed five turnovers (three interceptions, two fumbles) against Northern Illinois and were a combined 2-for-15 on third and fourth down conversions while gaining 298 yards.

"One of the worst-executed performances since we've been here," said Meyer, who has a 42-3 record in his fourth season at Ohio State.

The offense has been so stagnant that in the past five quarters it has three touchdowns while the Ohio State defense has scored twice. Against Northern Illinois, linebacker Darron Lee's 41-yard fumble return for a touchdown late in the third quarter provided the difference.

Auburn goes with White as new QB

Associated Press

AUBURN, Ala. — The Auburn Tigers are changing starting quarterbacks.

Coach Gus Malzahn said Tuesday he is benching a struggling Jeremy Johnson and switching to Sean White starting with Saturday night's game against Mississippi State. Johnson was billed in the preseason as a potential Heisman Trophy candidate but has thrown six interceptions in three games.

The Tigers have fallen out of the rankings after starting at No. 6. White is a redshirt freshman who hasn't played in a game for Auburn yet.

The 6-foot, 200-pound White was rated as one of the top-10 quarterback prospects by several recruiting services out of high school in Boca Raton, Fla.

Malzahn also said defensive end Carl Lawson will miss "an extended period of time." Lawson missed the past two games with a right hip injury.

In other college football news:

■ TCU senior defensive end Mike Tuaua and freshman receiver Andre Petties-Wilson have been suspended from the team after their arrests on charges of robbery-bodily injury.

According to a Fort Worth police report, Tuaua and Petties-Wilson were arrested Monday for an incident Sept. 4, when another TCU student told investigators that the two players stole a case of beer after attacking him and his friends.

■ Purdue has benched junior quarterback Austin Appleby in favor of redshirt freshman David Blough.

It is the third time in Darrell Hazell's three seasons at Purdue that the Boilermakers have changed starting quarterbacks in September or October. He made the announcement Tuesday.

Cards' Molina partially tears ligament

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Cardinals All-Star catcher Yadier Molina has a partially torn ligament in his left thumb, and St. Louis hopes he might return during the regular season.

"I think this is sort of the best news we could hope for," general manager John Mozeliak said Monday.

Molina will be re-evaluated late this week or early next week.

"It'll really depend on how the next 5-7 days go," Mozeliak said.

St. Louis also cleared right-hander Adam

Wainwright for baseball activities after he made a rapid recovery from a torn left Achilles, an injury sustained April 25. The two-time 20-game winner could help in the bullpen during the postseason.

"I've been watching him throw bullpens and watching him strut around," manager Mike Matheny said. "He's been telling everybody this was going to happen, so I don't know why we're surprised."

The Molina injury is the latest setback for a team that still had the best record in the majors. Outfielder Matt Holliday and first baseman Matt Adams have also missed considerable time and setup man

Jordan Walden lasted just a month before being sidelined for the season with a shoulder injury.

Molina missed about two months with a torn ligament in his right thumb last season. The Cardinals said Monday the latest injury, to his glove hand, is not so severe.

Molina was hurt while tagging the Cubs' Anthony Rizzo attempting to score the tying run on a fly ball on Sunday.

Tony Cruz will be the everyday catcher for now for St. Louis, which led the NL Central by four games with 13 to go.

Molina was batting .270 with four homers and 61 RBIs.

Price, Jays top Yankees, pad AL East lead

Associated Press

TORONTO — David Price pitched seven shutout innings, Jose Bautista had two hits and the Toronto Blue Jays used a three-run first inning to beat the New York Yankees 4-2 on Monday night.

Toronto stretched its lead in the AL East to 3½ games in the opener of a three-game showdown between the division's top teams.

The Blue Jays snapped a two-game losing streak, avoiding their first three-game skid since July 8-10.

Facing the Yankees for the fourth time since joining the Blue Jays in a July 30 trade, Price improved to 3-0 with a 1.71 ERA against New York with Toronto.

Roberto Osuna overcame Greg Bird's two-out solo homer in the ninth to earn his 17th save.

Price (17-5) got a scare when Jacoby Ellsbury led off the game with a liner right back at the head of the star left-hander. Price managed to snare the liner, and smiled in relief as he flipped the ball to third baseman Josh Donaldson.

Astros 6, Angels 3: Evan Gattis and Carlos Correa hit two-run homers, and host Houston beat Los Angeles in a matchup of American League wild-card contenders.

Dallas Keuchel (18-8) pitched 7²/₃ solid innings to remain undefeated at home this season. More importantly, the All-Star left-hander helped Houston keep momentum by winning its third straight.

The Astros (80-71) lead the Minnesota Twins by three games and the Angels by 3½ for the AL's second wild-card spot. The victory put the Astros within a game of first-place Texas in the AL West.

Pirates 9, Rockies 3: Starling Marte homered among his four hits and came within a triple of the cycle, and visiting Pittsburgh beat Colorado.

Aramis Ramirez went deep and Jody Mercer had four hits for the Pirates, who reduced their magic number for clinching a postseason berth to two.

Mets 4, Braves 0: Jonathon Niese won for the first time in a month, Michael Conforto homered and host New York moved closer to an NL East title with their victory over Atlanta.

Daniel Murphy lined a two-run double, Yoenis Cespedes had three hits and the Mets handed hard-luck Shelby Miller (5-16) his 15th straight defeat.

Diamondbacks 8, Dodgers 4: Paul Goldschmidt homered after Yasmany Tomas and Aaron Hill gave Arizona the lead with longballs off Brett Anderson

as the Diamondbacks beat host Los Angeles.

The Dodgers' loss in the opener of this four-game series kept their magic number for clinching a third straight NL West title at seven.

Cubs 9, Brewers 5: Anthony Rizzo had three hits and scored three runs, Jorge Soler hit a pinch-hit, 3-run shot and host Chicago beat Milwaukee.

The Cubs inched closer to a NL playoff berth as their magic number to clinch fell to four.

Red Sox 8, Rays 7: Xander Bogaerts hit a grand slam in the eighth inning to lift host Boston to a victory over Tampa Bay, moving the Red Sox out of the AL East's basement and ahead of the Rays.

David Ortiz collected his 99th RBI on a night he was honored at Fenway Park for hitting his 500th career homer. It was his first home game since he joined the 500-home run club, hitting it against the Rays on Sept. 12.

Brandon Guyer homered on the game's second pitch to spark a three-run first for the Rays, who lost for the seventh time in 10 games.

Jean Machi (1-0) got one out for the win. Robbie Ross Jr. pitched the ninth for his

fifth save.

Cardinals 2, Reds 1: Rookie Stephen Piscotty doubled in the go-ahead run in a two-run eighth inning and St. Louis turned it on late for a victory over visiting Cincinnati.

Rookie Tommy Pham tripled off J.J. Hoover (8-2) to open the eighth and Jhonny Peralta's one-out single tied it ahead of Piscotty's drive off the wall in left-center.

White Sox 2, Tigers 0; White Sox 3, Tigers 2: Erik Johnson followed a one-hitter by Jeff Smardzija with six solid innings, leading Chicago to a victory over host Detroit for a doubleheader sweep.

Samardzija allowed only a leadoff single to Victor Martinez in the fifth inning as the White Sox won the opener 2-0.

Gordon Beckham homered, Jose Abreu had an RBI double and Avisail Garcia a sacrifice fly in the night cap of the split-doubleheader. All the runs came off Detroit's Randy Wolf (0-4).

Johnson (3-0) allowed a long ball to Alex Avila and a sacrifice fly to Ian Kinsler. Making his fourth start this season after spending most of it at Triple-A Charlotte, Johnson matched a career best with nine strikeouts.