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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Marines see good, bad of women in combat

San Diego Union-Tribune

The Marine Corps general in charge of implementing a Pentagon plan to open ground combat jobs to women concluded there are benefits as well as significant risks to the proposal, and he outlined ways to eliminate most of an anticipated weakening of combat effectiveness during the transition, according to a document leaked Wednesday to the San Diego Union-Tribune.

The 14-page memorandum and 19 pages of enclosures by Brig. Gen. George Smith Jr., director of the Marine Corps Force Innovation Office, were submitted to the commandant to help the Marine leader decide how far gender integration should go.

The assessment states that integrating female troops into the ground combat arms will add some risk of reduced performance in combat, as well as

cost. "While this risk can be mitigated by various methods to address failure rates, injuries, and ability to perform the mission, the bottom line is that the physiological differences between males and females will likely always be evident to some extent," it says.

Although it does not make a specific recommendation which units to keep closed to women, the risk is highest for infantry units, especially crew-served heavy weapons, and "significantly lower for the non-infantry combat arms," it says.

Among potential benefits that women could bring to ground combat units that are cited in the Marine Corps assessment are enhanced decision-making in the field and fewer disciplinary problems.

The document signed and dated Aug. 18 has not been released by the Marine Corps, which did not dispute its authenticity but declined to com-

ment on its contents. A senior Pentagon official who followed the Marine Corps research from the beginning said it accurately reflects the thinking of the Marine brass and previously undisclosed research findings.

Marine officials also declined to share details of Gen. Joseph Dunford's recommendation last week to Navy Secretary Ray Mabus asking to keep some front-line combat units closed to women, a decision that was informed by the Force Innovation Office assessment.

Mabus had questioned the premise and methodology of the Corps' yearlong experiment on women in ground combat, saying the performance and physiological characteristics of female troops on average is not cause to bar all women from ground combat jobs.

According to a four-page selection of results released by the Marine Corps on Sept. 10,

researchers found that all-male units were faster and more lethal than mixed-gender units on most combat tasks.

The Corps has not released actual data from the experiment, only summaries. Mabus and other critics say it was not designed or executed in a way that would predict the effect on unit performance if women are allowed to compete against men for combat jobs. Outside of the task force experiment, the Corps' highest-performing women theoretically would replace its lowest-performing men, potentially increasing overall combat effectiveness.

The services are scheduled to brief Congress next Wednesday regarding prospects for eliminating all restrictions on women in combat by year's end. The Marine Corps is expected to make an additional presentation afterward in a closed-door session.

Neller takes over as Marine Corps commandant

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Hailed as "a tested warrior and an innovative strategist," Gen. Robert Neller accepted command of the U.S. Marine Corps on Thursday morning during a traditional ceremony at Marine Barracks Washington.

Neller — who was pinned with a fourth star Thursday — became the Corps' 37th commandant, taking over for Gen. Joseph Dunford, who held the post for less than a year. Dunford will become the 19th chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on Friday during a ceremony at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, Va., replacing retiring Army Gen. Martin Dempsey.

Describing Dunford as an

"out in front" and "awe-inspiring" leader, Defense Secretary Ash Carter said the general was his and President Barack Obama's "first and obvious choice" to replace Dempsey.

"I speak for everyone when I say how fortunate we are that Joe's council and wisdom will continue to guide our nation's security for years to come," Carter said.

Neller, who most recently commanded U.S. Marine Corps Forces Command and Marine Corps Forces Europe, was chosen because of his proven combat experience, his expert leadership skills and his dedication to forwarding the Marine Corps, Carter said.

"Whether he was command-

ing a Marine security force company or the 3rd Marine Division he's led with conviction and has earned the respect of every Marine under his charge," Navy Secretary Ray Mabus said, adding that the career infantry officer had earned "a reputation for being no-nonsense and direct."

His abilities, Mabus said, will help ensure the continued success of the Corps even as it faces shrinking budgets and multifaceted missions across the world.

"With the security situation around the globe, with the situation here in Washington, Commandant Neller will have his hands full," Mabus said. "But like Commandant Dunford, I am absolutely certain that he will rise to the challenges, see

them as opportunities and seize his time to assure that the Marine Corps remains the most effective expeditionary fighting force the world has ever known."

Thanking his family, senior defense leaders and the Marine Corps for entrusting him with his new position, Neller praised Dunford for his accomplishments during his short tenure as commandant. He pledged to continue Dunford's work to ensure the Corps is prepared for anything in an "unstable and unpredictable" world.

"It's a great honor and privilege to take this on," Neller said. "Let's go do this."

Pope warns Congress over extremism, violence

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Pope Francis, in a historic address Thursday, cautioned Congress against responding with hatred and violence to the growth of religious extremism around the world.

The pontiff said the United States response should instead be one of hope, healing, peace and justice, in an apparent reference to the war against the Islamic State group and Islamic terrorism during his speech in the House chamber to a joint session of lawmakers. Francis also touched on the Syrian refugee crisis, immigration and environmentalism.

The speech to Congress was a first for a leader of the Catholic Church, which represents about 1.25 billion people around the world, and capped a rare visit to Washington that energized the city and drew international crowds.

“We know that in the attempt to be freed of the enemy without, we can be tempted to feed the enemy within,” Francis told the House chamber. “To imitate the hatred and violence of tyrants and murderers is the best way to take their place.”

He said that fundamentalism tempts people into a simplistic view of the world that sees only good and evil, and that it must be guarded against.

“Our world is increasingly a place of violent conflict, hatred and brutal atrocities, committed even in the name of God and religion,” Francis said. “We know that no religion is immune from forms of individual delusion and ideological extremism.”

The pope also told Congress that ending the arms trade is key to stopping surging global violence, a striking comment to the elected leaders of one of the world’s largest arms exporters.

“Here we have to ask ourselves, ‘Why are deadly weapons being sold to those who plan to inflict untold suffering on in-

dividuals and society?’” he said. “Sadly, the answer, as we all know, is simply for the money — money that is drenched in blood, often innocent blood.”

In the vortex of Capitol Hill politics — especially during presidential election campaigns — Francis’ comments are likely to be appropriated by those on both sides of the political spectrum.

However, the pope’s message on Syrian refugees and immigrants was clearly one of compassion and understanding.

Francis acknowledged that hard decisions are needed on the flood of Syrians and others out of the wars in the Middle East into Europe, the largest refugee crisis since World War II. The Obama administration has said it will increase the annual number of refugees it accepts to at least 10,000 to ease the crisis. European governments are still wrestling with how to treat those streaming across their borders.

In a comparison that hits closer to home, Francis compared the situation across the Atlantic to the immigrants, many illegal, jumping the southern U.S. border, and he asked lawmakers to empathize.

“On this continent, too, thousands of persons are led to travel north in search of a better life for themselves and for their loved ones. Is this not what we want for our own children?” he said. “We must not be taken aback by their numbers, but rather view them as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their stories, trying to respond as best we can to their situation.”

Many were anticipating the pope’s mention of another controversial issue in national politics — global climate change.

Francis, who avoided that phrase in his address, did talk about “environmental deterioration caused by human activity.” He said technology should be put toward creating a healthier world and urged Congress to take action.

Hundreds killed in stampede during hajj

Associated Press

MINA, Saudi Arabia — A horrific stampede killed at least 717 pilgrims and injured hundreds more Thursday on the outskirts of the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia, the deadliest tragedy to strike the annual hajj pilgrimage in more than two decades.

At least 863 pilgrims were injured in the crush, said the Saudi civil defense directorate, which provided the death toll. The tragedy struck as Muslims around the world marked the start of the Eid al-Adha holiday.

It was the second major disaster during this year’s hajj season, raising questions about the adequacy of measures put in place by Saudi authorities to ensure the safety of the roughly

2 million Muslims taking part. A crane collapse in Mecca nearly two weeks earlier left 111 people dead.

Many of the victims were crushed and trampled to death on Thursday as they were on their way to perform a symbolic stoning of the devil by throwing pebbles against three stone columns in Mina, a large valley about 3 miles from Mecca that has been the site of hajj stampedes in years past. The area houses more than 160,000 tents where pilgrims spend the night during the pilgrimage.

Two survivors interviewed by The Associated Press said the disaster began when one wave of pilgrims found themselves heading into a mass of people going in another direction.

Syrian Kurdish offensive against militants stalls

McClatchy Foreign Staff

SURUC, Turkey — A Syrian Kurdish offensive described last week by U.S. officials as the most effective assault to date on the Islamic State group has ground to a virtual halt because of Turkey’s opposition to the advance and Kurdish commanders’ reluctance to extend their front lines beyond Kurdish areas, Syrian Kurdish and Arab militants say.

The stalling of the offensive, which was aided by U.S. airstrikes that were coordinated with Syrian Kurdish fighters on the ground, deals a new setback to the Obama administration’s efforts to build an anti-Islamic State coalition among Syrian opposition forces, and it comes amid a buildup of Russian jet fighters, armored vehicles and personnel near Syria’s coast.

“The Kurdish forces are important because they are

America’s boots on the ground in Syria and Iraq,” said Soner Cagaptay, an expert with the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a think tank.

The slackening in the drive by the Peoples Protection Units, a Syrian Kurdish militia known as the YPG, can be traced through the dramatic drop in the rate of U.S. airstrikes launched against the Islamic State in areas inside and adjacent to the swath of territory along the border with Turkey from which the brutal Islamist movement was expelled by the YPG offensive.

According to news releases issued by U.S. Central Command, U.S. aircraft launched 108 strikes in those areas in July, compared with 60 in August and only 35 so far this month.

A CENTCOM spokesman acknowledged that the YPG drive had slowed, but indicated that it could start up again.

Brees expecting to play vs. Panthers

The Associated Press

METAIRIE, La. — Saints quarterback Drew Brees took the field wearing his usual red No. 9 practice jersey with shoulder pads on underneath.

If not for the fact that he didn't throw a pass, there would have been no obvious indication that he is in a race to recover from a bruised rotator cuff by Sunday, when New Orleans tries to avoid dropping to 0-3 at Carolina.

"I have every intention of playing, but I do have to take it day-to-day," Brees said after practice Wednesday.

"Obviously you're dealing with something where you've

got to be smart because you don't want to aggravate it, reinjure it, hurt it more, make it worse. So there's a balance to what we're doing here in regards to rehab and recovery and rest."

Brees' injury further complicates matters for the Saints' offense, which has performed below the elite standard it has met since coach Sean Payton and the franchise's all-time leading passer joined the franchise in 2006.

The Saints, who averaged 411 yards and three TDs per game last season, have averaged about 366 yards and two TDs per game through Week 2 of this season.

Brees was hurt on a hit in the second quarter of last

Sunday's 26-19 loss at home to Tampa Bay. He never left the game, finishing 24-for-38 for 255 yards and one touchdown.

Brees, listed as "limited" on Wednesday's injury report, hasn't missed a start because of injury since joining New Orleans in 2006. Carolina safety Roman Harper, Brees' former teammate in New Orleans, said he'll believe Brees isn't playing "when I see it." Carolina cornerback Charles Tillman added that uncertainty surrounding Brees "doesn't change our preparation."

"Not at all," Tillman continued. "The minute you doubt Drew Brees, you've lost."

Florida suspends two for Tennessee game

Associated Press

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — Two Florida players who made pivotal contributions last year in a victory at Tennessee won't be around for the rematch.

The Gators suspended quarterback Treon Harris and cornerback Jalen Tabor for their game Saturday against the Volunteers.

Coach Jim McElwain announced the suspensions following practice Wednesday, saying Harris and Tabor made "choices."

"They made choices, and that's the way it goes," McElwain said. "I'm not angry at them at all. It's a choice. Each one of us [has] a choice, and they made a choice to do whatever. It hurts because we've got a lot of guys that really care about this team, and we'll have to have some of the guys step up and play."

Harris and Tabor, both sophomores, were suspended one game for an undisclosed violation of University Athletic Association policy.

They are the fourth and fifth Florida players suspended this season, joining defensive end Alex McCalister, receiver Latroy Pittman and safety Marcus Maye. McCalister and Maye missed the season opener. Pittman was suspended the first two games.

Without Harris, redshirt freshman Will Grier will start against the Volunteers (2-1) and get a chance to play the entire game, the first time this season he hasn't been looking over his shoulder.

Tabor's suspension moves Quincy Wilson into the starting lineup.

In other college football news:

■ Cardale Jones will remain top-ranked Ohio State's quarterback Saturday against Western Michigan.

Coach Urban Meyer announced the decision following practice Wednesday, two days after hinting he was considering starting J.T. Barrett.

Barrett was 11-1 last season starting for injured two-time Big Ten player of the year Braxton Miller before breaking his ankle in the regular-season finale against Michigan. Jones replaced Barrett and led Ohio State (3-0) to the national championship and started the first three games this season.

■ Blind long-snapper Jake Olson got his first taste of live action in practice with No. 19 Southern California on Wednesday,

and coach Steve Sarkisian is already thinking about scenarios to get him into a game.

Olson delivered a perfect snap to begin a successful field goal attempt during practice with the Trojans, taking another step toward participation in a game.

Though there is no timetable for Olson to play in a game, Sarkisian said he would come to a "mutual agreement" with an opposing coach when the moment happens, making sure Olson can safely participate in game action.

■ Myles Jack, No. 9 UCLA's versatile linebacker and running back, will miss the rest of the season due to a knee injury, coach Jim Mora announced Wednesday.

Jack hurt his knee during a non-contact drill near the end of Tuesday's practice, and he had surgery that evening. The junior is the third key Bruins defensive starter lost for the season with injuries this month, joining defensive lineman Eddie Vanderdoes and cornerback Fabian Moreau.

FIFA hands over emails

GENEVA — FIFA relented and handed over emails from suspended official Jerome Valcke on Thursday, having blocked access even as Sepp Blatter pledged support for American and Swiss investigations of corruption.

The embattled governing body should cooperate "no matter how close to home those investigations get," Blatter, who is targeted by both criminal cases, had said earlier Thursday.

"This is the difficult path we must follow if we are serious about change," the FIFA president wrote in his weekly in-house magazine column.

Still, Blatter's comments seemed at odds with FIFA's behavior during a stand-off with Switzerland's attorney general Michael Lauber.

FIFA had continued to block attempts to unseal emails from Valcke's business and personal accounts despite Lauber's public request on Wednesday.

The stand-off ended late Thursday afternoon when FIFA finally stopped insisting that "several conditions will be fulfilled," Lauber's office said.

Croatia hires player banned over chant
ZAGREB, Croatia — Croatia has hired former defender Josip Simunic, who was

banned for 10 games for leading fans in a pro-Nazi chant, to assist new national team coach Ante Cacic.

Simunic missed the 2014 World Cup over the incident in the qualifying playoff against Iceland in 2013.

Croatia has been deducted one point in its European Championship qualifying group after a swastika was painted on the field before June's match against Italy. Croatia must play its next two home qualifiers in an empty stadium.

Simunic is on the coaching staff of Cacic, who has been given a contract through the 2018 World Cup.

Coach ordered ref hit

SAN ANTONIO — A Texas high school football coach has acknowledged he directed two of his players to hit a referee during a game earlier this month, according to the school's principal.

In an internal school district statement, John Jay High School principal Robert Harris said that assistant coach Mack Breed told him he directed the students to hit the referee because the ref had used racial slurs and had missed calls. Details from the statement were first reported on Wednesday by ESPN.

The referee, Robert Watts, has denied using any slurs.

The two suspended students, Michael Moreno and Victor Rojas, appeared Wednesday at separate disciplinary hearings, which were closed to the public. A decision is pending from the Northside school district on the students' possible punishment.

Video from the Sept. 4 game shows Rojas blindsiding Watts and Moreno diving on top of him. Watts was the umpire on the defensive side watching a play along the line of scrimmage.

Hurt Lions QB throws

ALLEN PARK, Mich. — Matthew Stafford took snaps and threw at practice as if it was just another day at work.

The Detroit Lions quarterback said he felt "pretty good" Wednesday before going out on the field and looking healthy enough to participate as usual during the parts of practice open to reporters. He was able to finish practice with his in-

jured ribs.

Stafford needed X-rays on his chest and ribs after getting roughed up in Sunday's loss at Minnesota.

He has a 68-game starting streak, including two playoff games, going into Sunday night's home opener for the Lions (0-2) against Denver (2-0).

In other NFL news:

■ Chargers tight end Ladarius Green has suffered his second concussion in less than two weeks and his third since December.

Green was a limited participant in Wednesday's practice. He reported having concussion-like symptoms on Tuesday coach Mike McCoy said.

Green was injured in Sunday's loss at Cincinnati, the team said.

Durant cleared to play

OKLAHOMA CITY — Kevin Durant is all the way back.

The 2013-14 NBA MVP and scoring champion played just 27 games for the Thunder last season because of a broken bone in his right foot. Thunder general manager Sam Presti announced Wednesday that, after three procedures, Durant is ready to go. Training camp begins next week.

"He's been playing without restriction, five on five, competing as normal," Presti said.

Durant had surgery in October and returned to play in December with some pain. A screw rubbing against another bone was removed this February. After more pain, Durant consulted with three foot and ankle specialists and had a bone graft in March.

In other basketball news:

■ Jason Richardson is retiring after a 13-year NBA career in which he averaged more than 23 points a game for Golden State 10 years ago.

The 34-year-old swingman signed with the Atlanta Hawks in August. He played 19 games with the Philadelphia 76ers last season, his play shortened by a knee injury.

Richardson announced his retirement on Facebook, a move confirmed by the Hawks on Thursday.

Richardson also played with Phoenix, Orlando and Charlotte. He averaged 17.1 points a game, including three seasons over 20 points.



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Pirates clinch playoff berth

Associated Press

DENVER — The music was turned up maybe a tad bit louder than usual. A couple more handshakes, too. Perhaps a few more selfies.

Other than that — and all the sparkling wine bottles scattered around — this was a rather subdued celebration by the Pittsburgh Pirates.

A quick team toast to mark the occasion after a 13-7 win over the Colorado Rockies on Wednesday night and that was about it. These Pirates have bigger goals than simply getting into the playoffs.

That's old hat by now for a team that just secured its third straight trip to the postseason — not all that long after losing 105 games in 2010.

"We're happy with where we are," said Andrew McCutchen, who donned a post-season hat and shirt to commemorate the moment. "But we still have some work to do."

"We're not done. Got to keep going."

Only fitting that Neil Walker, the kid from Pittsburgh, led the charge with a career-high six RBIs, including a three-run homer.

The Pirates secured at least a wild card as they chase first-place St. Louis in the NL Central. They trail by four games with a home series coming up against the Cardinals.

St. Louis and Pittsburgh are the only major league teams to lock up playoff trips so far.

Walker came up big with a soft, two-run single in the first inning and a towering three-run homer in the third off fill-in starter Christian Bergman (3-1). Walker ended his night with a run-scoring single as part of a six-run ninth to break open a tight game.

Charlie Morton allowed the Rockies to climb within a run after being staked to a 7-1 lead. Joe Blanton (4-0) tossed 1²/₃ scoreless innings.

Starling Marte had three hits, including a two-run double. He didn't have the game-winning hit, though, noteworthy because he's delivered it the previous two seasons when the Pirates locked up a playoff spot.

Just when the Pirates appeared on their way to a rout, things got interesting in the fifth after Morton allowed a solo homer to Corey Dickerson and a three-run shot to Tom Murphy, making it 7-6.

Blanton and the bullpen kept the Rockies at bay. Sean Rodriguez hit a three-run double to spark the big ninth.

Pittsburgh manager Clint Hurdle was proud of the way his team celebrated in a muted manner. The Pirates (92-60) also reached the playoffs in three consecutive years from 1970-72 and 1990-92.

"What it does is it shows me a lot of growth on their part," Hurdle said. "We still have things in front of us we need to take care of."

NASCAR penalizes Bowyer

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Clint Bowyer's slim shot at winning the Sprint Cup championship in Michael Waltrip Racing's final season took a huge hit Wednesday when NASCAR penalized the team for an infraction in the opening playoff race.

NASCAR said the No. 15 team had parts not properly installed on its Toyota during the opening inspection Friday at Chicagoland Speedway.

Bowyer was docked 25 points, dropping him to last in the 16-driver Chase for the Sprint Cup championship field. Crew chief Billy Scott was fined \$75,000 and suspended for the next three races, and placed on probation for six months.

There are two races remaining in the opening round of the Chase before four drivers will be cut from the 16-driver field.

MWR immediately appealed, and NASCAR has asked the appeals officer to expedite the process. The team said in a statement it "respectfully disagrees," with the penalties.

"MWR has made mistakes in the past, but we feel we are correct in this instance," the team said. "We look forward to the opportunity to present our case to the appeals committee and have no further public comment until the process is completed."

Should MWR not succeed in having the penalty reduced or overturned, defending NASCAR champion Kevin Harvick will gain a spot in the standings without having even raced. Harvick was last in the 16-driver field after he crashed Sunday at Chicagoland.

Bowyer was already a longshot to advance out of the first round of the Chase and legitimately contend for the title. He was one of the final drivers to qualify for the Chase in what's been a below-average year for the driver, and he was an uncompetitive 19th in the opening race.

Still, he's been determined to put together a strong close to the season for his team, which learned last month that MWR will close its shop after the Nov. 22 finale. Bowyer has been released from his contract, which had two more years remaining on the deal, and will likely have a new job for 2016 to announce in the next few weeks.

Many of his team members, as well as the majority of MWR's organization, are scrambling to line up jobs as two cars are dropping off the grid next season.

The team has had its issues from its 2007 launch, when owner Michael Waltrip was found to have jet fuel in his engine in the days before the season-opening Daytona 500. The team was also embroiled in a 2013 cheating scandal when NASCAR found it manipulated the end of the regular-season finale in an effort to get Martin Truex Jr. into the Chase.

The sanctions were severe, Truex was kicked out of the Chase field, and sponsor NAPA ultimately left the team. MWR was forced to let go a portion of its workforce and the team has never fully recovered.

Twins near wild card spot

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Phil Hughes pitched five scoreless innings in his return to the rotation, and the Minnesota Twins had rare success against Corey Kluber in a 4-2 victory over the Cleveland Indians on Wednesday night to move within a game of the second AL wild-card spot.

Minnesota trails Houston by a game after the Astros lost to the Angels earlier Wednesday.

Hughes (11-9) allowed four hits and struck out four. Brian Dozier homered and Trevor Plouffe had two doubles, a single and an RBI for the Twins (78-73).

Kluber (8-15) gave up four runs on five hits and struck out six in 3 2-3 innings for the Indians. Cleveland played without star outfielder Michael Brantley, who injured his shoulder while diving for a ball on Tuesday night.

Carlos Santana hit a two-run homer in the ninth for the Indians (74-76), who now trail the Astros by 5 1/2 games with 12 left to play.

Some light rain greeted the teams as the game began, but the forecasts called for heavier storms later in the night that led some to wonder if the game would be finished.

Even more ominous for the Twins was seeing Kluber on the mound. They went 4 for 53 against him in his first two starts at Target Field this season, but matched that hit total in their big four-run fourth inning alone.

Dozier led off the inning with an opposite-field homer, Mauer doubled to tie Bob Allison's franchise record of 42 straight games reaching base and Plouffe sneaked an RBI-double past a diving Jose Ramirez at third base. After Torii Hunter curiously jawed at Kluber after getting hit on the arm to load the bases, Eduardo Escobar broke the game open with a two-run single to make it 4-0.

Last year's AL Cy Young winner left with one out to go in the third. He has now pitched 7 2-3 innings in two starts since returning from a strained right hamstring.

The unexpected outburst backed a sharp outing from Hughes, who was removed from the rotation last week after a shaky return from a back injury. With the Twins trying to chase down their first postseason berth in five years, manager

Paul Molitor didn't think he could afford to let Hughes work through the rust.

Hughes pitched out of the bullpen last weekend, but was re-inserted into the rotation when Tommy Milone complained of shoulder fatigue.

Blue Jays 4, Yankees 0: Russell Martin hit a three-run home run, Marcus Stroman pitched seven strong innings to win his third straight start and host Toronto beat New York, extending its AL East lead to 3 1/2 games.

Martin, who used to play for the Yankees, connected off Andrew Bailey in the seventh. Martin matched his career high for homers with 21 as Toronto took two of three from New York in a showdown between the division's top teams.

Braves 6, Mets 3: Freddie Freeman broke a ninth-inning tie with a three-run homer after driving in two as a pinch hitter in the seventh, and visiting Atlanta stunned New York in the finale of the Mets' rough homestand.

Angels 6, Astros 5: David Freese hit a go-ahead two-run double in a three-run eighth inning to help Los Angeles rally for a win over host Houston to close in on the second AL wild-card spot.

Freese's double sailed just beyond left fielder Colby Rasmus on the warning track and made it 5-4. Carlos Perez's RBI single made it 6-4 and chased Neshek.

Royals 4, Mariners 3 (10): Lorenzo Cain singled home pinch-runner Paulo Orlando in the 10th inning, and host Kansas City rallied past Seattle to close in on their first division title in 30 years.

The victory reduced the Royals' magic number to two for clinching the AL Central crown. They could lock it up Thursday night with another victory over Seattle and a Minnesota loss to Cleveland.

Tigers 7, White Sox 4: Justin Verlander hit 99 mph in evading a bases-loaded jam during his final inning, and Victor Martinez hit his 200th career home run as Detroit beat visiting Chicago.

Verlander (4-8) threw five straight fastballs 98-99 mph in striking out Geovany Soto to end the seventh inning and exited with a four-run lead. He allowed three runs on five hits with eight strikeouts.

Orioles 4, Nationals 3: Manny Machado hit a two-run homer off Max Scherzer with two outs in the seventh

inning and Baltimore rallied past host Washington.

Steve Pearce had a two-run homer and a double for the Orioles, who moved within four games of the final AL wild card spot.

Marlins 4, Phillies 3 (11): Dee Gordon's RBI double with two outs in the bottom of the 11th inning lifted host Miami to a victory over Philadelphia.

Justin Bour hit his 19th home run for the Marlins, who snapped a four-game losing streak.

Rays 6, Red Sox 2: Drew Smyly pitched shutout ball into the seventh inning, and John Jaso's two-run double keyed a three-run eighth to carry Tampa Bay to a win over Boston, keeping the Rays out of last place.

Brewers 4, Cubs 1: Zach Davies allowed two hits over six innings and Martin Maldonado drove in two runs to lead visiting Milwaukee to a victory over Chicago, snapping the Brewers' nine-game losing streak to the Cubs.

Cardinals 10, Reds 2: Matt Carpenter hit a pair of two-run homers, Lance Lynn pitched six scoreless innings and host St. Louis routed Cincinnati.

Padres 5, Giants 4: Jedd Gyorko hit an RBI single to right-center with two outs in the ninth inning to give San Diego a wild win over visiting San Francisco, who dropped seven games behind first-place Los Angeles in the NL West with 11 to go.

Rangers 10, Athletics 3: Elvis Andrus and Adrian Beltre each hit three-run homers in support of Colby Lewis' six strong innings and Texas beat host Oakland to take a three-game lead in the AL West.

Dodgers 4, Diamondbacks 1: Chase Utley hit a leadoff homer and added a tiebreaking RBI double in the eighth inning, and Los Angeles snapped its four-game losing streak by beating visiting Arizona.

Corey Seager had a two-run homer for the Dodgers (86-65), who lowered their magic number for clinching a playoff berth and their third straight NL West title to five.