

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## Bill protects troop pay during shutdown

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Threats of a Defense Department shutdown and freeze on troop paychecks waned this week after a series of moves on Capitol Hill.

A newly introduced House bill would ensure the military keeps getting paid if political divisions scuttle a funding plan for the federal government and force the department and other agencies to close.

Meanwhile, the House and Senate seemed intent on avoiding a shutdown. Both chambers were angling toward votes Wednesday — just hours ahead of a midnight deadline — on a temporary budget fix that could keep the department funded until December.

The DOD has said troops will not get paid and civil-

ians not deemed critical will be furloughed after midnight Wednesday if Democrats and Republicans cannot strike an agreement on an annual federal budget, which was tied up in recent weeks over funding for Planned Parenthood.

“With continued fiscal uncertainty in Washington, these patriots should never have to worry about how they will pay their bills, educate their children, and keep food on the table,” Rep. Randy Forbes, R-Va., said in a released statement on his proposal for military paychecks.

The legislation floated by Forbes, who chairs an Armed Services subcommittee, allows the Defense Department to continue paying active-duty and reserve servicemembers, as well as civilian workers and contractors without a budget. It

aims to avoid widespread civilian furloughs, though leaves the final decision on who stays at work to Defense Secretary Ash Carter.

Congress passed an emergency measure ahead of the last government shutdown in 2013 that protected troops from a pay freeze, but about 350,000 DOD civilians were furloughed for a week before the department took action to bring them back.

The protections for troops could likely be passed quickly as another emergency measure, said Todd Harrison, director of defense budget analysis at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

However, measures keeping civilians and contractors paid during a shutdown might not be popular among fellow lawmakers and fiscal hawks, Harrison

said. “That may be a little further than other folks in Congress are willing to go.”

The bill was still in House committee Tuesday, and there was little chance of it passing Congress before the current federal budget expires at midnight Wednesday, which might cause some white-knuckled anxiety for servicemembers.

But the protections might not be needed this week after all. Lawmakers appeared ready to pass a temporary budget measure before the shutdown deadline that would keep the government open under current funding levels until Dec. 11, averting any freeze on troop pay for now, Harrison said.

“I don’t think they (servicemembers) have anything to worry about,” he said.

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## Marines chided over study of women in combat

BY HEATH DRUZIN

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Advocates for fully integrating the armed forces on Tuesday accused the Marines of cherry-picking data to bolster the case to keep women from certain combat jobs.

The talk comes ahead of the Thursday deadline for military branches to present evidence for exemptions to a new rule set to go into effect Jan. 1. The rule will open all military jobs to women.

“If I had a daughter, based on all of the comments that are being made ... I would question my daughter’s decision to join an organization (the Marine Corps) that was so adamantly opposed to the full equal footing of women,” Marine Lt. Col. Kate

Germano said during a media roundtable Tuesday.

Germano and several other active-duty and retired military officers called for all military positions to be open to women, facing the same standards as men. The group took exception to the findings of a nine-month Marine Corps study, which included elaborate battlefield simulations, aimed at examining the impact of integrating women into combat arms units. The conclusions have been only partially released and have raised the specter of unit cohesion problems and increased rates of injuries for women.

A main point of contention is that the study looked at the average performance of all the women — as opposed to looking at the possibility that some women could meet standards.

“You cannot compare averages; this has to be an individual evaluation process,” retired Army Col. Ellen Haring said at the roundtable.

Germano, who helped dramatically raise female Marine recruit marksmanship scores at Parris Island, S.C., before being removed from her position amid complaints about her aggressive style, said there is an understanding in the Marines that women are expected to fail.

“What it essentially came down to was acceptance of lower expectations,” she said. “What I found was that the leadership was not ready to embrace the changes to make females feel more welcome.”

The Marines did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Gen. Joseph Dunford, who

recently went from commandant of the Marines to chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has reportedly recommended some positions remain closed to women.

The Marines released a truncated, four-page summary of their study earlier this month that painted a grim picture of women in combat units. But less than two weeks later, a much longer summary came out with more nuanced conclusions of the impacts, though the Marines still have not released the full report.

Navy Secretary Ray Mabus, who has oversight over the Marines, has criticized the study. Defense Secretary Ash Carter will make the ultimate decision about what, if any, jobs remain restricted.

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## Obama, Putin meet — but still dug in on Syria

Associated Press

NEW YORK — President Barack Obama and Russian President Vladimir Putin's first formal meeting in more than two years started with an awkward handshake and ended without a breakthrough on Syria, a crisis that has strained their already tense relationship.

On the biggest issue that divides them in Syria — the status of embattled leader Bashar Assad — Obama and Putin left their discussions Monday exactly where they started. The U.S. still insists Syria's future cannot include Assad, while Putin appears to only want to bolster the standing of his longtime ally, casting him as the best defense against Islamic State group militants.

Even so, both leaders appeared interested in whether their meeting on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly could yield progress toward ending Syria's 4½-year civil war. After the 90-minute sit-down at U.N. headquarters, Putin and U.S. officials who described the meeting on Obama's behalf each spoke of the need for cooperation.

"Strange is it may seem, there were many common points," Putin told reporters. "There were also disagreements which we agreed to work together. I hope this work will be constructive."

# US airstrike aids Afghans' efforts to retake Kunduz

BY JOSH SMITH  
AND ZUBAIR BABAKARKHAIL  
*Stars and Stripes*

KABUL, Afghanistan — Afghan President Ashraf Ghani urged citizens Tuesday not to give in to "fear and terror" as government forces sought to dislodge Taliban fighters from the northern city of Kunduz, which they overran a day earlier, dealing a severe blow to the government.

The Afghan counterattack began early Tuesday, with commandos and other reinforcements retaking government buildings that had been captured by insurgents, Ghani said in a televised speech that marked a year since he took office.

"The enemy has sustained heavy casualties," he said, trying to reassure Afghans that government troops are up to the task.

The brazen attack on Kunduz seemingly took government forces by surprise, and after a day of fighting, the Taliban had wrested control of the first major urban center since they were ousted from power in 2001. Even if government forces manage to retake the city, the Taliban's move into Kunduz demonstrated the vulnerabilities of the NATO-trained

Afghan force and raised questions about its ability to keep the insurgency at bay.

Monday's assault — which involved a level of command and control that the guerrillas had not demonstrated in the past — also represents a serious blow to the Ghani administration, which has been trying to engage the Taliban in a peace process aimed at ending the 14-year conflict.

Taliban gunmen remained entrenched in many areas of the city, according to witnesses, a day after hundreds of fighters stormed Kunduz in an attack that forced government police and soldiers to retreat to a nearby airport, sent refugees and foreign aid workers fleeing, and stunned observers.

About 8 a.m., government troops, backed by at least one U.S. airstrike and reinforced by special forces, struck back, retaking a police office and a prison that had been seized the day before by the Taliban, who freed about 600 prisoners, according to the head of the National Directorate of Security, Rahmatullah Nabil.

The airstrike was conducted early Tuesday "to eliminate a threat to coalition and Afghan forces in the area," Col. Brian Tribus, a U.S. military spokesman, said in a statement. He did

not say what the target was.

The guerrillas burned government offices, and reportedly looted some shops, according to witnesses. The Associated Press reported that Taliban gunmen were patrolling city streets on Tuesday, setting up checkpoints, searching for government loyalists and sealing off exit routes for anyone who wished to escape.

Meanwhile, Afghan officials denied reports that their forces had completely abandoned Kunduz, a city of about 300,000 people, by Monday night.

"We still have many areas in our control, and we will soon solve this problem," Defense Ministry spokesman Dawlat Waziri said Tuesday. "We have enough force in Kunduz right now to push back the Taliban."

A police official in Kunduz said only a few key government buildings had been retaken by late afternoon, with operations continuing as new reinforcements took up positions throughout the day.

In the past, the Taliban have limited themselves to trying to occupy smaller towns. Although they have succeeded in overrunning a handful this year, they have been regularly expelled within days in counterattacks by government reinforcements.

## Experts: Trump tax-cut plan could mean trillions in lost revenue

Los Angeles Times

Republican presidential front-runner Donald Trump proposed a major package of tax cuts on Monday, but offered few specifics on how to pay for them — and experts predicted they would cost untold trillions of dollars.

Trump, who has faced pressure to offer a detailed campaign agenda, vowed to simplify the tax system, with four indi-

vidual income tax brackets: 25 percent, 20 percent, 10 percent and 0 percent. The highest of the seven current brackets is 39.6 percent.

Trump would also lower the 35 percent corporate rate to 15 percent. But businesses would lose tax breaks on earnings overseas and various unidentified "loopholes that cater to special interests."

Millions of individuals who

earn less than \$25,000 a year, or couples who make less than \$50,000, would no longer pay income tax, Trump said.

Trump, the billionaire real estate developer, acknowledged that tax rates on the wealthy would drop, but said his plan would result in a vastly simpler tax code.

"My returns go up to the ceiling and beyond, which is ridiculous," he told reporters at a news

conference in front of the lobby escalator at Trump Tower in Manhattan.

Beyond his boast, though, how his plan would accomplish any of his predictions remained murky. Tax experts said it would cost the government trillions of dollars in lost revenue. How many trillions is unknown, they said, because of Trump's lack of detail on which tax breaks he would wipe out.



# Falcons, Panthers top surprising South

Associated Press

Move over, NFC West. The NFC South is No. 1.

Seven wins were good enough to win the South last year when Carolina beat Atlanta in a winner-take-all regular season finale to clinch the title at 7-8-1.

Now, both teams are 3-0. It's the only division with two undefeated teams.

The natural overreaction is to call the NFC South the best in football. But not so fast.

The Falcons rallied for a 39-28 win over Dallas on Sunday to become the first team in NFL history to start 3-0 after trailing in the fourth quarter of each game. But they're a couple plays away from 1-2.

Let's see how well Atlanta fares against teams outside the NFC East. The Falcons beat Philadelphia because Cody Parkey missed a field goal late in the fourth quarter. They beat the New York Giants after a costly fumble in the red zone by Eli Manning. They knocked off the Cowboys without Tony Romo and Dez Bryant.

New coach Dan Quinn might be the early favorite to win the Coach of the Year Award and Julio Jones looks unstoppable, but these Falcons still have a way to go to compare to the Dirty Birds.

As for the Panthers, they beat the Jaguars (1-2), Texans (1-2) and Saints (0-3) without Drew Brees. Their schedule gets tougher with four of the next five games against Seattle, Indianapolis, Green Bay and the Eagles.

The Falcons and Panthers are certainly the class of their division and one of them should win it with double-

digit victories instead of seven. But, they've still got to prove they can play with teams like Green Bay (2-0), Arizona (3-0) and even Seattle (1-2).

Here are other overreactions from Week 3:

**Overreaction:** The Steelers can't win without Big Ben. A knee injury will force Pittsburgh (2-1) to play several games without Ben Roethlisberger.

**Realistic reaction:** Michael Vick has won plenty of games in the NFL, and he has plenty of talent around to help. Antonio Brown and Le'Veon Bell are arguably the best receiver-runner combo in the NFL. Vick still has a strong arm, and he's still elusive, even at 35 years old.

**Overreaction:** Same old Jets. They fell behind the hapless Eagles 24-0 before rallying only to fall short in a 24-17 loss.

**Realistic reaction:** It was a classic trap game for New York. The Jets (2-1) had a short week coming off a Monday night win at Indianapolis with a trip to London coming up. They faced a nonconference team desperate to save its season, setting them up for a letdown.

**Overreaction:** The Ravens are done. They blew a fourth-quarter lead and fell to 0-3 with a 28-24 loss at home to Cincinnati (3-0).

**Realistic reaction:** It will be a tough road for Baltimore, which had been the only existing team to never lose its first three games. But the Ravens aren't this bad. They had a chance to win each game, and their upcoming schedule is favorable.

**Overreaction:** Derek Carr is the next Rich Gannon. A week after throwing for 351 yards and three TDs in a win

over Baltimore, Carr had 314 yards passing and two TDs against Cleveland while leading Oakland (2-1) to its first road win since 2013.

**Realistic reaction:** Carr is playing well, but Gannon was an NFL MVP who led the team to a Super Bowl. Carr is already better than Terrelle Pryor and JaMarcus Russell, though.

**Overreaction:** Gary Kubiak is a genius. The Broncos are 3-0, their defense is strong and Peyton Manning is playing like his old self.

**Realistic reaction:** The Broncos beat teams who are a combined 1-7. They've always won games they should win. It's the tough games against playoff teams that give them trouble.

**Overreaction:** Time to jump off the Cowboys' bandwagon. Dallas blew three 14-point leads in a loss to Atlanta.

**Realistic reaction:** If Brandon Weeden leads the Cowboys to 28 points every week, they'll make the playoffs without Tony Romo and Dez Bryant.

**Overreaction:** The AFC South is the NFC South. The Colts, Jaguars, Texans and Titans are tied at 1-2.

**Realistic reaction:** Andrew Luck is 17-2 within the division so the Colts are a good bet to reach 9-7.

**Overreaction:** Bench Colin Kaepernick. The 49ers lost 47-7 to Arizona, and Kaepernick threw four interceptions, including two returned for touchdowns.

**Realistic reaction:** Get serious. Blaine Gabbert was 5-22 in Jacksonville. Kaepernick led the 49ers to the NFC championship game twice in three seasons.

# Seattle hopes Lynch ready Rodgers, Packers overwhelm Chiefs

Associated Press

RENTON, Wash. — The Seattle Seahawks found a tonic for their 0-2 start, sparked by the likes of Tyler Lockett and Jimmy Graham and the return of Kam Chancellor making their defense whole again.

But just as it appears the Seahawks are ready to move forward in overcoming their difficult start, a new concern has emerged with the health of running back Marshawn Lynch.

The Seahawks finally got their first win thanks to a dominating performance against the undermanned Chicago Bears on Sunday in a 26-0 shutout, but there are worries about Lynch and his injuries.

Already dealing with a sore back and neck, and a calf injury that limited him in practice last week, Lynch suffered a hamstring injury that caused him to miss the second half of Sunday's victory. The hamstring problem capped a strange day for Lynch, who struggled getting himself ready for the game to begin with and didn't come out of the locker room until midway through the first half.

Seattle coach Pete Carroll said Lynch underwent an MRI last week on his sore calf, but was scheduled to have another MRI on Monday after the hamstring problem popped up during Sunday's game. Lynch felt his hamstring after catching a 9-yard pass to convert a fourth-and-1 on the final drive of the first half. He did not play the rest of the game.

Carroll said the extra day this week, with Seattle not playing until next Monday night against Detroit, could be beneficial in Lynch's recovery. If Lynch can't play against Detroit, it would be just the second game he's missed since joining the Seahawks early in the 2010 season. Lynch missed a 2011 game at Cleveland when

his back stiffened up just before kick-off. While he may not have started every game in his Seattle tenure, Lynch has played in every other one.

"We've just got to wait and see. We've got a couple of days here to figure it out," Carroll said.

With Lynch out, Thomas Rawls became a surprising revelation. The undrafted rookie from Central Michigan rushed for 104 yards on 16 carries, with 98 of those coming in the second half. He became the first Seattle running back other than Lynch to top the 100-yard mark since Robert Turbin in Week 14 of the 2012 season against Arizona.

Rawls was a player Carroll wanted and the Seahawks considered taking on the final day of the draft. Instead, Seattle was able to get him as a free agent and his spot on the roster was secure when former second-round pick Christine Michael was traded to Dallas after the final pre-season game.

"He's got his own style. He's very aggressive. He was looking for hits downfield. He's not looking to make guys miss him as much as he's looking to run right at you," Carroll said. "Through the line of scrimmage he's got nice wiggle and all of that but he's got an attitude that he's going to let you know he's coming."

The Seahawks went with Rawls instead of veteran Fred Jackson as their primary ball carrier with Lynch out. Carroll said that's because of Jackson's skill as a pass blocker and receiver and Seattle's plan to use him on third downs.

"We're trying to develop these guys and develop their roles a little bit and we were excited to see Thomas and know that Fred is going to be a third-down guy for us and we covet what he can do there," Carroll said.

Associated Press

GREEN BAY, Wis. — Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers thinks his offense is just getting started.

Just imagine what he could accomplish with a full complement of healthy weapons.

Rodgers dissected another defense in painstakingly methodical fashion, throwing for 333 yards and five touchdowns in Green Bay's 38-28 win on Monday night over the Kansas City Chiefs.

"I just think we're scratching the surface a little bit," Rodgers said.

Randall Cobb, who is playing while recovering from a sprained right shoulder, had three touchdown catches. James Jones, who was signed before the season to replace injured veteran Jordy Nelson, had seven catches for 139 yards.

The Packers (3-0) have done most of their damage the last two games with wideout Davante Adams sidelined by a sprained ankle.

The offense is still churning out points. "Aaron is a phenomenal player ... and playing great football," McCarthy said with a laugh. "I'll just keep saying it."

Rodgers gives credit to his offensive line. He was sacked once and was under duress for spurts from Chiefs pressure.

But Rodgers, who finished 24-for-35, again burned a secondary on free-play situations following defensive penalties. The longest gain came on a 52-yard catch in the fourth quarter by Jones following an offside penalty, setting up Cobb's

third touchdown catch.

"His ability to really process information is as good as I've ever been around," McCarthy said about Rodgers.

The Chiefs (1-2) were on alert for Rodgers' tendency to take advantage of free plays. They still got beat.

Jamaal Charles rushed for three touchdowns for Kansas City. His 7-yard TD with 1:25 left got the Chiefs within 10. But the end result was the same for Kansas City, which lost its second straight.

Despite the three touchdown runs, the Packers prevented Charles from making explosive plays, limiting him to 49 yards on 11 carries.

Up front, Green Bay controlled the line of scrimmage when it counted and got to Alex Smith for seven sacks.

Jamaal Charles rushed for three touchdowns for Kansas City (1-2), which followed its stunning, last-minute loss at home to Denver with a respectable fourth-quarter effort. Charles' 7-yard TD with 1:25 left got the Chiefs within 10. But the end result was the same for Kansas City, which lost its second straight.

"Green Bay did a nice job," said a curt Chiefs coach Andy Reid.

Quarterback Alex Smith finished 24 of 40 for 290 yards and a touchdown. But the first half was brutal, when Smith was 2 of 7 for 39 yards.

"I'll watch the tape on that," he said when asked to evaluate Smith's night. "That's my responsibility, though, whatever, the whole thing here, offensively and defensively. It's my responsibility."



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# Jays rally late, top Orioles

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — As they charge toward their first AL East title in 22 years, the Toronto Blue Jays are finding new and interesting ways to win.

A team that has hit 223 home runs used a 60-foot dribbler to beat the Baltimore Orioles 4-3 Monday night.

Toronto's fifth straight victory, coupled with the Yankees' loss to Boston, reduced the Blue Jays' magic number for securing the division crown to two.

After scoring twice in the eighth to pull even, the Blue Jays got the decisive run against Brad Brach (5-3) in the ninth. Dione Navarro led off with a single and was replaced by pinch-runner Dalton Pompey, who advanced on a single. After a sacrifice moved the runners up, Pompey scored when Justin Smoak hit a slow roller to first and Chris Davis threw wildly to the plate.

"I hit it off my thumbs," Smoak said. "Looking for a changeup, got a heater. That can happen."

The Blue Jays did get a home run — from Edwin Encarnacion — but that wasn't much of a factor in the Blue Jays' 35th comeback victory of the year.

"We can win any way possible," Smoak said. "This team is unbelievable. Guys fight to the end."

Brett Cecil (5-5) pitched one inning and Roberto Osuna got two outs for his 20th save.

Ryan Flaherty hit a three-run homer for the Orioles, who have lost four straight. Toronto starter Marco Estrada, Cecil and Osuna retired the last 17 Baltimore batters in order.

Down 3-1, the Blue Jays rallied in the eighth against Chris Tillman and All-Star reliever Darren O'Day. Ryan Goins led off with a single and advanced on a ground-out before O'Day entered and gave up RBI

singles to Ben Revere and Jose Bautista.

**Cardinals 3, Pirates 0:** Matt Carpenter raced home to break a scoreless tie in the ninth inning when two Pittsburgh outfielders mishandled Jon Jay's single, and Mark Reynolds followed with a two-run homer to lift visiting St. Louis to a win.

The Cardinals reduced their magic number to clinch a third straight NL Central title to two after getting to Pittsburgh closer Mark Melancon (3-2).

**Giants 3, Dodgers 2 (12):** At San Francisco, Zack Greinke and NL West-leading Los Angeles were denied a play-off-clinching party for at least another day, losing to World Series champion San Francisco on pinch-hitter Alejandro De Aza's sacrifice fly.

**Angels 5, Athletics 4:** Pinch-hitter David Murphy drove a bases-loaded single into left field to end it, and host Los Angeles kept the pressure on in the AL wild-card race with its sixth consecutive victory, beating Oakland.

Albert Pujols tied it with his 558th career homer in the sixth inning for the Angels, who have won nine of 11 during their majors-best 17-8 performance in September.

**Tigers 7, Rangers 4:** Justin Verlander allowed one run in six innings, and Tyler Collins' three-run home run sparked a five-run fifth inning as visiting Detroit handed Texas its third straight loss.

Verlander (5-8) gave up a leadoff homer to former Detroit teammate Prince Fielder in the fourth. He allowed six hits and walked two while striking out five.

**Astros 3, Mariners 2:** Chris Carter drove in the go-ahead run with his team's third solo homer, rookie Lance McCullers pitched effectively into the seventh inning and visiting Houston enhanced its position in a crowded AL playoff race with its win over Seattle.

Houston moved with 1½ games of first-place Texas in the AL West and main-

tained its slim lead in the chase for the second wild card.

**Twins 4, Indians 2:** Emergency starter Tommy Milone replaced an ill Phil Hughes and pitched visiting Minnesota to a big win for its wild-card chances.

Hughes, one of several Twins players hit with a virus that has spread throughout the team, was scratched about 4 hours before the game.

**Cubs 1, Royals 0 (11):** Pinch-hitter Chris Denorfia led off the 11th inning with a home run, lifting host Chicago.

Denorfia drove the first pitch from Miguel Almonte (0-2) into the left-field bleacher for the Cubs' major league-leading 13th walk-off victory of the season.

**Red Sox 5, Yankees 1:** Eduardo Rodriguez became the franchise's first rookie left-hander to win 10 games in 43 years, and visiting Boston slowed New York's march toward a postseason berth. Eduardo Rodriguez (10-6) pitched six innings while supplanting John Curtis, who went 11-8 in 1972, as the most recent Boston rookie lefty to reach 10 wins.

**Nationals 5, Reds 1:** On another eventful afternoon at Nationals Park, Washington right-hander Max Scherzer came within five outs of his second no-hitter of the season hours after closer Jonathan Papelbon was suspended for fighting with Bryce Harper a day earlier.

Scherzer (13-12) did not allow a hit until Tucker Barnhart singled to left field on a 1-2 count with one out in the eighth.

Papelbon, meanwhile, is done for the season: He will miss four games because he was suspended by the Nationals for the episode in which he grabbed Harper's throat, and the other three games because he dropped his appeal of a Major League Baseball ban for throwing at an opponent's head last week.

# SMU men banned from postseason, Brown suspended

Associated Press

DALLAS — The NCAA banned the SMU men's basketball team from postseason play Tuesday and suspended veteran coach Larry Brown for nine games after concluding that he lied to investigators, ignored academic fraud and fell far short of expectations in leading his staff when it came to compliance.

In a scathing report, the NCAA noted that Brown had previously coached at Kansas and UCLA yet made "choices against his better judgment when it came to compliance issues" at SMU, where he is preparing for his fourth season.

"These choices included not reporting possible violations in his program, initially lying to the enforcement staff during the investigation and providing no specific guidance to his staff on rules compliance," the NCAA said in punishing SMU for its 10th major infractions case over the years.

SMU did not immediately comment on the findings, which it can appeal.

The NCAA said Brown had acknowledged "his failed judgment" during a hearing on the case and that it found him "reflective and remorseful."

Brown led Kansas to the 1988 national championship before returning to the NBA as San Antonio's coach. But the Jayhawks were banned from postseason play the next season and placed on probation for recruiting violations during Brown's tenure.

# Ohio State, others try to keep season perfect

Associated Press

Seventeen teams have made it through the first third of their schedules with 4-0 records. Here are five with shots to make it unbeaten through the regular season and five that probably will have their bubbles burst.

## The ones with a chance:

### OHIO STATE

**Why Buckeyes keep winning:** The defending national champions, winners of 17 straight, are the most talented team in the country.

**Why they might not:** If they don't shore up some inconsistencies on offense.

**Next tough test:** Nov. 21 vs. Michigan State.

**Star, so far:** Adolphus Washington has played the best on a defensive line stocked with NFL talent.

### MISSISSIPPI

**Why Rebels keep winning:** Chad Kelly keeps chucking it for 300 yards a game to a wealth of receivers.

**Why they might not:** If they're as flat as they were against Vanderbilt, they won't make it through the SEC unscathed.

**Next tough test:** This week at Florida.

**Star, so far:** Kelly, the first-year starter, has thrown 10 TD passes.

### UTAH

**Why Utes keep winning:** A favorable

schedule, and fourth-year starting QB Travis Wilson keeps the offense moving like it did against Oregon.

**Why they might not:** The Utes' defense is stout up front, but the secondary is vulnerable to the big play.

**Next tough test:** Oct. 10 vs. California.

**Star, so far:** Wilson has completed 68 percent of his passes and thrown for 4 TDs and run for 67 yards a game and 3 TDs.

### NOTRE DAME

**Why Irish keep winning:** The replacements for the long list of injured players keep performing at a high level, particularly QB DeShone Kizer.

**Why they might not:** More injuries, and if the secondary keeps giving up big plays.

**Next tough test:** This week at Clemson.

**Star, so far:** Kizer, who has started the last four games after being the No. 3 QB in the spring, is hitting 68 percent of his passes with 5 TDs against 2 picks.

### GEORGIA

**Why Bulldogs keep winning:** Greyson Lambert comes anywhere close to matching his interception-free, 77-percent passing.

**Why they might not:** The defense has had a tendency to lose focus at times, and even a brief letdown gets you beat in the SEC.

**Next tough test:** This week vs. Alabama.

**Star, so far:** There are several to choose from, but RB Nick Chubb is averaging 150 yards a game and has gone over 100 in 12 straight games.

## Some teams bound to get beat:

### INDIANA

**When it could happen:** This week against Ohio State.

**Why:** The defense has given up 499 yards a game against weak opposition.

**Why the Hoosiers might keep winning:** QB Nate Sudfeld maintains his 7-to-1 TD-to-interception ratio.

**Star, so far:** UAB transfer Jordan Howard is running for 169 yards a game.

### NORTH CAROLINA STATE

**When it could happen:** This week against Louisville.

**Why:** The record is built against over-matched competition. The Wolfpack were 4-0 at time this last year before going 3-5 in the ACC.

**Why the Wolfpack might keep winning:** The rushing game keeps generating 250 yards a game and the defense holds steady.

**Star, so far:** Matt Dayes has run for 100-plus yards in all four games.

### UCLA

**When it could happen:** Oct. 15 at Stanford.

**Why:** Bruins have to go to Utah in November, and as good as QB Josh Rosen

has been, he's still a freshman, and he won't navigate the Pac-12 without throwing in a klunker somewhere.

**Why the Bruins might keep winning:** Rosen keeps growing and the defense is able to manage without Myles Jack.

**Star, so far:** Except for his struggles against BYU, Rosen has lived up to his five-star recruiting rating.

### MICHIGAN STATE

**When it could happen:** Oct. 17 at Michigan.

**Why:** The injury list seems to get longer by the week, and pass defense is a major concern.

**Why the Spartans might keep winning:** The Connor Cook-led offense keeps scoring 30-plus points a game.

**Star, so far:** WR Aaron Burbridge has more than twice as many catches (24) as the team's No. 2 receiver.

### TCU

**When it could happen:** Nov. 7 at Oklahoma State.

**Why:** The defense isn't as good as expected, and it's playing in a conference whose calling card is high-scoring offenses.

**Why the Horned Frogs might keep winning:** QB Trevone Boykin and WR Josh Doctson keep putting up crazy numbers.

**Star, so far:** Doctson already has 35 catches, most of any receiver at a Power Five school, and he already has six TDs.