

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Flooding widens as Florence heads NE

Associated Press

WILMINGTON, N.C. — Emergency workers delivered truckloads of food and water to Wilmington, a city of 120,000 people cut off from the rest of the state by Florence's still-rising floodwaters, as helicopters and boats pulled people from homes swamped by swollen rivers.

The deadly storm still had abundant rain and top winds of about 30 mph early Monday, and forecasters said it was expected to gradually pick up forward speed and complete a big turn toward the Northeast, which is in for as much as 6 inches of rain.

Flooding worries increased in West Virginia and Virginia, where roads were closed and power outages were on the rise. About 500,000 homes and businesses were in the dark.

In some places, the rain stopped after Florence moved on and the sun peeked through, but North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper urged residents who were evacuated from the hardest-hit areas to stay away because of closed roads and flooding. "There's too much going on," he said.

The death toll climbed to 18 as authorities found the body of a 1-year-old boy who was swept away after his mother drove into floodwaters and lost her grip on him while trying to get back to dry land.

Florence was still massive despite being downgraded to a tropical depression from a once-fearsome Category 4 hurricane. Radar showed parts of the sprawling storm over six states, with North and South Carolina in the bull's-eye.

North Carolina emergency

response officials tweeted that 23 truckloads of military meals and bottled water were delivered overnight to Wilmington, the state's eighth-largest city.

Signs on a flooded highway leading out of town said "ROAD CLOSED," and many streets that weren't flooded were blocked by fallen timber. The smell of cracked pine trees wafted through hard-hit neighborhoods.

Residents waited for hours outside stores and restaurants for water and other basic necessities. Police guarded the door of one store, and only 10 people were allowed inside at a time.

County commission Chairman Woody White said officials were planning for food and water to be flown into the coastal city, located on a peninsula with the rising Cape Fear River to the west and more water to the east.

Pentagon sends about 13K troops

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon has sent some 13,000 servicemembers to areas affected by Hurricane Florence in North and South Carolina, where they are charged with search and rescue and other operations as flooding worsened throughout the region Monday.

National Guard members from both states have conducted more than 60 operations since the deadly storm made landfall as a Category 1 hurricane Friday, according to U.S. Northern Command.

NATO base in Kabul building new structures

BY CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

Nearly 17 years after the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan, the international coalition in Kabul is putting down new roots with hardened permanent structures to replace temporary ones at its headquarters in the increasingly violent capital.

A contract to build a massive, concrete command-and-control center on the compound is currently out to bid, officials there said last week.

Some base personnel in June said construction of the planned three-story, 120,000-square-foot concrete building would require hundreds of people living and working in temporary structures at the headquarters to relocate to other nearby

bases.

The complex is expected to have more than 800 workspaces, according to a NATO procurement document. Contracting rules bar release of further details during the bidding and design phase, officials said.

The plans follow completion earlier this summer of a permanent passenger terminal and a control tower at the compound's helicopter landing zone, which, until a few years ago, was still a soccer field. An uptick in air traffic at the Resolute Support headquarters, the result of decreasing security in the capital, drove the effort.

"This project was accomplished rapidly ... due to the significant increase of heli-

copter flights at RS HQ, which made the previous provisional arrangements untenable," the NATO Support and Procurement Agency said in a July statement about the tower and the terminal.

Helicopter commutes to and from NATO's downtown headquarters have become common in recent years as bombings and ambushes have made road travel dangerous for coalition troops and officials, the Defense Department's lead inspector general for its Afghanistan mission said in a May report.

Civilian personnel at the U.S. Embassy, which adjoins the NATO compound, are forbidden to travel the short distance to Kabul International Airport by road, John F. Sopko, special

inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction, said earlier this year.

The increased reliance on air travel comes with a cost. Flight fees for each 3-mile trip to the airport were expected to increase from \$1,350 to \$2,250, Sopko said.

Upgrades to the landing zone costing about \$760,000 and funded by NATO members were completed in July, Resolute Support officials said.

Officials formally opened the new passenger terminal in June. The new air control tower, completed in July, gives air controllers a 360-degree view of the landing zone and the surrounding airspace, improving air traffic safety, NATO said.

Taliban attacks kill Afghan security forces

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — The Taliban launched multiple attacks on Afghan checkpoints as well as police and military bases in different parts of the country, killing at least 27 members of the security forces, Afghan officials said Monday.

The attacks and the high casualty toll underscore the difficulties Afghan forces face in trying to secure the country on their own. The Afghan forces have struggled to combat both the Taliban and an Islamic State affiliate since the U.S. and NATO formally ended their combat mission in the country in 2014.

In western Farah province, attacks began Sunday night and killed at least 17 members of the security forces. Fared Bakhtawer, head of the provincial council, said the Tal-

iban attacked police checkpoints across the province and around the provincial capital.

A group of Taliban fighters first targeted checkpoints in the district of Push Rod, where 10 policemen died. Another attack struck in Bala Buluk district, where seven were killed and at least three others were abducted by the insurgents. Separately, also in Bala Buluk, six policemen surrendered to the Taliban after an intense battle.

There also were attacks elsewhere in Farah, but Bakhtawer couldn't provide any casualty figures, pending more detailed reports.

In northwestern Badghis province, five officers were killed, including Abdul Hakim, the police commander of a reserve unit, in an attack that took place Monday morning near the provincial capital of

Qala-i-Now.

Jamshid Shahabi, spokesman for the Badghis governor, said about 22 Taliban fighters were killed and 16 others were wounded during the gunbattle there.

In northern Baghlan province, the Taliban on Monday attacked a joint army and police base, killing three army officers and two police officers, said Gen. Ekramuddin Serih, the provincial police chief. Four other members of the security forces were wounded in the attack, which took place in the Baghlani Markazi district, he said.

"The base is under the control of the Afghan security forces now, and reinforcements have also been sent to the district," he said. The police chief added that at least 20 Taliban were killed or wounded in the fighting.

Last stand: Syria's rebel Idlib girds for losing battle

Associated Press

BEIRUT — They dug trenches around towns, reinforced caves for cover and put sandbags around their positions. They issued calls to arms, urging young men to join in the defense of Idlib, the Syrian province where opposition fighters expect to make their last stand against Russia- and Iran-backed government troops they have fought for years.

This time, it's "surrender or die."

As the decisive stand for their last stronghold looms, this motley crew of tens of thousands of opposition fighters, including some of the world's most radical groups, is looking for ways to salvage whatever is possible of an armed rebellion that at one point in the seven-year conflict controlled more than half of the country.

In its last chapter, just as it has throughout the long, bloody war, the Syrian rebellion's fate lies in foreign hands. This time, the splintered and diverse rebels have only Turkey.

"The whole world gave up on us, but Turkey will not," said

Capt. Najib al-Mustafa, spokesman for the Turkish-backed umbrella group known as the National Front for Liberation.

Ankara has appealed to Russia and Iran, its uneasy negotiating partners, for a diplomatic resolution to the ticking bomb. At the same time, it has sent reinforcements of its troops ringing Idlib, a move designed to ward off a ground assault, at least for now.

A wide offensive is likely only after a green light from Russia. But delicate diplomatic moves are at work.

Moscow is keen on strengthening ties with Turkey at a time when Ankara's relations are at their lowest with the U.S. Turkey, by calling on the U.S. and Europe for support, seems to be playing on that interest to pressure Russia to accept its proposals for a solution on Idlib that avoids an attack.

On Monday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was to meet for the second time in 10 days with Russian President Vladimir Putin, this time in Sochi, Russia.

Police: Border agent confessed to killings

From staff and wire reports

LAREDO, Texas — A U.S. Border Patrol supervisor who confessed to killing four women and assaulting a fifth who managed to escape remained in jail Monday, police said in court records.

Juan David Ortiz is being held in Laredo on \$2.5 million bond on four counts of murder, aggravated assault with a deadly weapon and unlawful restraint.

According to affidavits, Ortiz, 35, "provided a voluntary verbal confession" early Saturday in the deaths of the women.

It all began with the discovery Sept. 4 of the body of Melissa Ramirez, 29. According to court records, Ortiz said he killed Ramirez a day earlier. Like the other victims, Ramirez was shot in the head and left in a road in rural northwest Webb County.

A second victim, Claudine Anne Luera, 42, was found shot and left in the road Thursday morning, badly injured but still alive, according to the affidavit. The mother of five died at a hospital later that day.

On Friday, according to the affidavit, Ortiz picked up a woman named Erika Pena. She told police she struggled with Ortiz inside his truck, where he pointed a pistol at her, but that she was able to flee. She made it to a gas station where she found a state trooper whom she asked for help.

According to the affidavit, Ortiz told investigators that after Pena ran off, he picked up his last two victims, whose identities have not yet been released by authorities.

For nearly eight years, Ortiz served as a corpsman in the U.S. Navy at installations in Texas and California, according to his service record.

Ortiz spent his final year in the Navy at Fort Sam Houston's Navy Medical Training Support Center. It is the administrative arm of the Navy's medical programs in the San Antonio area.

He left the Navy in May 2009 at the rank of petty officer 2nd class. His awards and decorations include the Joint Meritorious Unit Award, National Defense Service Medal and the Rifle Marksmanship Ribbon.

Bill seeks full Arlington honors to enlisted MOH recipients and POWs

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

A House bill seeks to afford enlisted Medal of Honor recipients and former prisoners of war the right to be buried with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery.

Those honors, which include an escort and a horse-drawn caisson, are currently reserved only for officers and service-members killed in action.

The Full Military Honors Act of 2018 was introduced to the House Armed Services Committee Sept. 7 by Reps. Mike Bishop, R-Mich.; Sam Johnson, R-Texas; and Tim Walz, D-Minn. The lawmakers want to bring the legislation before the full chamber this fall.

"Medal of Honor recipients and POWs have earned and deserve nothing less than full military honors," Walz said in a statement. "As a retired enlisted soldier of 24 years, I'm proud to join in introducing the Full Military Honors Act. To help ensure we honor the sacrifices these heroes and their families have made for our country, we must pass it without delay."

Staffers in Bishop's office said they learned of the issue earlier this year after the family of Robert Fletcher — a former Korean War POW — spoke out against the policy. Fletcher, a Buffalo Soldier and Michigan native, died Feb. 12 and was interred at Arlington on June 4.

"America's POWs and Medal of Honor recipients have sacrificed immeasurably in service to the United States — regardless of their rank ..." Bishop said in the statement. "This has been an issue for too long, and my legislation will ensure those who have gone above and beyond the call of duty are provided the full military honors they have earned for their end of life ceremonies."

The issue resonated with Johnson, an Air Force veteran who was shot down over North Vietnam in 1966 and held captive for nearly seven years.

"My fellow POWs who served honorably demonstrated the ut-

most patriotism, but not all of them were eligible for full military honors at their burial, simply due to their rank," he said in the statement. "I believe this is wrong. ANY veteran who served honorably as a Prisoner of War or whose actions earned them the Medal of Honor has already demonstrated extraordinary dedication to defending Freedom. In return, they deserve to have the country they fought for bestow full military honors if they are eligible to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery."

Burial eligibility for former POWs and Medal of Honor recipients is established by the Code of Federal Regulations, Arlington officials said. Any former POW who served honorably and died on or after Nov. 30, 1993, can be buried in-ground there. It also allows burial for recipients of the Medal of Honor, the Distinguished Service Cross, the Air Force Cross, the Navy Cross, the Distinguished Service Medal, the Silver Star or the Purple Heart.

A Defense Department instruction sets a standardized baseline of services, including a two-person uniformed detail, the playing of taps, the folding of the flag and its presentation to the family of the deceased, Arlington officials said. Commissioned officers, warrant officers and senior noncommissioned officers (pay grade E-9) who are eligible for burial at Arlington are eligible for "full honors," which includes an additional escort, a marching element, a band and the horse-drawn caisson.

Arlington officials said earlier this year they can barely keep up with the current demand for full-honors burials.

There were 5,071 former POWs in the U.S. as of August 2017, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs. However, that number includes only those in the VA system. There are 72 living Medal of Honor recipients, according to the Congressional Medal of Honor Association.

Mattis rips Russia's Macedonia meddling

Associated Press

SKOPJE, Macedonia — Defense Secretary Jim Mattis on Monday condemned Russia's efforts to use its money and influence to build opposition to an upcoming vote that could pave the way for Macedonia to join NATO, a move Moscow opposes.

Mattis told reporters traveling with him to Skopje that there is "no doubt" that Moscow has been funding pro-Russia groups to defeat the referendum on a name change later this month.

"They have transferred money, and they're also conducting broader influence campaigns," Mattis said. "We ought to leave the Macedonian people to make up their own minds."

Macedonians will vote Sept. 30 on whether to approve the name North Macedonia in

an effort to placate Greece, which for years has blocked Macedonia's path to NATO and the European Union. But any progress toward NATO membership by the Balkan nation is strongly opposed by Russia, which doesn't want the alliance to expand to areas formerly under Moscow's influence.

Mattis, speaking after a meeting with Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, made no mention of Russia but announced the U.S. plans to expand its cybersecurity cooperation with Macedonia "to thwart malicious cyberactivity that threatens our democracies." Zaev predicted Macedonians will vote in favor of the name change and thus the move into NATO.

A small, pro-Russia oppositional party, Unique Macedonia, strongly criticized Mattis' remarks on Moscow's efforts to defeat the referendum.

Gen. Abrams nominated to be USFK commander

BY KIM GAMEL
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — Gen. Robert Abrams, the head of U.S. Army Forces Command, has been nominated to be the next commander of U.S. Forces Korea, according to the Senate Armed Services Committee.

If confirmed, Abrams would replace Gen. Vincent Brooks to lead about 28,500 American troops based in South Korea as Seoul and Washington are engaged in diplomatic efforts to persuade the North to give up its nuclear weapons.

The four-star general, also known by his nickname, Abe, was listed as the nominee to be the commander of USFK as well as the United Nations Command and the Combined Forces Command on the Senate Armed Services Committee website. It said he will face

a confirmation hearing on Sept. 25.

Brooks has presided over U.S. military efforts in South Korea since April 2016, a period that has seen tensions with the North that raised fears of a nuclear war before ebbing after the North agreed this year to engage in diplomacy.

Abrams currently leads FORSCOM, which is based at Fort Bragg, N.C., and is the largest organization in the Army. He also played a key role in the court-martial of Pvt. Bowe Bergdahl, the former Taliban captive who pleaded guilty to desertion and misbehavior charges last year.

Abrams, the convening authority in the proceedings, approved the judge's decision to spare Bergdahl prison time but to sentence him to forfeit \$10,000 in pay, a drop in rank and a dishonorable discharge.

Embattled Kavanaugh willing to testify

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh said Monday he was willing to speak to a Senate panel to “refute” an allegation he sexually assaulted a woman while in high school after his accuser said via her attorney that she was ready to testify in public.

Kavanaugh released a new statement calling the allegation “completely false” and saying he “had no idea who was making this accusation until she identified herself” on Sunday to *The Washington Post*.

“I am willing to talk to the Senate Judiciary Committee in any way the Committee deems appropriate to refute this false allegation, from 36 years ago, and defend my integrity,” Kavanaugh said.

Kavanaugh, meanwhile, was seen arriving at the White House late Monday morning. There was no immediate explanation of the reason for his visit.

He had been on a smooth confirmation track, but the new allegations have roiled that process. Republican senators have expressed concern over a woman’s private-turned-public allegation that a drunken Kavanaugh groped her and tried to take off her clothes at a party when they were teenagers.

Debra S. Katz, the attorney for the woman, Christine Blasey Ford, said her client considered the incident to be an attempted rape.

“She believes that if were not for the severe intoxication of Brett Kavanaugh, she would have been raped,” Katz told

NBC’s “Today.”

Kavanaugh, 53, “categorically and unequivocally” denied the allegations when they came out anonymously last week.

“This has not changed,” said White House spokesman Kerri Kupec on Monday. “Judge Kavanaugh and the White House both stand by that statement.”

Still, White House counselor Kellyanne Conway said of Ford: “She should not be insulted. She should not be ignored. She should testify under oath and she should do it on Capitol Hill.”

Conway, who said she had discussed the situation with President Donald Trump, said that both Ford and Kavanaugh should testify, but made clear it was up to the Judiciary Committee. She said Sen. Lindsey

Graham, R-S.C., had told her it could happen as soon as Tuesday and the White House will “respect the process.”

Stressing that Kavanaugh already had testified and had undergone FBI background checks, Conway said, “I think you have to weigh this testimonial evidence from Dr. Ford and Judge Kavanaugh along with the considerable body of evidence that is already there about the judge’s temperament and qualifications and character.”

In morning television interviews, Katz said her client was willing to tell her story in public to the Judiciary panel, although no lawmakers or their aides had yet contacted her. Katz also denied that Ford, a Democrat, is politically motivated.

GOP, White House fret about midterm election prospects

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The prognosis for President Donald Trump and his party was grim.

In a post-Labor Day briefing at the White House, a top Republican pollster told senior staff that the determining factor in the election wouldn’t be the improving economy or the steady increase in job creation. It would be how voters feel about Trump.

And the majority of the electorate, including a sizable percentage of Republican-leaning voters, doesn’t feel good about the president, according to a

presentation from pollster Neil Newhouse that spanned dozens of pages.

Newhouse’s briefing came amid a darkening mood among Republican officials as the November election nears. Party leaders were already worried that a surge in enthusiasm among Democrats and disdain for Trump by moderate Republicans would put the House out of reach. But some Republicans now fear their Senate majority is also in peril — a scenario that was unthinkable a few months ago given the favorable Senate map for the GOP.

“For Republican candidates to win in swing states, they need all of the voters who support President Trump, plus a chunk of those who do not,” said Whit Ayres, a GOP pollster. “That is threading a very narrow strategic needle.”

Operatives in both parties say Republicans still have the edge in the fight for control of the Senate. But GOP officials are increasingly worried that nominees in conservative-leaning states like Missouri and Indiana are underperforming, while races in Tennessee and Texas that should be slam-dunks for

Republicans are close.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell raised an alarm last week, warning that each of the competitive Senate races would be “like a knife fight in an alley.”

Some of the public fretting among Republicans appears to be strategic, as party officials try to motivate both voters and donors. Many moderate Republican voters “don’t believe there is anything at stake in this election,” according to the documents Newhouse presented to White House officials.

Arm of gun control group pouring millions into fall election

The Washington Post

The Everytown for Gun Safety Action Fund is spending millions to support candidates in four states, underscoring the extent to which gun control is shaping up to be an issue in the November midterm election.

The fund, the political arm of the gun control group Every-

town for Gun Safety, plans to spend \$8 million to \$10 million in Georgia, Michigan, Nevada and New Mexico as an initial investment in the election. It will include contributions to candidates as well as independent expenditures such as mail, television, radio and digital ads.

“This is not a movement of blue states. This is a movement

of Americans,” said John Feinblatt, president of Everytown for Gun Safety, a nonprofit organization. “The old third-rail warnings are out the window, and you can redraw the map and work on gun safety virtually anywhere in this country.”

Feinblatt said the initial sum is a “curtain-raiser” on what

will come between now and the election.

Everytown’s strategy to change gun laws has focused on statehouses. The focus on individual races is an outgrowth of that, Feinblatt said, and resources are being used where the group thinks it can make the most difference.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police: Man used child to steal game prizes

NH SALEM — Police are looking for a man who they say used his toddler to steal prizes out of a vending machine game at a mall in New Hampshire.

Several witnesses recorded video of the crime Friday evening at The Mall at Rockingham Park in Salem.

Police said the man had the small girl climb into the bottom of the Key Master, where prizes are dropped for winners, and reach up and grab various items and hand them to him.

The man, who also had a young boy with him, then left the area with the children and stolen items, police said.

Political signs are technically illegal

UT SALT LAKE CITY — The political signs sprouting up across the Salt Lake City area on overpasses, pedestrian bridges and highway boundary fences are technically illegal, but the law isn't really enforced.

Utah Department of Transportation spokesman John Gleason told the Salt Lake Tribune that it is illegal to place campaign signs in rights of way without approval from the department. He said the department never approves them.

Gleason said the department's workers have more important things to do than taking down hundreds of illegal signs statewide, but when they do go out and remove some, more tend to show up the next day.

Guide dead after bear attack; hunter hurt

WY JACKSON — Wyoming authorities said

a hunting guide was found dead after he and a client were attacked by a bear.

The Jackson Hole News & Guide reported that the body of Mark Uptain, 37, was found Saturday.

Teton County spokesman Billy Kirk said the client, Corey Chubon, of Florida, suffered leg, chest and arm injuries and was flown to a Jackson hospital.

Authorities said Chubon was bowhunting and shot an elk Thursday, but he and Uptain could not find the animal until Friday. They were preparing to pack it up that day when they were charged by two bears.

Kirk said one of the bears attacked Uptain and then Chubon. He said Chubon was able to flee and phone for help.

Mexico remark leads to hate crime charge

LA GONZALES — A south Louisiana man has been booked on hate crime charges after police say he told a woman in a store to "go back to Mexico" and then attacked her parents.

Gonzales police said Robert Ray, 60, of Donaldsonville, approached the woman, 19, and made the comment at a store on Friday. When her mother, Salome Martinez, told Ray the comment was "not a nice thing to say," Ray then pushed her to the floor, police said. Police said Ray also hit the woman's father, Alfredo Buitureira, with his fist and a boot when Buitureira intervened.

Ray also has been charged with two counts of simple battery and criminal damage to property, police said.

Squirrels chow down on fruit crops

ME STANDISH — Farmers in New England

are getting harassed by a bumper crop of squirrels.

The varmints are chomping their way through apple orchards and pumpkin patches, fattening themselves for winter while destroying the crops with bite marks.

Robert Randall, who has a 60-acre orchard in Standish, Maine, said he's never seen anything like it. He said the onslaught is rendering apples and pumpkins unsellable.

Kendall Marden, from the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, said the explosion in the squirrel population is linked to a bumper crop of acorns and other food last fall.

But as hungry as the squirrels are, it's unlikely they'll inflict serious economic damage. Orchards operators said this year's apple crop looks good.

Police: Teen arrested in flare gun shootings

OH TOLEDO — Police in Ohio said a boy, 17, was arrested in connection with two flare gun shootings that injured two people.

The Toledo Police Department announced the arrest on its Facebook page and Twitter account Friday evening but provided no additional details.

Both victims were shot in the face.

The first shooting happened Sunday. A woman, 36, said six young men jumped into her car at a gas station.

She drove herself to a hospital where she was treated for severe burns.

Police said the second shooting occurred in a different Toledo neighborhood Tuesday. A boy, 16, told officers he was walking along a street when two young men approached and one of them shot him with a flare gun.

Man accused of fatally stabbing cat is jailed

TX GALVESTON — A Southeast Texas man was jailed after police allege he threatened to kill his girlfriend, fatally stabbed the family cat and left unguarded in his home an assault-type rifle that was fired by his son, 4.

The Galveston County Daily News reported that Mario Salinas, 27, is facing several charges, including cruelty to a nonlivestock animal and terroristic threat to a family member.

According to documents, Salinas' girlfriend called police Sept. 10, saying he had threatened to kill her.

Police went to the home after a report of a gunshot. Salinas told officers his son had accidentally shot the family cat, Snowflake. But a family friend told police Salinas had stabbed the pet.

Police said the boy accidentally fired the weapon after Salinas had left it on a bed along with others.

Schools to reward attendance with cash

MO KANSAS CITY — A Kansas City-area school district plans to use money as an incentive to get students to attend class every day.

Students at Hickman Mills School District's four secondary schools will have the chance to win \$100 each month if they have perfect attendance, The Kansas City Star reported.

Ruskin High, the Freshman Center, Smith-Hale Middle School and the Crittenton Center students with perfect attendance each week will be entered into a monthly drawing. Each school will then draw a winner's name at the end of the month.

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STARS AND STRIPES®

NFL roundup

Vikings, Packers tie after missed FGs

Associated Press

GREEN BAY, Wis. — A tie felt odd to Kirk Cousins.

On one hand, the Minnesota Vikings quarterback threw three touchdown passes in the fourth quarter to help rally his team from a 20-7 deficit against the Green Bay Packers.

But three missed field goals, including two in overtime, by rookie Daniel Carlson hurt. So did a pass from Cousins that bounced off Laquon Treadwell's hands late in the fourth quarter that was intercepted by Ha Ha Clinton-Dix.

It added up to a 29-29 tie on Sunday.

"I don't know what to feel after a tie. I don't know how to answer that," said Cousins, who finished 35 of 48 for 425 yards. "It's a unique place to be and proud of the way that the whole team ... the way everybody stayed in it and fought."

If only the Vikings could convert one of those field goals into points.

Carlson's 35-yarder as time expired in overtime went right of the uprights, just like his kick from 49 earlier in overtime. Carlson also missed from 48 in the second quarter.

"It's disappointing when you've got an opportunity to win the football game there at the end and you come up with a tie. It's better than a loss," Vikings coach Mike Zimmer said.

The result at Lambeau Field overshadowed memorable performances by both quarterbacks.

Green Bay star Aaron Rodgers played with a brace on his injured left knee and threw for 281 yards and a 9-yard touchdown pass to Davante Adams.

But a mishandled handoff with 5:17 left in overtime cost the Packers a chance at another long field-goal attempt. Rodgers recovered the fumble on second-and-1 at the 37, and he was sacked on third down to push Green Bay back to the 47.

He wasn't happy about the tie either.

"Close to an 'L.' Doesn't feel great," Rodgers said.

Saints 21, Browns 18: Wil Lutz kicked a 44-yard field goal for host New Orleans with 21 seconds left, Cleveland kicker Zane Gonzalez pushed the second of his two missed field goals wide right in the final seconds, and the Saints held on to extended the Browns' winless streak to 19 games.

Gonzalez also missed two extra points, one week after his potential winning field goal was blocked in a season-opening tie with Pittsburgh.

A person familiar with the decision said Monday the Browns will sign free agent kicker Greg Joseph to replace Gonzalez.

Joseph was picked over several other kickers who came in for tryouts on Monday, said the person who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the team has not announced the signing.

Joseph was with the Miami Dolphins during training camp and the preseason. He played at Florida Atlantic.

Chiefs 42, Steelers 37: Patrick Mahomes tied a franchise record with six touchdown passes. The 22-year-old Mahomes finished 23 of 28 for 326 yards in his third career start as the Chiefs (2-0) won in Pittsburgh for the first time since 1986. Mahomes has 10 touchdown passes through two weeks, the most ever by a quarterback through two games.

Seven Chiefs caught at least one pass. Two — running back Kareem Hunt and wide receiver Demarcus Robinson — turned their only targets of the day into scores.

Buccaneers 27, Eagles 21: Ryan Fitzpatrick threw for more than 400 yards and four touchdowns for the second straight week.

Filling in for suspended quarterback Jameis Winston, the 35-year-old Fitzpatrick

completed 27 of 32 passes for 402 yards and has the suddenly explosive host Bucs off to a 2-0 start for the first time since 2010.

Jaguars 31, Patriots 20: Blake Bortles threw four touchdown passes, three in the first half, and the host Jaguars (2-0) beat Tom Brady and the Patriots in a rematch of last season's AFC championship game.

Bortles connected with Donte Moncrief, Keelan Cole and Austin Seferian-Jenkins for scores in the first 30 minutes, the second time he's done that in his NFL career. Bortles completed 29 of 45 passes for 377 yards, with the four TDs and an interception. It was the best game of his five-year career.

Broncos 20, Raiders 19: Brandon McManus kicked a 36-yard field goal just inside the right upright in Denver with 6 seconds left, denying Jon Gruden his first win as a head coach since 2008.

Rams 34, Cardinals 0: Todd Gurley ran for three touchdowns, Jared Goff threw for 354 yards and a touchdown for host Los Angeles.

It was the second time in Gurley's four-year NFL career that he had three rushing scores in a game. The other time was Week 15 at Seattle last season. Gurley finished with 42 yards on 19 carries as he played only three quarters due to cramps.

49ers 30, Lions 27: Jimmy Garoppolo threw two touchdown passes, Matt Breida ran for 138 yards and host San Francisco's longest TD run in four seasons, and the 49ers bounced back from a season-opening loss.

Falcons 31, Panthers 24: Matt Ryan ran for a pair of scores for the first time in his career and threw a pair of TD passes for host Atlanta.

Dolphins 20, Jets 12: Ryan Tannehill threw two touchdown passes, Kenyan Drake ran for a score and the Dolphins took advantage of several mistakes by

Sam Darnold and the host Jets.

Chargers 31, Bills 20: Melvin Gordon matched a career high by scoring three touchdowns, and the Chargers manhandled the anemic Bills during rookie quarterback Josh Allen's debut as a starter.

While the rest of the Bills jogged into the locker room at halftime, cornerback Vontae Davis jogged in, then just kept on going.

He quit at halftime — a jaw-dropping decision that left his teammates and coaches shaking their heads.

"Pulled himself out of the game. He communicated to us that he was done," coach Sean McDermott said after the Bills fell 31-20.

Later, Davis posted on Twitter that he was, in fact, calling it a career.

Titans 20, Texans 17: Ryan Succop kicked a 31-yard field goal with 1:00 left, and the battered Titans held off the visiting Texans to give Mike Vrabel his first victory as an NFL head coach.

Cowboys 20, Giants 13: Dak Prescott threw a 64-yard touchdown pass to Tavon Austin on the third play of the game and the host Cowboys sacked Eli Manning six times in a 20-13 victory over the Giants.

The Dallas defense was strong again, just as in an opening loss at Carolina, as the Cowboys (1-1) avoided the first 0-2 start in seven seasons under coach Jason Garrett.

Colts 21, Redskins 9: Andrew Luck threw for two touchdown passes, shook off two interceptions and engineered a game-sealing drive.

Luck was 21-for-31 for 179 yards and had a TD pass in a 25th consecutive game, the longest active streak in the NFL. He was 7 of 8 for 62 yards on a methodical 13-play, 75-yard drive that culminated in a Luck-to-T.Y. Hilton score that put visiting Indianapolis (1-1) up 21-9 early in the fourth quarter.

Keselowski wins first race of playoffs

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Brad Keselowski nailed the final restart and roared away from the field in the scorching Vegas heat.

With another huge performance in his late-season surge, Keselowski finished up front again — and he's got NASCAR's Big Three drivers looking over their shoulders.

Keselowski raced to his third consecutive Cup series victory Sunday, opening the playoffs by persevering through a wreck-filled afternoon and taking charge of overtime.

He also secured team owner Roger Penske's 500th victory across all competitions with his resourceful performance amid 99-degree conditions and constant stop-and-start late drama of a race featuring 12 cautions and several wrecks.

"I didn't think it was ever going to end," Keselowski said after his 27th career victory and third in Las Vegas. "I was

worried about running out of gas there at the end."

Keselowski had plenty of worries with just two laps to go while he sat in his car and waited for the cleanup of Michael McDowell's wreck with Kurt Busch. But after the red-flag stop ended, nobody could keep up with his Team Penske Ford.

The victory extended an extraordinary late-season run for Keselowski, who won at Darlington and the Brickyard in consecutive weeks before Vegas. Keselowski credited his pit crew's efficiency for the latest win in his improbable surge, which has added some intrigue to a NASCAR season largely dominated by the Big Three of Truex, Harvick and Kyle Busch.

"We have not been the best car the last three weeks," Keselowski said. "We put everything together when it counted, and we kind of stole it today. Same scenario the last two weeks. ... I

feel like we stole the last three races. We're not complaining, but we still have a lot of work to do to go out there and win head-to-head without those issues."

Penske was not in attendance for his landmark victory at Las Vegas Motor Speedway, instead watching from Sonoma at the IndyCar season finale. He formed Team Penske in 1966, and it has fielded 50 winning drivers across 14 race series during the ensuing 52 years.

The owner pumped his fist on the timing stand in Sonoma after Keselowski won.

"We did it, boss!" Keselowski shouted. "That's quite a number, right? It's really great to be a part of that, and to get the last one to get us there, that's pretty great."

Kyle Larson was second, and defending Cup champion Martin Truex Jr. came in third. Keselowski's rivals are very aware of his surge against stiff odds.

"Brad clearly found the

horseshoe," Truex said. "Three races in a row he's won, (and) he has not had the best car. ... He hasn't led the most laps in any of those races, and he showed up at the end with good pit stops and good short-run speed. I think clearly, it's pretty obvious how it worked out. He's hot right now. He's on a streak. That's the way it goes. We finished third with the best car."

Eight of the 16 playoff drivers had various problems during the race, which had six cautions in the final 60 laps alone. Four playoff drivers failed to finish — including co-leader Kevin Harvick, who wrecked with 120 laps to go when he blew his right front tire.

Kyle Busch finished seventh in Vegas even after clipping the wall and plowing through the infield grass with 35 laps to go.

Truex moved into the overall points lead over Busch and Keselowski, who leapfrogged Harvick.

Dixon collects fifth IndyCar championship

Associated Press

SONOMA, Calif. — Scott Dixon was fully reclined, quietly watching NASCAR on television with friends, as the clock inched toward the IndyCar season finale. A fifth championship was one steady Sunday drive away and Dixon wasn't the least bit stressed.

Dixon needed only an uneventful Sunday at Sonoma Raceway to win the championship and sealed it by finishing second, the same place he started, behind Ryan Hunter-Reay. The fifth title moved him into second in IndyCar history, two behind A.J. Foyt.

"I can't believe this is actually happening," Dixon said. "You always doubt these situations and think they are never going to happen. It's all about the people and I'm the lucky one that gets to take it across the line."

The 38-year-old New Zealander also won titles in 2003, 2008, 2013 and 2015, all with Chip Ganassi Racing. He's the longest tenured driver in Ganassi history and helped the team owner cap a strong organizational weekend in which Ross Chastain won NASCAR's Xfinity Series race, Kyle Larson finished second in NASCAR's opening playoff race and Dixon gave him a 12th IndyCar

championship.

"What an incredible ride it's been with this guy," said Ganassi, who celebrated the title the same way he did in 2015, by diving from the championship stage into the crowd assembled below.

Dixon's task was eased when challenger Alexander Rossi hit teammate Marco Andretti seconds after the start and broke his front wing. Rossi had to pit for a new part, dropped to last in the field, and the championship was pretty much decided.

Dixon held a 29-point lead over Rossi at the start of the day, and even though the race was worth double points, Rossi needed to be perfect to catch "The Iceman." Dixon's final points margin was 57 points over Rossi, who rallied to finish seventh. Rossi ended his third season in IndyCar second in the standings.

"It was going to be a tough day to beat Scott anyway," Rossi said. "It's unfortunate to go out like that. I wish I could replay that a million more times. We have to look at 2018 and be pretty happy with it, even though we go away second and the first loser."

As relaxed as Dixon appeared to be all day, he admitted after the race he didn't let up in the race car after Rossi's mishap. The title wasn't secure, he said, until he

made it through the final round of pit stops cleanly.

"You just never know, anything can happen," Dixon said. "We had a lot of grit. Rossi did a hell of a job, he's been pushing so hard this year and he's going to be a star."

Hunter-Reay won for the 18th time and second this season.

"To end this way is unreal," said Hunter-Reay, who dedicated the win to injured IndyCar driver Robert Wickens. "We wish he was here, he would have made my life a lot more difficult on the track today."

Hunter-Reay also praised Dixon as the greatest driver of this IndyCar generation. "It's unthinkable what he's accomplished," Hunter-Reay said. "To share the track with him is awesome and to beat him is, too."

Will Power and Simon Pagenaud finished third and fourth for Team Penske, which picked up its 500th organizational win earlier Sunday when Brad Keselowski won NASCAR's opening playoff race in Las Vegas. Roger Penske watched those closing laps from atop Power's timing stand as the end of NASCAR overlapped the start of IndyCar. Penske pumped his fist in the air several times after the Keselowski win.

Wainwright's gem helps Cards end skid

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Adam Wainwright had something to prove.

Wainwright pitched two-hit ball for six innings for his first win in five months, Marcell Ozuna homered and the St. Louis Cardinals salvaged the finale of a four-game series with a 5-0 victory over the Los Angeles Dodgers on Sunday night.

"You know what? Us old guys can still play, can't we? A little bit," the 37-year-old Wainwright said. "The main thing for me tonight was to do what I did in my entire rehab performances. It was all about executing, making my pitches. That's probably the deepest lineup I've ever faced."

The Cardinals snapped a season-high four-game losing streak and moved into a tie for the second National League wild card with the Dodgers, who slipped a half-game behind Colorado for the NL West lead.

The Rockies visit Dodger Stadium for a three-game series beginning Monday night, the last regular-season meeting between the teams.

Wainwright (2-3), making his second

start since missing almost four months with right elbow inflammation, struck out a season-high nine while earning his first victory since April 16. His 101 pitches were his most since July 22, 2017.

"We just had to come out and win today," Wainwright said. "That team over there was riding some pretty good highs. They came in and just whooped us for three straight games and we really needed a big win before going to Atlanta."

Cardinals manager Mike Shildt had complete confidence in Wainwright pitching a game with playoff implications.

"Clearly there's some significance there," Shildt said. "But that's what guys like Adam Wainwright do. They step up. That's what horses do and that's what aces do and that's what he's been for a long time in this organization. He stepped up and it's hard to beat a shutout."

Cardinals reliever Bud Norris left the game with a blister on his middle finger after walking the only batter he faced in the seventh. Jordan Hicks, pitching for the first time in a week, finished the inning and also worked the eighth. Carlos Martinez com-

pleted the four-hit shutout — one night after the Dodgers piled up 17 runs.

"I thought that Wainwright was really good tonight," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said. "When any pitcher can throw his breaking ball at any point in time to get us — we are a fastball hitting team — he was doing it. He was spiking it and it had good bite and the fastball in on the lefty and the curveball off of that."

Ozuna homered to right-center to make it 1-0 in the second.

Yairo Munoz sparked a two-run fourth, reaching first on a wild pitch after swinging and missing at strike three. Jedd Gyorko and Yadier Molina followed with RBI singles, chasing Dodgers starter Ross Stripling and giving the Cardinals a 3-0 lead.

Ozuna singled and scored on third baseman Justin Turner's fielding error in the sixth. Ozuna has a team-high 44 multihit games.

"I was just trying to put the ball in play and the last couple of games I was struggling at the plate and I made some adjustments in batting practice and that led to success today in the game," Ozuna said.

MLB roundup

Betts, Red Sox trim magic number to two

Associated Press

BOSTON — Mookie Betts doesn't seem to be badly hurt, so the Red Sox can focus on clinching the AL East at Yankee Stadium for the second time in three seasons.

Betts gave Boston a scare when he injured his left side making two throws to home plate during a 4-3 win over the New York Mets on Sunday that cut Boston's magic number to two for a third straight division title.

Boston has an 11 1/2-game lead over the second-place Yankees and would clinch with one win during a three-game series that opens Tuesday afternoon.

Andrew Benintendi hit a tie-breaking sacrifice fly in the eighth inning off Seth Lugo (3-4) after a matchup of Sale and New York's Jacob deGrom, both Cy Young Award candidates. Brandon Workman (5-0) pitched a scoreless eighth, and Steven Wright got three outs

for his first big league save.

Blue Jays 3, Yankees 2: Dellin Betances wasted a 2-1 eighth-inning lead, allowing hits to four of his first five batters. Pinch-hitter Rowdy Tellez had a tying single and Randal Grichuk a go-ahead double. Betances (4-6) has lost in two of his past three appearances for the host Yankees.

Astros 5, Diamondbacks 4: Justin Verlander (16-9) struck out 11 in seven innings, allowing one run and three hits for host Houston, which leads second-place Oakland by 4 1/2 games in the AL West.

Rays 5, Athletics 4: Khris Davis hit a grand slam in the ninth off Sergio Romo, his major league-leading 43rd homer. Host Tampa Bay trails Oakland by seven games with 14 games left.

Nationals 6, Braves 4: Bryce Harper and Anthony Rendon hit two-run homers off Sean Newcomb (12-9) and 19-year-old rookie Juan Soto

added an RBI single for visiting Washington.

Atlanta maintained a 6 1/2-game lead in the NL East over second-place Philadelphia.

Marlins 6, Phillies 4: Peter O'Brien homered and drove in three runs as visiting Miami ended a five-game losing streak. O'Brien put the Marlins ahead with a two-run homer in the fourth and Bryan Holaday added a pair of doubles.

Reds 2, Cubs 1: The Cubs' NL Central lead remained at 2 1/2 games over second-place Milwaukee when Scott Schebler homered on the first pitch of the game from Jose Quintana (13-10) and Phillip Ervin also went deep.

Pirates 3, Brewers 2: Jesus Aguilar and Domingo Santana homered on consecutive pitches from Felipe Vazquez to begin the ninth, but host Milwaukee fell short.

Rockies 3, Giants 2: Antonio Senzatela pitched shutout ball into the sixth inning and

hit a two-run single as Colorado topped host San Francisco and moved back into first place in the NL West.

Padres 7, Rangers 3: Rookie Francisco Mejia hit a grand slam with two outs in the ninth inning and host San Diego avoided three-game sweep in a matchup of last-place teams.

Angels 4, Mariners 3: Kole Calhoun hit a tiebreaking home run and Justin Upton connected in his third straight game as host Los Angeles averted a four-game sweep.

Tigers 6, Indians 4: Jim Adduci homered and drove in a career-high four runs for visiting Detroit

Orioles 8, White Sox 4: Jonathan Villar and Adam Jones homered and rookie Cedric Mullins had a career-high four hits for host Baltimore.

Twins 9, Royals 6: Tyler Austin hit one of visiting Minnesota's four home runs and made a spectacular catch while flipping into the dugout.