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N. Korea confirms sub-based missile test

BY KIM GAMEL
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea confirmed Thursday that it successfully test-fired a new submarine-launched ballistic missile just days before the communist state is due to resume nuclear talks with the U.S.

The Pukguksong-3 missile was launched “in vertical mode” Wednesday from the water near the eastern city of Wonsan, the state-run Korean Central News Agency reported.

“The test-firing scientifically and technically confirmed the key tactical and technical indexes of the newly designed ballistic missile and had no adverse impact on the security of neighboring countries,” KCNA said.

It didn’t provide more details, but South Korean officials said the missile flew 280 miles and reached an altitude of 565 miles before crashing into the sea off the eastern coast.

Experts said it was likely fired from an underwater barge and not a submarine.

David Wright, of the Union of Concerned Scientists, noted that the missile had been launched at an angle, which curbed the distance it traveled.

“If flown on a standard trajectory with the same payload, that missile would have a maximum range of about 1,900 km (1,200 miles),” he said in a blog post. “This would classify that missile as medium range.”

The launch threatened to raise tensions as Washington and Pyongyang planned to resume talks over the North’s nuclear weapons program this

weekend. No location has been announced.

President Donald Trump has dismissed past launches as routine because they involved short-range missiles. He had no immediate comment on Wednesday’s test, which was the first underwater launch in three years.

The State Department called on the North “to refrain from provocations, abide by their obligations under U.N. Security Council resolutions, and remain engaged in substantive and sustained negotiations to do their part to ensure peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and achieve denuclearization.”

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un apparently didn’t attend the launch as he has done in the past, but he sent “warm congratulations” to the national defense scientific research

units who conducted it, KCNA reported.

The news agency said the launch was “of great significance as it ushered in a new phase in containing the outside forces’ threat to [North Korea]” and further bolstered its “military muscle for self-defense.”

Experts say the communist state is likely trying to project strength ahead of new negotiations to wring concessions from Washington. The tests also show that the North has continued to develop its weapons programs as talks have stalled.

North Korea’s nuclear submarine program is considered especially threatening because submersible weapons are harder to detect in advance and have a broader range.

Stars and Stripes reporter Yoo Kyong Chang contributed to this report.

Baghdad under curfew amid violent anti-government rallies

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — An Iraqi medical official said at least six protesters were shot and killed in the southern city of Nasariyah, south of the capital, Baghdad, during anti-government rallies Thursday.

The official told The Associated Press the bodies of the protesters were taken to the local hospital after sunset. The protesters had defied a curfew imposed in the city, about 200 miles southeast of Baghdad. Protests have spread in Baghdad and towns and cities to the south since Tuesday. The new violence brings the death toll to 31, including 10 killed Thursday. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn’t authorized to brief the media.

The protesters have rallied behind calls to unseat the gov-

ernment, accusing it of corruption and failure to address deepening economic malaise. The security forces have responded with live ammunition, tear gas and water cannons while authorities cut the internet, which protesters had used to organize.

Iraqi security forces imposed a round-the-clock curfew in Baghdad and fired live rounds and tear gas on Thursday to disperse anti-government protests that have gripped the country.

In a desperate attempt to quell the demonstrations, which were spontaneous and mostly spurred by woes over deteriorating economy and lack of jobs and services.

Before dawn, explosions were heard inside Baghdad’s heavily fortified Green Zone, home to government offices and foreign embassies.

The U.S.-led coalition said an

investigation is underway, adding that no coalition forces or assets were hit.

Hundreds have been wounded since the violence and clashes between security forces and anti-government demonstrators first erupted.

Twelve people were killed late Wednesday in the southern cities of Nasariyah, Kut and Amara. The dead were protesters and one policeman, according to security officials.

Iraq’s state news agency said Parliament Speaker Mohammed al-Halbusi invited representatives of the protesters to come to the parliament building to discuss their demands.

The demonstrations and the unrest are the most serious challenge to Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi’s year-old government, which has been caught in the middle of U.S.-Iran tensions in the Middle

East. Iraq is allied with both countries and hosts thousands of U.S. troops, as well as powerful paramilitary forces allied with Iran.

Also Thursday, Iraq’s foreign ministry summoned Iran’s ambassador to Baghdad to denounce his threat that Tehran would retaliate to an American attack anywhere in the world, including in Iraq. A ministry statement said Iraqi official Abdul-Karim Hashem told Iran’s envoy, Iraj Masjedi, that American troops are in Iraq at the request of the Iraqi government and that Iraq will not accept becoming an arena for international conflicts.

Masjedi recently told Iraq’s Dijla TV that if the Americans attack Iran, Tehran “will strike back anywhere, including (in) Iraq.”

Coast Guardsman pleads guilty to charges of drug, gun crimes

Associated Press

GREENBELT, Md. — A Coast Guard lieutenant accused of stockpiling weapons and targeting Supreme Court justices, prominent Democrats and TV journalists pleaded guilty Thursday to gun and drug charges.

Christopher Hasson's guilty plea to all four of the counts he faced resolves a case in which federal prosecutors called him a self-described white nationalist and domestic terrorist intent on carrying out mass killings.

But prosecutors didn't file any terrorism-related charges against Hasson, who was arrested in February. With his plea, the former Marine now faces up to 31 years in prison. His sentencing is set for Jan. 31.

Two of the four counts in Hasson's indictment charged him with illegally possessing unregistered and unserialized

silencers. He also was charged with possession of a firearm by an unlawful user or addict of a controlled substance, and illegal possession of tramadol, an opioid painkiller.

Prosecutors claimed Hasson drew up what appeared to be a computer spreadsheet hit list that included House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer and Democratic presidential hopefuls Sens. Elizabeth Warren, Cory Booker and Kamala Harris. Several network TV journalists — MSNBC's Chris Hayes and Joe Scarborough and CNN's Chris Cuomo and Van Jones — also were mentioned.

Hasson also targeted two Supreme Court justices and two social media company executives and searched online for their home addresses in March 2018, within minutes of searching firearm sales websites, according to prosecutors.

In a February court filing, prosecutors said Hasson "intends to murder innocent civilians on a scale rarely seen in this country." They also said he has espoused extremist views for years and drafted an email in which he said he was "dreaming of a way to kill almost every last person on the earth."

Investigators found 15 guns, including seven rifles, and more than 1,000 rounds of ammunition at Hasson's basement apartment in Silver Spring, Md. He researched how to make homemade bombs and mortars, studied sniper training and used his government computer to search for information about Nazis and Adolf Hitler, prosecutors said.

Hasson worked at Coast Guard headquarters in Washington on a program to acquire advanced new cutters for the agency. He has remained on active duty pending the outcome of the criminal case.

Marine faces charges over hidden guns and threats

By WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

MARINE CORPS BASE HAWAII — A Marine Corps private deferred entering a plea at his arraignment Wednesday in Hawaii, where he faces charges that include making threats and attempting to bring concealed weapons onto a Nebraska Air Force base in May.

Pfc. Ali Al-kazahg also deferred until later a choice of trial by jury or judge during the brief hearing at Marine Corps Base Hawaii, where he is being held and where he has been stationed since August 2018.

Lt. Col. Wilber Lee, the judge in the case, set a weeklong trial to begin Jan. 24.

Al-kazahg has been charged with carrying a concealed weapon, communicating threats, possession of modified firearms and unlawful firearms modifications, unauthorized absence, violation of a lawful general regulation and dereliction of duty, fraudulent enlistment and making a false official statement.

Al-kazahg, an American citizen and native of Nebraska born to Iraqi refugees, was arrested May 31 after being stopped by gate guards at Offutt Air Force Base near Omaha.

According to the Omaha World-Herald newspaper, Al-kazahg, who was home on leave at the time of the arrest, was stopped because his name appeared on a law enforcement watchlist.

Al-kazahg's name had appeared on a "be on the lookout" bulletin, according to the World-Herald, which obtained a copy.

The newspaper reported that he was listed for allegedly telling another Marine he would "shoot up the battalion, starting at the barracks" if he received discipline for misconduct.

He also mentioned specific Marines as targets, the newspaper said.

Misawa maintenance commander fired

Stars and Stripes

The 35th Fighter Wing at Misawa Air Base in northeastern Japan relieved the commander of its maintenance squadron on Monday, according to a media report.

Lt. Col. Jason Moehle, who led the 35th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, maintainers of the F-16 Wild Weasel aircraft, was relieved by 35th Maintenance Group commander Col. Ronald Christensen, who cited a loss of confidence in Moehle's ability to command, the Air Force Times reported Wednesday.

The Times quoted a statement from wing commander Col. Kristopher Struve.

"A decision of this magnitude is never easy to make, but it's the right decision in ensuring we're maintaining the highest standards of leadership in the 35th Fighter Wing's ranks," Struve said, according to the report.

Moehle assumed command of the maintenance squadron in June 2018, the report said.

As a major in March 2016, Moehle temporarily took over the 1st Aircraft Maintenance Squad-

ron at Langley, Va., when its commander at the time, Lt. Col. Ivan Pennington, was relieved by the 1st Wing commander for the same reason, lack of confidence.

The 1st Fighter Wing flies the F-22 Raptor advanced stealth fighter.

At Misawa, Moehle had responsibility for keeping the 44 F-16CM fighters ready to fly. Their role in combat is to clear a path for friendly aircraft by defeating opposing anti-air missiles and other defenses. The Wild Weasels typically arrive early during an air attack.

Moehle as a captain graduated in December 2011 from the U.S. Air Force Advanced Maintenance and Munitions Officer School, Combat Support Course, at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., according to the Air Force.

He entered the service in 2004 and was commissioned through the Reserve Officer Training Corps, according to the Air Force Times. His decorations include the Meritorious Service Medal, the Air Force Commendation Medal and the Air Force Achievement Medal, the report said.

More Javelins urged for Ukraine

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The United States should provide more Javelin missiles to Ukraine's military as it battles pro-Russia forces in the eastern region of the country, the top American military commander for U.S. and NATO forces in Europe said Thursday.

The U.S. military has trained enough Ukrainian soldiers to use the shoulder-fired, anti-tank missiles that America should provide more of the defensive weapons, Air Force Gen. Tod Wolters told reporters at the Pentagon. Ukraine has said the missiles have been critical in its efforts to fend off Russia-backed forces in the Donbass Region, where the war has continued since Russia annexed the nearby Crimea region from Ukraine in 2014.

"Yeah, I think more of those would probably help," he said. "Right now, it is my military advice that I think we should go forward with that because of the positive outcome — because they are better able to [defend] their sovereign territory."

Javelins are man-portable missiles capable of destroying heavily armored vehicles. They are touted as "fire and forget" missiles, meaning after the operator locks onto a target and fires, the missile guides itself to that target. Last year, the United States provided 200 Javelin missiles and 37 launchers to Ukraine.

Wolters' comments Thursday came as the Javelin missile has gained attention in recent days amid an impeachment inquiry launched by House Democrats over President Donald Trump's interactions with Ukraine's president.

In a rough transcript of a July 25 phone call between the two leaders released last week by the White House, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told Trump his country was ready to purchase more Javelins.

"I would like you to do us a favor though because our country has been through a lot and Ukraine knows a lot about it," Trump responded, according to the rough transcript. Trump continued to ask Zelenskyy to investigate U.S. political issues,

including former Vice President Joe Biden and his son Hunter Biden..

That conversation came just about one week after Trump ordered \$250 million in military aid to Ukraine withheld by the Pentagon and State Department. Democratic leaders in the House have said their inquiry will determine whether Trump withheld that aid to pressure Ukraine to investigate his political rivals. Trump has denied that charge and insisted he acted appropriately in the July phone call.

On Thursday, Jonathan Hoffman, the Pentagon's chief spokesman, described the hold as "a brief pause" and said the bulk of that aid has now been delivered to Ukraine. The remainder was expected to be released by next week, he said.

The aid included money for training operations and non-lethal military gear, but it did not include funds for Javelin missiles.

Hoffman said his understanding was the aid, first announced by the Pentagon in June, was withheld amid corruption concerns in Ukraine.

Ex-envoy to Ukraine is questioned

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Lawmakers heard testimony Thursday from the former special U.S. envoy to Ukraine who has become a central figure in the unfolding impeachment inquiry against President Donald Trump. It's the first in what is expected to be a series of interviews with officials inside and outside the State Department.

Kurt Volker produced documents for the interview including copies of text messages and photos, according to a person who wasn't authorized to speak on the record about the private session. Investigators planned to ask Volker about any role he may have played in Trump's efforts to press Ukrainian officials for damaging information about the son of former Vice President Joe Biden.

Volker resigned on Sept. 27 after being asked to testify to Congress about the whistleblower complaint that describes how Trump in a July 25 phone call repeatedly prodded Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy for an investigation of Biden and his son Hunter while his administration delayed the release of military aid to help Ukraine fight Russia-backed separatists. The complaint says Volker met in Kyiv with Zelenskyy and other Ukrainian political figures a day after the call and he provided advice about how to "navigate" Trump's demands.

"I think he was doing the best he could," said retired senior U.S. diplomat Daniel Fried, who described the actions of his former colleague as trying to guide Ukrainians on "how to deal with President Trump under difficult circumstances."

Volker agreed to a voluntary interview with lawmakers and congressional staff, led by House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff, of California, as Democrats dig deeper into the administration's handling of Ukraine.

22 GIs hurt in parachute exercise

Associated Press

HATTIESBURG, Miss. — At least 22 soldiers were injured as hundreds parachuted onto a Mississippi military base during a night training exercise.

U.S. Army spokesman John Pennell told WDAM-TV that the paratroopers were among 650 soldiers jumping from C-130 planes Wednesday night. Some were blown off course from their intended landing zone and into a stand of pine trees. Several became entangled in the branches and had to be rescued.

"Paratroopers from across the brigade and Camp Shelby are assisting in getting others out of the trees," Lt. Col Matt Myer, commander of 1st Battalion, 501st Parachute Infan-

try Regiment, wrote on the battalion's Facebook page early Thursday. "All of the accounted for jumpers are being afforded access to phones to call their loved ones."

Pennell said at least 15 of the people hurt at Camp Shelby were treated by medics and another seven were hospitalized. Staff Sgt. John Healy said none of the injuries are considered to be life-threatening.

Camp Shelby Cmdr. Col. Bobby Ginn said the troopers belong to the 4th Brigade of the 25th Infantry Division stationed at the Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Anchorage, Alaska.

Mississippi National Guard spokeswoman Lt. Col. Deidre Smith said soldiers continued to jump into the drop zone after

the injuries, with units trying to account for their members.

"Once all soldiers have been accounted for, our goal is ultimately to continue training," Smith said in a statement. "Despite the challenges that we currently face, soldiers always place the mission first."

Smith said the base works to reduce risks associated with airborne operations, with a nearby hospital in Hattiesburg on alert and emergency vehicles on standby at Camp Shelby.

About 3,000 troops from the Alaska base are participating in monthlong training called Operation Arctic Anvil.

Pennell promised more information once a safety investigation is complete.

Casino giant settles Vegas shooting suits

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Two years after a gunman rained gunfire on country music fans from a high-rise Las Vegas hotel, MGM Resorts International reached a settlement that could pay up to \$800 million to families of the 58 people who died and hundreds of others who were injured, attorneys announced Thursday.

It's a major step to resolve hundreds of lawsuits in multiple states that seek compensation for a range of physical and psychological injuries from the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history.

Victims say the casino giant failed to protect 22,000 people at a concert venue it owns or stop the shooter from spending several days amassing an arsenal of assault-style weapons and ammunition in his suite at the Mandalay Bay resort.

The amount of the settlement depends on the number of plain-

tiffs who take part, according to a statement from Las Vegas law firm Eglet Adams, which represents nearly 2,500 victims and made the announcement just days after the second anniversary of the Oct. 1, 2017, massacre.

"Our goal has always been to resolve these matters so our community and the victims and their families can move forward in the healing process," said Jim Murren, chairman and CEO of MGM Resorts.

An independent administrator will be appointed by a court to dole out money from the settlement fund, attorneys and MGM said. They expect to wrap up the work by late next year.

MGM's insurers will fund a minimum of \$735 million. Depending on the number of victims who participate, the company will contribute more, up to \$800 million, according to the victims' attorneys.

At least 4 fatally stabbed at Paris police HQ by employee

Associated Press

PARIS — An administrator armed with a knife attacked officers inside Paris police headquarters Thursday, killing at least four before he was fatally shot, officials said.

Police union official Loic Travers told reporters the attack appeared to have started in an office and continued elsewhere in the large police compound across the street from Notre Dame Cathedral.

The number of people injured was not immediately clear.

Travers said the motive is unknown, but that the 20-year police employee allegedly responsible for the attack worked in the intelligence unit and had not posed known problems until Thursday.

He said he could not remember an attack of this magnitude against officers.

Emery Siamandi, who works at police headquarters, said he was in the stairwell leading to the chief's office when he heard gunshots.

"I told myself, this isn't right," Siamandi said. "Moments later,

I saw three policewomen crying. I couldn't help them in any way, and their colleagues were crying too, so I figured it must be serious."

He said he saw one officer on his knees in tears.

"It's the worst scenario possible, an internal attack with colleagues working together," said Philippe Capon, of the UNSA police union.

Capon cautioned against jumping to conclusions on the motive and said, "Nothing can be ruled out, including a personal issue."

French media reported a department employee carried out the attack with a ceramic knife in a part of the headquarters building that is not open to the public.

The attack came a day after thousands of officers marched in Paris to protest low wages, long hours and increasing suicides in their ranks.

French President Emmanuel Macron stopped by to show solidarity with officers and department employees, his office said.

Victim's brother hugs former Dallas cop after trial

Associated Press

DALLAS — A white Dallas police officer who said she mistook a neighbor's apartment for her own and fatally shot him in his living room was sentenced to a decade in prison in a stunning courtroom scene that included the dead man's brother and the black judge embracing the sobbing officer.

People outside the courtroom reacted angrily to the sentence given to Amber Guyger in the death of Botham Jean, believing it was too lenient. But Jean's brother addressed her directly from the witness stand.

Brandt Jean told Guyger that his brother would have wanted her to turn her life over to Christ and that if she asks God for forgiveness, she will get it.

"I love you as a person. I don't

wish anything bad on you," he said to Guyger, 31, before asking the judge, "I don't know if this is possible, but can I give her a hug?"

The judge said he could, and Brandt and Guyger stood up, met in front of the bench and embraced while Guyger cried. Judge Tammy Kemp also hugged Guyger before she was led from the courtroom Wednesday.

The shooting in September 2018 drew widespread attention because of the strange circumstances and because it was one in a string of shootings of unarmed black men by white police officers.

Guyger, arrested three days after the shooting and later fired, was convicted of murder Tuesday. The jury, which was

largely made up of women and people of color, could have sentenced her to up to life in prison or as little as two years. Prosecutors asked them to send her to prison for 28 years, which is how old Botham Jean would have been if he were still alive.

She will be eligible for parole in five years, after serving half of her sentence.

As video of the dramatic hearing circulated online, critics blasted the judge, saying her hug was inappropriate for the jurist overseeing the case.

Meanwhile, at a Dallas church where the Jean family gathered to worship and Botham Jean used to lead congregation singing, video of Brandt Jean embracing Guyger in court drew applause and "amens" when showed Wednesday night.

Dallas County District Attorney John Creuzot, a former trial judge, called Brandt's embrace of Guyger "an amazing act of healing and forgiveness that is rare in today's society ... especially for many of our leaders."

If Jean's 18-year-old brother "can heal and express healing in that fashion, in his words and in his deeds, I would hope that the greater community, not just Dallas but all of Texas and all of the United States, could gain a message from that," he told reporters.

Dallas Mayor Eric Johnson issued a statement saying he would "never, ever forget the incredible examples of love, faith and strength personified by Botham, Brandt and the entire Jean family."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Yuengling, Hershey collaborate on brew

PA POTTSVILLE — Now on tap: a new brew featuring Yuengling's nearly 200-year-old porter recipe and Hershey's chocolate.

The two Pennsylvania-based companies teamed up on a limited edition beer called Yuengling Hershey's Chocolate Porter.

Beginning in mid-October, the chocolate-infused brew will be available on tap at bars, restaurants and other venues in 13 states from Kentucky to Massachusetts as well as Washington, D.C.

The brew was in development for nearly a year. Yuengling expects it to last until February.

Police: Girl threatened boy over another girl

SC HILTON HEAD ISLAND — Authorities in South Carolina said a girl brought two kitchen knives to her elementary school and threatened to kill a boy who had a crush on another girl.

Citing a Beaufort County Sheriff's Office report, The Island Packet reported the knives were found in the girl's backpack by administrators at the Hilton Head Island School for the Creative Arts.

The report said a student told a second-grade teacher the girl had a knife and had said she planned to kill a boy who liked another girl.

A search of the girl's backpack uncovered two blades, each about 4 inches long.

State fair announces its 2019 food menu

NC RALEIGH — The North Carolina State Fair, where diets meet their de-

mise, released its belly-busting menu for 2019, and it includes some new concoctions.

One vendor is offering a red velvet funnel cake topped with cheese and enchilada sauces. Another will sell a jalapeno pepper stuffed with cheese and brisket, frying it up and serving it on a stick.

Fairgoers can also enjoy a golden fried chicken breast nestled in a cinnamon bun, topped with pepper jack cheese and crispy bacon and drizzled with a zesty honey sauce.

This year's fair runs Oct. 17-27.

Agency investigates headless gator

FL SARASOTA — Florida wildlife investigators want to know what happened to an alligator found without its head on the side of a roadway.

The gator was spotted by Kimberly Kukich, who was driving to her parents' home in Sarasota. As she got closer to the large gator, she saw its head was missing.

Now the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is on the case. They say it's illegal to possess alligator parts without proper permits.

Investigators told ABC 7 that the gator was likely hit by a vehicle and its head was removed later.

Police kill cow that was loose in city

IA DES MOINES — Police shot a cow that officers had tried to round up as it rambled across downtown Des Moines and nearby neighborhoods.

Police said the animal was found and killed Tuesday night.

The cow was first spotted in the East Village area of down-

town. Officers tried to catch it for nearly three hours before it vanished into a forested area along the Des Moines River, north of downtown near Birdland Marina.

Violinist asks woman to stop recording

OH CINCINNATI — The president of Cincinnati's symphony orchestra said one of its recent concerts came to a halt when an audience member refused to stop recording a violinist's performance.

Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra President Jonathan Martin told The Cincinnati Enquirer a patron in the front row began recording violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter's performance on a cellphone over the weekend.

Mutter reportedly halted her performance with the orchestra and asked the woman in the audience to stop the recording.

Martin said the audience member then stood up and started talking to the soloist.

He said he escorted the woman out and she deleted the recording.

Javelina rescued after stopping road traffic

AZ PHOENIX — A baby javelina is recovering after a jaunt on a Phoenix freeway.

The Arizona Department of Public Safety said the young javelina was one of two that brought traffic on State Route 51 to a standstill.

Trooper Martin Sotelo managed to wrangle one javelina. The other ran off and eluded capture.

The rescued javelina was transported to Southwest Wildlife Conservation Center in Scottsdale for medical treatment.

Javelina, which look like wild boar, are native to desert environments.

Woman climbs fence at zoo's lion exhibit

NY NEW YORK — Zoo officials said a woman reportedly climbed over a safety barrier at the lion exhibit at a New York City zoo.

The Bronx Zoo said in a statement that staff received a report that an individual climbed over the visitor barrier at the African lion exhibit.

The woman is seen in a social media video waving to the lion from across a moat that separates the animals from visitors.

The zoo said it was a "serious violation and unlawful trespass."

103 roping steers escape truck fire

MT BILLINGS — A semi hauling a trailer full of roping steers caught fire on Interstate 94 in southern Montana but none of the cattle were injured.

The Montana Highway Patrol told The Billings Gazette the driver was able to safely remove all 103 head of cattle. Area residents, some of them on horseback, helped keep them off the road until someone volunteered the use of a nearby pen.

A motorist spotted the fire in the front axle and got the driver to pull over.

Trooper Richard Drake said the motorist used a fire extinguisher while the driver unloaded the steers, which are used in rodeo competitions.

From wire reports

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STARS AND STRIPES®

Rays use homers to top A's in wild card

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Yandy Diaz slugged baseball's lowest spender into a matchup with mighty Houston, Charlie Morton silenced the powerful Athletics on the mound, and the Tampa Bay Rays beat Oakland at its own game 5-1 in the AL wild-card round Wednesday night.

After playing in only one game since late July, Diaz hit a leadoff homer and went deep again in the third inning. Avisail Garcia hit a two-run drive in the second, and Morton had all the support he needed as Tampa Bay advanced to face the AL West champion Astros in a best-of-five Division Series.

Game 1 is Friday at Houston, which racked up a major league-best 107 wins this season.

"We have a tough road ahead of us. Houston's a great team, but we played them well this

year. It's going to be a dogfight," Tommy Pham said.

Pham homered in the fifth for the 96-win Rays, who had the smallest payroll in the majors at \$66.4 million. And in a playoff meeting between creative, small-budget teams that make the most of limited resources, it was Tampa Bay that came out on top.

The Rays were unfazed by a towel-swirling Oakland crowd of 54,005 that established a wild-card record, having recently played at Dodger Stadium and on the road against the Yankees and Red Sox in the season's final two weeks.

Tampa Bay players raced out of their dugout to celebrate when Marcus Semien struck out to end it, and then started putting on fresh playoff T-shirts and caps.

"It's a beautiful thing having the lowest payroll in baseball and having the success we did,"

center fielder Kevin Kiermaier said before the game. "It always feels good to stick it to the man anytime you're able to in this game, and that's something to be very proud of."

The A's have lost nine straight winner-take-all games since 2000, going 1-15 with a chance to advance to the next post-season round. Their only win was in 2006 against the Twins before being swept in the AL Championship Series by the Tigers.

A year ago in the wild-card game, Oakland's first time back in the playoffs since 2014, the A's fell behind fast and lost 7-2 at Yankee Stadium. They won 97 games again to earn a wild card.

This game had a far different feel in the familiar, friendly confines of the Coliseum, but the A's dug themselves another quick hole.

And the visitors were the ones putting on a happy home

run show this time. Oakland, which hit a franchise-record 257 homers, is 0-6 in winner-take-all playoff games at home since 2000.

Never one to shy from the unorthodox — the Rays used four outfielders against Matt Olson — Cash started Diaz at first to make sure his best bat against lefties was in the lineup.

"I just was trying to get good pitches to hit and luckily they went out," Diaz said through a translator.

Morton, with a career-high 16 wins and his best ERA yet of 3.05 this season, counted on his playoff experience giving him an edge. He won Game 7 of the World Series for the Astros in 2017.

Morton gave up five hits without an earned run over five innings. He struck out four and walked three in his seventh playoff start and eighth appearance, having spent the last two seasons with Houston.

Nationals-Dodgers a star-studded matchup

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Aces galore on the mound. Power hitters in the lineups. Hard-throwing relievers out of the bullpen.

The National League Division Series between the Washington Nationals and Los Angeles Dodgers is a perfect fit for Hollywood. There are stars all over the field.

Having won a franchise-record 106 games in the regular season, the Dodgers are aiming for a third consecutive World Series appearance after losing to Houston and Boston the last two years.

"Our only goal is to win a championship," manager Dave Roberts said. "We are equipped to accomplish that goal."

The Nationals have a streak of their own they want to end: four losses in the Division Series since 2012.

The Nationals eked their way into this round with a dramatic wild-card victory over Milwaukee, helped by a Brewers error in the eighth inning. They slept in their own beds Wednesday night, flew all day Thursday and arrived at Dodger Stadium early in the evening for a workout ahead of the best-of-five series.

"We're all excited about what happened yesterday," Nationals manager Dave Mar-

tinez said, "but they understand what's ahead of them."

Here are some things to watch for in the best-of-five series:

Big three, times two. For the second straight year, Clayton Kershaw isn't opening the postseason for the Dodgers. A year ago, they went with Hyun-Jin Ryu against the Atlanta Braves, ending Kershaw's streak of six consecutive playoff appearances starting Game 1.

This year, right-hander Walker Buehler got the nod.

"Around here I don't know if one, two or three really matters," Buehler said. "The order's a little bit less significant than people want to make it out to be."

The same could be said of the Nationals, who went with Patrick Corbin in Game 1 for his postseason debut, their so-called third ace among a trio that includes Max Scherzer and Stephen Strasburg.

Mr. Consistent. Washington third baseman Anthony Rendon is having a huge year. He batted .319 with 34 home runs and 126 RBIs, all career highs that have put him in MVP conversation.

The 29-year-old All-Star attributes his numbers to mostly luck, joking that he gets

a lot of cheap hits.

"I'm getting broken-bat hits, I'm getting flares, I'm trying to pull the ball to left field and I'll hit it off the end and it will trickle down the right-field line, stuff like that," Rendon said.

Martinez has called the 29-year-old All-Star "Mr. Consistent" since before he became manager last year.

"What makes him really good is that he's not afraid to hit with two strikes," Martinez said. "He'll battle you up there and hit the ball the other way. But when he gets to two strikes, there's no panic."

Bellinger's MVP bid. Cody Bellinger allowed himself to soak in the chants of "MVP! MVP!" during the Dodgers' regular-season finale in San Francisco. He didn't have as strong a second half as before the All-Star break, but still ended up hitting .305 with 47 homers and 115 RBIs.

"Now it's out of my hands, so I'm not going to worry about that right now and put all my focus in on these next games," he said.

Keeping it close. The Nationals haven't announced their starters for Games 2 and 3, which Roberts pointed out while declining to reveal which order Kershaw and Ryu will go in.

NHL roundup

Caps spoil Blues' banner-raising party

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Jakub Vrana spoiled the St. Louis Blues' banner-raising party.

Vrana scored at 2:51 of overtime to give the Washington Capitals a 3-2 victory over the Stanley Cup champions Wednesday night in the opener for both teams.

Vrana beat Jordan Binnington with a high snap shot to the glove-side corner for his first point in five games against the Blues. It was just Binnington's third loss in 17 career home games.

"I just tried to do what I can do best," Vrana said. "He made some saves, but the last one he didn't. It was a long shift and we were kind of tired. Once, I got a little speed, it was a quick snap shot and it went through him."

Alex Ovechkin and Dmitry Orlov also scored for the Capitals. After allowing two goals on the first three shots he faced, Braden Holtby stopped the final 19 he faced.

"It's obviously not an ideal

start to the season, but I felt like I played the goals fairly well," Holtby said. "I just misread little bits of them to execute them. I knew I wasn't far off and if I just kept pushing that way, we were going to play our game and at that point you just try and make the next save to stay in the game as long as you can."

Sammy Blais and Alex Pietrangolo scored for the Blues, and Binnington made 31 saves.

"To me our whole game tonight, we weren't aggressive," Blues coach Craig Berube said. "We didn't play our game. The first period was fine, but after that, I felt we got away from our game and just didn't have that aggressive mindset and didn't manage the puck well."

The Blues started their title defense in style with Blais scoring on the first shot of the game just 53 seconds in. David Perron carried the puck below the right circle and feathered a pass between two defenders to set up Blais' one-timer. Ryan O'Reilly got a secondary assist for his 500th career point.

Maple Leafs 5, Senators 3:

Auston Matthews scored twice in host Toronto's four-goal second period against Ottawa.

Matthews gave the Maple Leafs a 3-2 lead at 8:02 of the second and made it 4-2 on a power play with 5:10 left in the period. He has nine goals and two assists in the four season-opening games, starting with a four-goal game against the Senators in his NHL debut in 2016.

Ilya Mikheyev had a goal and an assist in his NHL debut, Frederik Gauthier and Trevor Moore also scored, and Frederik Andersen stopped 23 shots.

Scott Sabourin scored in his NHL debut for Ottawa.

Golden Knights 4, Sharks

1: Reilly Smith had two goals, Cody Glass scored the first of his career and host Las Vegas beat San Jose in the opener for both teams.

Mark Stone also scored for the Golden Knights. Marc-Andre Fleury made 21 saves to earn the win in the 799th game of his career.

Fleury, now in his 16th season, improved to 10-5-0 in openers. The victory tied him with Curtis Joseph (10-2-0) and Martin Brodeur (10-5-3) for the most season-opening wins in NHL history.

Vegas, which will play in San Jose on Friday, improved to 6-1-2 all-time against the Sharks in the regular season.

Marcus Sorensen scored for San Jose. Martin Jones made 31 saves.

Oilers 3, Canucks 2: Leon Draisaitl had a goal and two assists, Connor McDavid snapped a third-period tie and host Edmonton topped Vancouver to make Dave Tippett a winner in his debut as coach.

McDavid broke a 2-all deadlock with 5½ minutes to play, splitting the defense before beating goalie Jacob Markstrom on a strong solo effort.

Zack Kassian also scored for Edmonton. Mike Smith made 31 saves in his first game with the Oilers. Alexander Edler and Tanner Pearson had the goals for the Canucks.

Bears planning to start Daniel, Smith against Raiders

Associated Press

LAKE FOREST, Ill. — It came as no surprise when Chicago Bears coach Matt Nagy on Wednesday announced Chase Daniel will start at quarterback in place of injured Mitchell Trubisky in London against the Oakland Raiders.

The unexpected announcement actually came from Bears linebacker Roquan Smith when he said he plans to play against the Raiders on Sunday.

Smith missed the Bears' 16-6 victory over the Minnesota Vikings for what Nagy had termed a "personal issue," and on Monday his status had been uncertain.

"I will play this week," Smith said with resolve.

The eighth overall pick in the

2018 draft, Smith had 24 tackles in the first three games but was watching from the sideline against Minnesota with no explanation other than "personal issue" from Nagy or the Bears organization.

"Like coach said, it was a personal reason," Smith said. "That's behind us now. So (I'm) just focused on getting better this week and moving on to Oakland."

No further explanation was given by Smith or Nagy for the absence. Smith wouldn't answer if a legal issue was involved or even if it was an injury of some sort. He said he knew fans and reporters would want to know why he missed the game, but asked they respect his privacy.

"I guess that's just life in gen-

eral," Smith said. "People are always curious."

Smith went through a full practice but Nagy wasn't presumptive about Smith's availability.

"It's gonna be more of a day-to-day thing for us with him," Nagy said.

Nick Kwiatkoski started for Smith against Minnesota and made a team-high nine tackles, with a strip sack and two tackles for loss.

"That was big time," Smith said. "Guys definitely stepped up, Nick Kwiatkoski, (linebacker) Kevin (Pierre-Louis), so that's big. You know, when one brother is down, others just step up and do their jobs. That was huge."

Smith wasn't surprised by

the Bears' defensive effort. It came with starting linemen Akiem Hicks and Bilal Nichols also out with injuries.

"We kind of expect that, knowing the type of guys that we have, the brotherhood we've built here," Smith said.

Daniel makes his third start with the Bears due to the left shoulder injury suffered by Trubisky when he tried to scramble and was taken down by Minnesota's Danielle Hunter. The Bears hadn't officially said Trubisky would miss the game until Wednesday. Nagy said a date for Trubisky's return is uncertain at this point, calling him "day to day."

Daniel has been in the league since 2010 and it's his fifth overall start.

Change in the SEC has come to pass

Associated Press

The Southeastern Conference built its reputation on punishing ground games with one-name tailback megastars like Herschel, Bo and Emmitt — all larger-than-life performers who pounded the rock, piled up the yards and gave the SEC a down-in-the-dirt toughness no other league could match.

These days, the SEC action is not in the trenches but on the outside — where lightning-quick wideouts catch passes from quarterbacks making split decisions on the fly, often from empty backfields.

“It runs counterintuitive to what (SEC) coaches will tell you about wanting to be balanced,” CBS Sports college football analyst Gary Danielson said. “But things have changed.”

■ No. 4 LSU leads the way with quarterback Joe Burrow controlling an offense that’s thrown for 1,727 yards, more than three times as many as its run for.

■ No. 2 Alabama quarterback Tua Tagovailoa has had consecutive games with five TD passes to his talented, fast group of receivers like Jerry Jeudy and Henry Ruggs III.

■ And No. 3 Georgia, where its legacy of backs like Herschel Walker, Todd Gurley and Terrell Davis is cherished Between the Hedges, has spread things out a bit to gain most of its yard by the pass.

Vanderbilt coach Derek Mason said it’s not complicated, he believes it’s simple math: Why make someone in the backfield burst through six or seven defenders when you can let a skill player slip one tackler and break off a big play.

“Most teams in the SEC are looking at their roster that way,” he said.

The shift is based on the talented quarterbacks at the helm, said ex-Arkansas and Ole Miss coach Houston Nutt.

During his 14 years as a head coach, Nutt worked to defend I-formation runners and win the battle in the trenches. Now, with playmakers like Tagovailoa, Burrow and Georgia quarterback Jake Fromm, there’s always a threat on the outside that can’t be matched by handing off 40 or 50 times a game, Nutt said.

“Right now, they’re spreading them out and you’ve got to defend them,” said Nutt, speaking after an appearance at the Knoxville QB Club.

South Carolina coach Will Muschamp, who coordinated a national title defense at LSU, believes the playing field has changed because of enhanced techniques of preparing high school players like seven-on-seven tournaments and individual training.

“I think that quarterbacks, skill players and defensive backs when you get them now, they’re so much further along,” he said.

Alabama coach Nick Saban has gone all in on the spread after winning five national titles with the likes of Heisman Trophy winners Mark Ingram and Derrick Henry at tailback.

Only two years ago, the Crimson Tide relied on runners Damien Harris and Bo Scarborough and quarterback Jalen Hurts to rush for 3,509 yards on the way to their last national crown. Alabama threw only 332 times that season, averaging less than 194 yards passing a game and scoring 28 TDs by pass — fewer than its 36 rushing touchdowns.

Things have flipped for Saban’s Crimson Tide in a big way.

Behind Tagovailoa and its talented receiving corps, the Tide have thrown for twice as many yards (1,485 to 715) and touchdowns (18 to nine) as they’ve run for.

Then there’s LSU, which three years ago, had Leonard Fournette and Derrius

Guice in the backfield and front and center of its offense. Fournette and Guice combined for 2,230 yards — nearly matching the Tigers’ passing output of 2,281 — and 23 touchdowns.

This year, LSU ranks first in SEC passing and 13th in league rushing.

LSU’s Burrow is leading the SEC in passing yards and total offense per game. His 17 passing touchdowns outstrip the Tigers’ ground total of 11.

Saban believes more talented skill players coming out of high schools and more creative play-calling to force defenses to cover who whole field instead of a tight center at the line of scrimmage have opened things up.

“I think the combination of those things probably has changed our league just like it’s changed football in general.”

But not everyone has given up on featuring the run.

No. 7 Auburn leads the SEC in rushing at 259.9 yards a game and tailback Ja’Tavious “Boobee” Whitlow is second in the league with 102 yards per game.

The Tigers have thrown for just six touchdowns, nearly half of the 11 it has scored on the ground this fall.

Mississippi State is the other SEC team that gains more on the ground than the air. Kylin Hill, a junior, leads the league at 137.8 yards per game as the only other rusher besides Whitlow averaging 100 or more yards a contest.

Danielson, the former quarterback who broadcasts SEC games for CBS, doesn’t see the emphasis on speed and spread changing — unless defenses uncover better ways to slow them down.

“This is where the game has gone,” he said, “and it’s hard to see that changing back.”

White emerges as leader of Notre Dame’s D

Associated Press

SOUTH BEND, Ind. — Maybe it was the injuries. Or the lightweight recruiting profile. Or maybe it was playing at one of the deepest positions at Notre Dame.

Whatever the reason, Drew White is aware that earning the starting job at middle linebacker came as a surprise to some.

“I never really saw it that

way,” said White, who ranks third on the Fighting Irish this season with 21 tackles and leads the team with six tackles for loss. “I don’t really get it.”

White suffered a broken ankle as a sophomore in the spring of 2018 and then broke his shoulder this year during spring break in a “freak” snow skiing accident that didn’t sit well with his coaches.

“I have no problem with

going on a family vacation, but you’re also on a scholarship,” coach Brian Kelly said. “The good part about it is it’s behind us. He worked through it.”

White will make his fifth start of the season Saturday when No. 9 Notre Dame (3-1) plays at home against Bowling Green (1-3).

At 6 feet and 230 pounds, White doesn’t appear to be a physically imposing figure in

the middle of a defense where linebackers Te’von Coney and Drue Tranquill so recently roamed. He was mostly an afterthought his first two seasons at Notre Dame

“He is somewhat inconspicuous,” said his high school coach, Roger Harriott of St. Thomas Aquinas in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. “So you don’t expect him to move that fast, or be as physical and as strong as he is.”